

RealTime



Performance and the national arts
October–November 1996

Death and Fashion

Edinburgh: Wilson, Bausch, Stein

Arts and economic rationalism, Copenhagen Dancin' City, ISEA 96, New poetries, Brisbane Festival, Deckchair Theatre, Sydney dance, Kalya Conference, Performance and the word

OnScreen

Indigenous images, Kathryn Millard, Ida Lupino, Howard Hawks, Jon McCormack, experimenta, Mark Dery, Dawn of Cinema, movie reviews



free

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The word. In *The New Work Order* (Allen & Unwin, 1996) Gee, Hull and Lankshear describe and analyse the pervasive new language of Fast Capitalism, their label for capitalism's latest transformation. Its lexicon includes teams, tribes, flat hierarchies, collaborations, team leaders (formerly bosses), coaches, knowledge brokers (one of the various reincarnations of middle management), and knowledge workers. Workers are self-directed, self-supervising, committed partners, owners of the project (only as long as they're working on it and before they're tipped back into the job market with their expanding portfolios) and, as the new syntax has it, all assume managerial roles and responsibilities. In a world of lean and mean, small and local highly competitive companies, the overriding narrative is of rapid transformation—high turnover of new projects, new teams, new products, new niche markets. To drive the narrative, all you need are the key concepts: privatisation, deregulation and customisation. Overlay the language with a visionary aura of democratisation—provided by charismatic leadership offering sublime job satisfaction—and you have more than market share or mere profit-making, you have the opportunity to change the world!

We're well on the road of Fast Capitalism and the way is paved with the dismantled trade unions and the detritus of structural unemployment. All we have to do now is speak the language. As Sarah Miller argues in "Development without culture" (page 3), market economy discourse mocks the public sector and aggrandises the private sector with creativity, performance, efficiency and excellence as the bywords. In the case of the Australia Council, compliance with market economy discourse has meant the ascendancy again of excellence over access and the dropping of risk and innovation from funding criteria. We should, however, feel relaxed and comfortable, because, as John Howard tells us, we have free speech again. Relatively speaking, I never thought we'd lost it. But then again user pays, privatisation, the appropriation of indigenous lands for mining, these all involve Australians paying for things they thought they already had. What price free speech? What price the arts?

It will be interesting to hear if the language of the Australia Council Reform Association's ACRA Symposium in Sydney (now postponed until November 21) fits the new rhetoric. According to a letter received from convener Roger Woodward, Arts Minister Senator Alston "has very kindly offered to help organise an expanded version of the symposium with the full backing of the Department of the Arts". According to Alston's department, the Foundation for Culture and the Humanities will also be involved in the organisation of the symposium. What of the Australia Council that pre-election Alston committed himself to, shouldn't it play an instrumental role in this event? Woodward's letter is headlined: "The Australia Council will attend". Is that all? The aim of the event is to include "not only what has been unsatisfactory with the present system but a discussion of improved or alternative systems". The letter concludes "I'm sorry I do not yet have a full list of speakers. I understand the Department of the Arts will be writing to you soon with these details." A prelude to change? Got your invitation to speak?

You'll find the word examined here and there in *RealTime 15*, in Sarah Miller's important polemic, Hazel Smith's report on experimental poetry at a New Hampshire conference, Angela Rockell's listening to Tasdance's poetry in performance, dancer Deborah Hay's discussion of the dance workshop, Jacqueline Millner on Tony Oursler's *Talking Light* in the Sydney Biennale, Annemarie Jonson's *OnScreen* editorial on the government's film industry assistance review, Mark Dery's interrogation of the new media in the review of his *Escape Velocity*, and my own look at the word in recent Sydney performance.

As for that which will 'seduce and annihilate thought', other than the language of Fast Capitalism and the John Howard's idea of free speech, we'll have a full report on the 100 Years of Cruelty Conference on Artaud in RT#16, along with Richard Murphet's report on performance education in the US and UK, more on ISEA96 (this time Amanda McDonald Crowley on internet developments), Di Weekes' interview with leading young Australian percussionist Vanessa Tomlinson, and debate over Peta Tait's RT#14 essay on the theatre/performance studies schism.

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top: Ida Lupino with Assistant Cameraman Emmett Berkholz, directing low-angle shot for tennis scene in *Hard, Fast and Beautiful*, 1951

bottom: Tony Martin, Corrinne Ammerlaan and Stefan Sapio in Kathryn Millard's *Parklands*, 1996. photo: Simon Cardwell

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Development without culture?

Sarah Miller challenges the application of market economy discourse to the arts

Our sense of belonging to the same human species is going to be severely challenged in the years to come by the faceless movement of speculative capitals manipulated by invisible forces; by the insults we are accumulating on the roof of our common house, the biosphere; by the dangers of nuclear accident; by the profound crisis of urban civilisation shared by the first, second and third worlds; and by the untouchable powers of a megacorporation beyond the scope of national or international jurisdictions.

We have to restore this essential value, the reminder that the real purpose of economic activity is the well-being of concrete human beings... This will not happen without an approach to education that stresses the variety, the universality but also the necessity of exposure to the greatest values created by any given community, our own and those of others: the arts, the letters, the visual and verbal treasures created by humankind. That this effort starts at the local level goes without saying. That it possesses an international dimension must be said. That in any case it costs money is said over and over again.

Carlos Fuentes presenting the 1996 Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts and Public Policy at the John F Kennedy Centre for the Performing Arts

The six months since the Coalition Government swept to power has been marked by the extraordinary and depressing rapidity with which certain key platforms—republicanism, the constitution, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal reconciliation, multiculturalism, not to mention the value

(albeit fiscal) placed on the arts and cultural sector by the previous Labor Government—have disappeared from the national agenda. In fact it seems that the much routed attack on 'Sydneycentrism' espoused by the National Coalition as a key element in their election strategy, was less an attack on the perceived economic or political status of Australia's largest city, than on the perhaps more socially progressive values that Sydney was seen to represent. It is no coincidence, for instance, that Australia's richest and most conservative states, Western Australia and Queensland, have been the two which have overwhelmingly demonstrated their support for cuts to funding for Aboriginal services. Regional Australia has similarly demonstrated a less than moderate stance on policies designed as inclusive rather than exclusive.

Ironically, however, it must be acknowledged that despite their "big picture", the commitment of the Labor Right to a range of policies designed to further the interests of big business and a concomitant lack of interest in issues of social justice, set the stage for a resounding defeat. By turning its back on those areas traditionally deemed the preserve of the Left, a population increasingly unable (apparently) to distinguish between the economic policies of the major parties seemed to find the call for change overwhelmingly persuasive. And if the Labor Party was turning its back on its own rhetoric and policies, then it seems there was no reason for a population, orchestrated for a failure of nerve by the tabloid press and private media interests, to do anything other than follow suit.

Similarly, the history of the Australia Council over the last several years reflects this failure of political imagination. Having abdicated its multifarious roles and responsibilities, it now favours a rather more singular focus—its own survival. The parable of the man who leaves one town in order to avoid his own death, only to come face to face with death in the next town, comes to mind.

At senior management level, fear of a change of Government (since at least 1992) predicated a range of changes in policy and priorities which has left the Australia Council, and rather more to the point, its constituency of artists and organisations looking increasingly vulnerable. Chairperson Hilary McPhee's remarks to the effect that management strategies had been successful as the cuts weren't as bad as they could have been, is a case in point. As commentator David Throsby has noted, such statements are a bit like telling someone whose leg has been amputated that they were lucky not to lose both!

Historically, the Australia Council has operated according to a list of *objectives* and *strategies* elaborating its fundamental constitutional *principles* as well as a range of changing *priorities* allowing Council to be responsive to the perceived needs of the day. The *objectives* outlined the broad parameters under which the Australia Council operated. These included a commitment to "excellence" but also to "risk and innovation" and of course the established principles of arm's length funding and peer assessment as well as access, equity and diversity. These may be vexed terms and strategies but then all terms used to describe or assess artistic value are unsatisfactory. Interestingly and tellingly, well before the last federal election, the admittedly troublesome commitment to "risk and innovation" was dropped from Australia Council rhetoric in its various publications. The restructuring of the Australia Council itself, encompassing the establishment of the Major Organisations Board (now Fund) as a site of particular privilege and new strategies pertaining to peer assessment has, of course, been well documented.

Given the increasing and apparently irresistible tendency of Council to prioritise the equally troublesome notion of "excellence" over issues of access, diversity and experimentation, it will be interesting to see how the Australia Council responds to cuts in funding for Aboriginal Arts and Cultural areas through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). Previously, the relatively small allocation of funds through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Fund of the Australia Council was able to be justified (appropriately or not), by the possibility of funding from ATSIC. Now that that particular tap has been turned off, the responsibility will lie (rightly) with an Australia Council already suffering a 12.5 per cent cut. Alternative avenues of support for artists—through the tertiary education sector for instance—are looking increasingly at risk as the impact of cuts on students, teaching staff and courses take their toll.

At least university vice chancellors have been seen on the streets protesting with their students and staff. It would be nice to imagine that Council and management of the Australia Council might engage in the same level of support for their staff and constituencies, however the relationship between 'client' and management looks set to remain in oppositional mode for the foreseeable future. In this context it seems pertinent to ask just how senior management perceives the role of the Australia Council in terms of advocacy on

behalf of its diverse constituency—and this despite the establishment of and quarantining of funds for the new Audience Development and Advocacy division (ADA) and particularly given its already detrimental effect on real budgets for art form funds.

Still the major shift in attitudes to arts funding and policy in Australia has perhaps less to do with the change in government than the penetration of market economy discourse into the arts and cultural sector over the past ten years or so. While this may not be surprising given its presence in most aspects of contemporary society, the question remains, as Canadian commentator, Gerald S Kenyon has pointed out, of "how deep the penetration may be and the extent to which it is uniform across different organisational positions".

What seems to underpin the current thinking around the management, marketing and role of the arts are a range of key characteristics which assume the inherent superiority of the private sector. The public sector is characterised as inefficient, costly and irresponsible, whilst the private sector, despite all evidence to the contrary, is projected as efficient, lean, responsive and responsible. Secondly, the private sector is assumed to be free of ideological and emotive bias, whereas (small) state subsidised organisations are assumed to be always and irretrievably ideologically driven. Thirdly, it is now a given that the arts are an 'industry' and should at the very least desire to be free of state patronage if not profitable. Fourthly, despite a long history of by and large successful attempts to circumvent free competition in the market place (monopolies, tariffs etc), the private sector assumes the importance of unfettered individual initiative, allegedly for our general betterment; that is competition results in excellence leading to higher levels of 'performance' and 'creativity'.

That these are the values of the private sector is quite comprehensible. Harder to justify, is their promotion and dissemination by the public sector. That these values have been adopted by our major flagship institutions is less surprising given that these institutions, far from performing a countercultural or emancipatory role, exist more as a force for the reproduction of prevailing power structures. More significant is that these organisations along with government and those public sector agencies established at arm's length from government precisely to ensure access, equity, respect for art and artists and the value of curiosity, diversity and imagination, should be so conspicuously silent in terms of a counter discourse, whether it reflects art for art's sake, the need to cultivate creativity and fulfil human potentialities or even to preserve national culture(s) and identities.

This is quite shocking from those whose proper role one might imagine is to advocate on behalf of artists and art-making across disciplines and contexts. The wilful insistence on the expendable and expedient nature of art is dangerous and destructive. The breakdown of a whole range of infrastructure support for arts and cultural activity across Australia is particularly alarming. With the example of the United States and the destruction of the National Endowment of the Arts before us, how shall we respond? There is no doubt that artists and art making will continue. However, to cite Bill Clinton, it has to be said that whilst the arts can survive without government support, they flourish with government support—both financial and moral.

To return to the words of Carlos Fuentes:

Can we now have in the world of the new century and the new millennium, economic performance without knowledge and knowledge without art and the humanities? Can we in other words, have development without culture?

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SOCIAL ECOLOGY

Drop dead chic

Karen de Perthuis explains why fashion is inevitably attracted to images of death

When the look on the catwalk is 70s minimalism (or just plain minimalism), as it has been at recent European collections, it doesn't leave much in the way of inspiration for the creators of headlines—especially those who rely on fashion to provide a dash of colour and outrage. So instead of the usual tirade by the tabloids against what they perceive as being ugly and unwearable clothes, this year attention was focussed on the emergence of a new breed of ugly and worn out models. Thin, pale, with dirty blonde hair and dark circles under their eyes, they skulked down the runway causing renewed outcries about the fashion industry's role in promoting a generation of young girls as familiar with eating disorders as their mothers were with twin-sets.

'Junkie chic', as it came to be known, also appeared in the pages of the British bible of cool, *The Face*, with one fashion spread showing models in a police line-up. Elsewhere a doped model was shot sprawled across a toilet looking like she'd rather do nothing more than spew down the front of her designer label acid-lime polyester front. Meanwhile, Australian rock/style mag *Juice* twisted a few more sensible-length skirts with Jez Smith's "Live Fast...Fashion to Die For" photographs. These showed young male and female models in a tongue-in-cheek pastiche of images from popular culture. Overdosed, beaten, strangled, drowned, suffocated—these kids were fashion victims in more ways than one. The accompanying text documented not only the cause and time of death but, more importantly, what they were wearing. To raise the question of taste—as these shots invariably have—soon becomes irrelevant in a discourse such as fashion which has periodically promoted an

aesthetic of the ugly. And anyway, if nothing else, these beautiful and stylish corpses at least look like they remembered that old bit of advice about clean knickers and careless bus drivers.

Despite claims that this time the fashion industry and media had "sunk to the lowest point imaginable", there is nothing new about associating fashion with images connected to death and decay. In fashion photography's earliest days, this morbid tendency could be attributed to the technical deficiencies of the camera which, as *Vogue's* chief photographer George Hoyningnen-Huene complained, was unable to capture real life, with the models seeming to freeze in front of the lens.

After the Second World War, Irving Penn's abiding interest in mortality and decay infiltrated his fashion work. At a time when *haute couture* (and the world it exemplified) was struggling to survive, Penn's melancholy images of elegant, satin-draped women stranded in shabby studios and decrepit mansions imbued the great fashion houses' denial of imminent demise with a desperate edge. Looking more like a threatened species than society belles, these photographs were disturbing enough for *Vogue* to take their readers' seriously when they complained the images "burned on the pages".

The 60s ushered in a period of decadent optimism with a new emphasis on movement—witness Richard Avedon's signature 'jump-walk'—and a fresh, natural look which shook off the appearance of being pickled in formaldehyde that excessive make-up gave models. But once confidence in modernism was shattered, fashion turned its back on a naive faith in futurism and utopian visions and the 'shadow side of style' resurfaced.



"Live fast...fashion to die for"; *Juice* magazine

Gez Smith

In a 1972 spread for the short-lived but adventurous magazine, *Nova*, Bob Richardson produced a pictorial narrative which concluded with Angelica Huston's 'suicide'. In a shot which pre-dates the *Juice* spread by nearly 25 years, she is sprawled across a motel bed, pills scattered, while at the bottom of the page, disinterested type states the designer of her clothes. In more mainstream publications Guy Bourdin attracted attention with his advertising shot for Charles Jourdan. Consisting of a single shoe and the chalked outline of a woman's body, it unmistakably portrayed the wearer as a victim of a brutal murder. In another spread, Bourdin placed models in front of animal carcasses, rationalising that fashion was as much about bodies as it was clothes. In a similar vein, Helmut Newton shot a fashion sequence for *Oui* magazine which followed the theme of murder.

Because of his refusal to publish his work outside of its original context, Bourdin is less well-known than Newton, his contemporary, but nonetheless they both shared an interest in exploring themes of power, violence and sex through the medium of fashion photography. This field was more or less unique in its leniency regarding censorship, publishing images that may not have passed outside of fashion magazines. In part, this may have been due to the fact that they were addressed to women and therefore not considered prurient but maybe also because, as Cecil Beaton said, "fashion has license to be fiction". However, this did not prevent articles such as one in *The New York Times* from claiming that fashion photography had become "indistinguishable from an interest in murder, pornography and terror".

During the 70s such apparently unsettling images became diluted in the pages of American magazines such as *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* which had, in previous decades, been responsible for encouraging challenging work. Editors, bowing to the economic pressures of advertisers, subordinated an interest in the artistic shot to those that captured 'life-style'. One of the last series to pass before the new era of conservatism became entrenched was Deborah Turbeville's swimwear shots of five women in a steamy, run-down bath house for *Vogue*. In what must have been a Complaints Department trifecta, readers expressed outrage not only with the anorexic appearance of the models and the possible masturbatory and/or lesbian connotations of the image but also with its apparent referencing of Auschwitz.

Turbeville's introspective vision, while standing in dramatic contrast to the overtly voyeuristic work of her male counterparts, grappled no less with expressions of violation and incorporated her own obsession with decay. Shooting in dilapidated environments and using techniques such as distressing the image at the stage of the negative, she has produced a body of ghost-like work that comments

on the fleeting nature of fashion and beauty. Her approach acknowledges the chronic tension that exists between the ephemeral and the permanent in photography. Although this is a characteristic of representation in general, it is particularly acute in the fashion photograph with its unspoken threat that beauty will fade and styles will change.

It is such reflexivity and self-awareness that criticism or sensitivity about fashion images tends to ignore. The photographers who have attracted the most censure are usually those who have also thought deeply about their role in constructing representations of women and of the nature of fashion itself. For whether it is consciously recognised or not, there is something inherently morbid in fashion's constant change and renewal. It is what Rene Konig called fashion's relentless 'death-wish'; in order to live, fashion—with its restless desire for the new—must die and so always carries the imprint of death and eternal life.

There is also a more fundamental element to the question of fashion's perpetual mutability and images that invoke the spectre of death. Across cultures, all practices of dressing, adorning and clothing the body are rituals of containment aimed at transforming the biological body into the social body. The significance of this process can be understood in terms of a social system's need to clearly define all borderline states. To this effect, the body attracts particular attention as it acts not only as a symbol for society as a whole but also represents the site where divisions between outside and inside are the most perilous. In her book, *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas wrote about how the presence of body fluids attests to the possible permeability, pollution or contamination of the body. This produces a response which Julia Kristeva describes as abjection and the most extreme example of abjection is the horror of the corpse.

However, the success of containing the body and effacing its distressing reminder of mortality through ornamentation and dress is ultimately doomed to failure because, as has been said, it can only "mark an unclear boundary ambiguously". On the other hand, fashion—invested with transformative and preservative powers—exceeds the role of clothing by enabling the idea of an *unchanging* and eternal body. Within its folds then, fashion hides something that provokes a cultural anxiety which extends beyond fears about teenagers falling into drug-addiction or willing themselves into anorexic or bulimic states; this is the fear of ageing, death and decay. By representing fashionable images which are suggestive or interwoven with death, this latest trend exposes the fiction in fashion's veiled promise of immortality.

Karen de Perthuis is a Sydney writer and stylist who wants to be reincarnated as Diana Vreeland.



"Live fast...fashion to die for"; *Juice* magazine

Gez Smith

Dance and anti-dance: a totality

Tess de Quincey and Stuart Lynch at Copenhagen's *Dancin' City*

The largest festival in the world for modern and new dance, Copenhagen's 4th International *Dancin' City* was grand, eclectic and provocatively programmed. It proved to be a success despite enormous competition in a city inundated with performance (Copenhagen is European Cultural Capital for 1996). Despite mutterings about the death of European festivals, blockbuster survival tactics were replaced with a bid towards totality.

An intense spectrum moved from the pure dance of Merce Cunningham to Jérôme Bel's ultra reflective *Anti-Dance*, creating a feeling of a 'classless' festival where obscure and risky work was

presented alongside big budget quality product. The emphasis was not only on interdependence but also on the presentation of history and process; perhaps an extension of Scandinavian democracy or maybe a clear strategy for a dialogue between artists, theorists, critics and audiences and for a future multiplicity of works and forms.

The Merce Cunningham Co. (US) was overwhelming. Five divergent pieces from the latest five years of Cunningham's 50 years of work, were challenging and extremely demanding, leaving the dancers perpetually at the edge of their technique. The most recent work, *Rondo* (1996), is fresh, ingenious and provocative.

tendency towards a musclebound hyperactivity alongside its strong Japanese spatial aesthetics.

Some delicate and complex choreographic patterns juxtaposed a resonant presentation of stillness—even if a deeper relation to emptiness and to space was not so forthcoming.

Non-director, non-choreographer catalyst Alain Platel and the Flemish company Les Ballets C. de la B. composed a brilliant, chaotic cacophony *La Tristeza Complice*. As the men piss in their trousers, boys beat up mental cases and young girl dancers are molested alongside the rocketing tempo of a north African breakdancer with wings and a ballet pastiche on rollerskates, what comes across is a sense of quiet, reckless but insistent observation. The piece has an animal-breathing as each vivid dancer seethes in and out of the suspended mass which is further swelled by Dick Van der Harst's arrangement of Purcell set to a magnificent gendarmerie of 10 harmonica accordions plus a superb solo soprano.

Sasha Waltz & Guests (Germany) presented the entire

three *Travelogue* series of performances which were very popular. The work is humorous, entertaining and well-produced which, combined with a quirky if at times overriding heterosexuality, assures an absolute success.

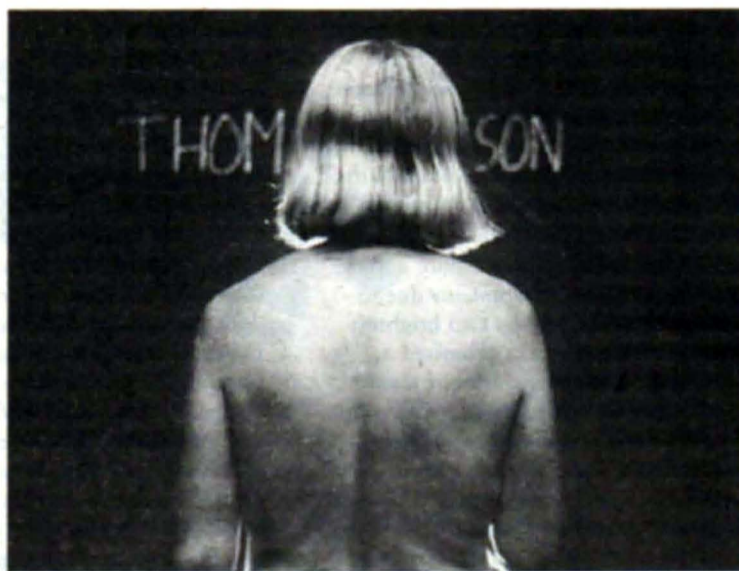
A double evening event with three solo works by José Navas (Venezuela) and a single group work by Quasar Companhia de Dança (Brazil) drew large audiences. The youthful and sensitive ballet-defined duende of Navas combined well with the raw, humorous and temperamental choreography of the Quasar's punk-street feel.

Wayne McGregor & Random Dance Co. (UK) have been hailed as the New English Thing. The work is young, exuberant, fast and frantic—but lacking in weight and the coolness required to achieve clarity. When the dancers are stretched to their very best one is reminded of Molissa Fenley's 'hyperdance'. But within these repetitions there is not the same rigorous commitment to a danced continuum as presented by Fenley—a stunning solo at the 94 festival.

The young French choreographer Jérôme Bel presented *Anti-Dance*; two quiet, slow and committed one-hour works. Via the symbolic exchange of objects in the first piece and actions in the second, they confirmed, antagonised or metaphorised typical dance structures. These provocatively programmed works would normally be described as performance art. Although arguably 'anti-dance' they were decisively moved and powerful.

Our own work, *Epilogue to Compression* was a 12-hour piece aiming at

a summation of *Compression 100* (Sydney, May 96). The final hour, presented within a theatre, was very definitely a hybrid piece, cutting and slicing between narrative and non-narrative, performance and dance. It received a mixed response with the durational aspect most clearly understood by the visual-arts field.



Jérôme Bel, *Anti-Dance*

Owing to our own involvement we were unable to cover the strong Latin grouping as well as a number of Scandinavian works: Tango El Gran Baile (Argentina) from Buenos Aires, and Europe's leading flamenco group La Familia Farrucca (Spain). From Scandinavia Tero Saarinen (Finland) and Ingun Bjørnsgaard (Norway) presented well-received, disciplined postmodern works. From Denmark, a large number of local artists represented different trends within the Danish dance scene: Anders Christiansen's intense, idiosyncratic work is predominantly butoh-inspired. Tim



Anna Teresa de Keersmaeker/Rosas, *Rosas Danst Rosas*

DEAKIN

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Anna Teresa de Keersmaeker (Belgium), with her renowned company Rosas, presented two works. *Rosas Danst Rosas* is the company's first and now famous minimalist performance from 1983. Four women confront three basic forms of lying, sitting and standing over two hours. Emotional narrative is placed within a conceptual framework that paradoxically both enhances and cuts its intent. It is a repetitive, teeth-gritting and mature *tour de force* that is without compromise. The second, her latest piece, *Mozart/Concert Arias*, is a splendid homage to Mozart with a 34-piece orchestra on original instruments, three opera singers and the company's 13 dancers. It is a beautiful, humorous and abundant work that maintains a contemporary insistence within its 90s megastaging.

Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company (US) presented three pieces. Having once epitomised the legend of the brilliantly athletic modern dancer, the reverence for youth and muscle is unfortunately still maintained. Nevertheless Bill T.'s passion carries through and the company itself exudes great warmth. Unfortunately, his working around Kurt Schwitters' *UrSonata* is a travesty of a pivotal and important work. The languages are far apart and this simplistic misconception proved their incompatibility.

With superbly technical dancers, massive high-production capability and Philippe Guillotel as costume designer, Philippe Decoufflé's work *Decodex* (France) was extremely popular and a captivating success. An upstaged circus enchantment as opposed to a 'dance piece', it leaves one with that Andrew Lloyd Webber feeling and a sense of the baroque epitome of 'Frenchness'.

Japanese choreographer Saburo Teshigawara and his company Karas performed *I was real—Documents*. Other than some quite beautiful suspended moments at the beginning, the work had a



Alain Platel/Les Ballets C. de la B. *La Tristeza Complice*

Feldman's first larger-scale collaborative work, with dancers from Venezuela, Cuba and USA, integrated postmodern dance with video images. *Bysteps* was a showcase of short works by six independent Danish choreographers (Jens Bjerregaard, Kamilla Brekling, Lene Boel, Anne Katrine Kalmoes, Lene Østergaard and Mikala Lage) ranging over the various streams of post-modern into new dance area. The Paradox Event staged a beach ballet, while *Transform* is a prominent, annual event where Danish and international choreographers present site-specific group work in often fascinating environments. This third festival presented Mehmet Sander (US/Turkey), Kitt Johnsen (Denmark), Motionhouse (UK) and Bo Madvig (Denmark).

In bringing together the varying trends of contemporary work from around the world, the festival showed a strong sense of commitment to a forum for dialogue rather than just to the presentation of confirmed product. This insistency is a challenge and, for dance/performance junkies, the entire festival was a solid shot in the arm.

Performers Tess de Quincey and Stuart Lynch are based in Copenhagen and Sydney.
Dancin' City, Copenhagen, August 1–18 1996

Retina burns

From the 50th Edinburgh Festival and Fringe, Benedict Andrews conjures performances by Wilson, Bausch, Stein, Chaikin, Netherlands Dance Theatre, Hakutobo, Zofia Zalinska and Teatr Podrozy

In order to celebrate the 50th birthday of Edinburgh Festival, director Brian McMasters invited a core of elite theatre and dance artists to present works. As a young director this was a rare opportunity to see my heroes in action—Robert Wilson, Pina Bausch, Peter Stein and Robert LePage. With the cancellation of LePage's *Elsinore* due to equipment failure and of Neil Bartlett's *Seven Sacraments* due to illness, the Festival lost its two brightest young stars. Their works promised a questioning of the boundaries of theatre and a meshing of performance with other forms—cinema and digital technology in *Elsinore* and the visual arts in *Seven Sacraments*. The Festival, instead, became a display of established auteurs.



Martha Graham Dance Company – *Appalachian Spring*
Lois Greenfield

The high priest of hi-tech aestheticism, Robert Wilson brought two productions which showed the present extremities of his work and a seeming fascination with Modernist textuality via the high-fiction of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and the playful, heavenly landscapes of the Gertrude Stein-Virgil Thomson *Four Saints in Three Acts*. Both productions were abstract and mesmeric. *Orlando* was a minimalist chiaroscuro composition with an epic solo performance from Miranda Richardson, and *Four Saints* a lollipop landscape saturated with cartoon colours and filled with flying sheep, elegant giraffes, punk acrobats and a chorus of sartorial saints and vaudeville comperes.

Orlando is a fascinating exemplar of Wilson's recent experiments with narrative showing his refusal to illustrate text or display conventional emotion. Instead he writes a parallel text with gesture, architecture and light which forces the audience to drop below the narrative and let its dream logic unfold. Woolf's fantastical tale about a young lord who lives through 350 years of history and finds himself transformed into a woman is perfect fodder for Wilson's explorations of time's passing and history's images. *Orlando* is performed by Richardson with androgynous tension and physical and vocal precision. Her voice is amplified giving it mediated resonance and an alien-like quality. As words pile on top of words in her two hour monologue, Richardson's voice and Woolf's language are fused into an independent and mercurial texture. Hans Peter Kuhn's meticulous sound design allows Orlando's voice to shift through speakers placed throughout the auditorium further accentuating the character's disembodiment. Wilson's lighting design draws inspiration from German Expressionist films and early Hollywood. At the beginning the stage is black, a light picks out the back of Richardson's head for a moment, fades to black again, then lights her hand only. Parts of her body seem to float. Wilson continues to make light a performer throughout the piece, often using it to play with appearances and disappearances central to the questionings of identity and sexuality in the text. The

light is always sculptural with tight follow spots lighting Richardson's face, making her seem like a haunted Greta Garbo.

The space is a cross between minimalist painting and magic show. Wilson flies various gauzes and curtains to change compositions, creating chambers and multiple horizon lines. He also uses the set as a sequence of indices which play with scale and meaning. A miniature automated door pops-up through the floor to represent Orlando's suitor, opening and closing in response to her questions. When Orlando changes into a woman, s/he does so behind a giant polished metal tree trunk which has slowly flown in. This phallic joke and pun on theatrical conventions demonstrates Wilson's oblique and playful dramaturgy. His *Orlando* uses form to interrogate language and subjectivity. Richardson's performance moulded into Wilson's statuesque choreography shows the impact of history and time on the body.

Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thomson's cubist opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* provides Wilson with a language that converges with his own use of autistic text, allowing him to create hallucinatory landscapes. He calls the piece "a meditation on the joy of life". It is a series of free-associative pictures as various saints graze in a day-glo heaven. Snow falls on white cut-out palm trees, biplanes fly by, angel statues drop in and giraffes bow their heads. It is classic make-of-it-what-you-will Wilson surrealism culminating with a 'mansion of heaven' (a giant white architectural model suspended above the stage) bursting into flames as the saints on stage hold miniature models in their hands. These are the light and beautiful 'souls' reflected on by Wilson and Stein in their meditation on saintliness, or 'genius' if you like.



Pina Bausch – Gluck's *Iphigenie auf Taurus*

Peter Stein's production of *Uncle Vanya* with the Teatro di Roma and Teatro di Parma was the closest the Festival came to a well-made play (with the exception of Botho Strauss' wonderfully well-unmade play *Time and the Room* presented by Nottingham Playhouse). *Uncle Vanya* is a masterpiece of orchestration combining passionate realism, hyper-naturalistic design and an ever-present soundscape which highlights Stein's inspired use of silence. Over three and a half hours he creates a terrifying passage of time within which the characters' gradual disintegration and the painful tearing of illusions are played out. The performances from the cast of hand-picked Italian actors are detailed, yet elastic. Each character proceeds blindly from an unresolvable, unknowable lack; the impossibility of resolution fused with an acute awareness of the body's aging creates a slow dance of death. Stein sees the play as containing the embryonic symptoms of all the systems and neuroses of the twentieth century. In this way his exacting analysis and evocation of the emotional lives of Chekov's Russian bourgeois becomes an exploration of our own *fin-de-siecle* malaise.

Pina Bausch's dance-opera of Gluck's *Iphigenie auf Taurus* is also embryonic in that it was one of her first works created at Wuppertal in 1973. Re-presenting this early work shows her choreography when it was



Robert Wilson – *Four Saints in Three Acts*

less a deconstruction of dance and the economy of desire and more aligned to narrative. It is an atavistic, emotionally raw piece obsessed with machinations of history and rituals of power. The opera soloists are placed in the gilded boxes of the theatre while the chorus sings from the pit. The dancers alone occupy the stage—a cavernous post-industrial chamber of beaten metal (into which, at times, the lighting rig is flown turning the tools of the theatre into instruments of imprisonment and torture). The libretto is a complex Greek tale of exile, enslavement, human sacrifice and death's door family reunion. The representation of the barbaric state shows the influence of Heiner Müller's catastrophic scenographies. The ruler, Thoas, a brutal and shadowy man with a shaved head enters doing a jerky angular dance wearing a giant leather trench coat. He disappears behind a hanging sheet and emerges without the coat which is revealed standing of its own accord, a heavy, oppressive symbol. He is followed everywhere by a disturbing couple, an immaculately dressed bald man who stands downstage staring into the audience (our representative?) and a small, broken woman bedecked with jewels who carries a box of dirt which she smears over her face. The man repeatedly lifts her up forcing her collapsing body into submission. In this opera, Bausch reflects the deformed audience of patriarchy, while the story of mythic exiles begs us to love.

Other dance I saw in the Festival programme included the Martha Graham company, Netherlands Dans Theatre (who will be at the Melbourne Festival in October) and Hakutobo's *Renyo*. Unfortunately the Martha Graham programme of works reconstructed from between 1918 and 1944 felt like a creaky and reverential museum piece. It seems Saint Martha has been canonised and her devotees have maintained the shape of her works, but lost the soul. Netherlands Dans Theatre's programs, however, were fresh and provocative. Jiri Kylian's 'black and white' works in particular are stark and intense, full of funky geometrics, seamless movement and erotic rituals. *Bella Figura* is a dance about performance and the space between dream and waking.

Vast open spaces are created with corridors of light, or the proscenium height and width is enlarged and reduced by black curtains to play with our gaze and the liminal zone between performer and audience. In one sequence two women naked, except for scarlet corselettes, are imprisoned by the curtain's frame. They shyly and exquisitely come ever so close to caressing each other, but instead set each other in motion. The dance is razor sharp: robotic jolts, twitching limbs, slides, and torsos twisted into impossible contortions. Kylian creates beautiful and provocative hieroglyphics.

Hakutobo is one of my favourite butoh companies and I enjoyed seeing their work *Renyo*—*Far from the Lotus* again. It is a complex and subtle work which elaborates on the *jizo*: stone statues of children found throughout Japan which are carved anonymously and placed by the roadside or rice paddy, left exposed to the rain, wind and snow. The dancers perform their decay and mutation. Akeno (whose outstanding performance is the core of the work) dances the body in perpetual flux, electrified, not moving but moved. She shudders and shimmers, seems to be a tiny infant all agog or then an impossibly old woman or even a

corpse decaying into the elements: becoming an-Other body.

Amongst the whirligig of the Fringe several productions demonstrated the raw power of the best of the Festival shows. Seeing Joseph Chaikin perform Beckett's *Texts for Nothing* in the gutted shell of a Gothic church is an experience I will never forget. Beckett's texts—about the body's struggle with itself, with articulation, with the experience of nothingness and its attempts to remember—resonated in Chaikin's own experience of losing speech and body control due to a stroke some years ago. His live stuttering, struggling tongue was interspersed with an analogue recording of the texts made pre-stroke which was clear, controlled and precise creating an unmendable schizophrenia between past and present which absolutely echoed Beckett's writing.

A similar solo performance of burning presence was given by Polish actress Zofia Kalinska (formerly of Kantor's Cricot Theatre) in *If I am Medea*. Performed in a dark, filthy, ramshackle basement with a grilled window looking out onto a patch of ultra-green weeds and sunlight, the piece was a 'seance' in which Kalinska compared her life with Medea's. Howard Barker's production of his chamber play *Judith* performed by the Wrestling School (a



Robert Wilson – *Orlando*

company dedicated to his work) generated the collisions of sheer beauty and cruelty that his Theatre of Catastrophe requires.

Polish performance group Teatr Podrozy's *Carmen Funebre* was a haunting and violent requiem about civil war and genocide. In the sombre courtyard of the university buildings they created a deeply moving physical theatre spectacle. 'Civilians' are searched out from amongst the crowd by menacing masked figures on stilts who strip, separate and brutalise them. The piece is most powerful when it becomes a mourning for the dead—the performers each carefully carrying a tiny paper house with a pale flame burning inside, offering words of hope to the audience in broken English until tying balloons to the houses and watching them fly away into the Edinburgh night like prayers.

It was a Festival (and if you looked hard enough, a Fringe) of virtuoso theatre artists whose works demonstrated their mastery and maturity. Their works were a distillation and vivification of their careers—idiosyncratic, technically excellent and containing beautiful, disturbing images which burned the retina. The next generation of renegades (as these artists had once been) sadly cancelled or were ignored.

Benedict Andrews is artistic director of Adelaide's Blueprint Theatre and has worked as assistant director with the State Theatre Company of South Australia and Belvoir Street Company B. His trip to Edinburgh was made possible by the STCSA and the South Australian Department for the Arts and Cultural Affairs.

1996

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- *D Block*. A surreal room full of tiny offices, by Acme performance group.
- *A Man's Story*. The 1996 Adelaide Fringe hit, written by Alan Lovett.
- *Potion X and Freeze Frame* by Full Tilt Performance Troupe.
- *Silicon Spies* — from Odd Productions featuring Anne-Marie Sinclair. Cyber-glam and k-tuned cyber-anarchist Rupert.

Visual Art

- *Exhibition Club Chocolate*. Canberra artists Alex Asch, Marianna del Castillo, Marion East, Cristy Gilbert, Giovanna Inniello, Murray Kirkland, Vivien Marsala, Neville Minch, Gerard Murphy, Rowan Nichol, Melissa Niedorf, Tanja Riese, Benita Tunks and Jill Wolf exhibit new work.
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Other speakers will include John Wood (*Blue Heelers*) and Susan Lyons (*Mercury*) who will discuss the actor-screenwriter relationship, Genevieve Picot (*Proof*) and George Whaley who will talk about the actor-director relationship, and Lex Marinos who will investigate the Race Against Prime Time to discover what it takes to establish colour-blind casting, as well as many more top professionals from across the industry.

Free Public Forums: 6.00pm Thursday 31 October, Reception Room, Melbourne Town Hall - *The Vision Thing*, moderated by Mary Delahunty (ABC TV), hear the personal visions of three people who work in very different areas of the industry but who all have an influence on cultural directions, on performers, and on what the audience sees. 6.00pm Friday 1 November, Iwaki Auditorium, ABC Southbank - *The Art of the State*, moderated by Louise Adler (Radio National), a topical look at State Theatre Companies, which will also be broadcast on *Arts Today*. Both forums are proudly sponsored by the City of Melbourne.

Registration costs \$210 for MEAA members and \$450 for all others. For further information or to receive a registration brochure contact Sarah Bartak at the National Performance Conference on ph (03) 9686 7166 or fax (03) 9686 7160, or write to Level 2, 18 Kavanagh Street, Southbank Vic 3006.

The Second National Performance Conference acknowledges the generous support of the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding & advisory body; Arts Victoria, the Australian Film Commission, Melbourne International Festival of the Arts, Nine Network Australia, Murrumbidgee Theatres & Staged Developments Australia, Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance, JUST Super, City of Melbourne, Film Finance Corporation, Village Roadshow, Network Ten, VICNET, and Liberty Films.



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A convention of new poetries

Hazel Smith reports from New Hampshire on *Assembling Alternatives*

Conceived and organised by Romana Huk, *Assembling Alternatives* was the first international forum for the representation and discussion of experimental poetry from America, Britain and Canada. The four day event included an array of new poetries ranging from "language-poetry"—a movement which began in America in the seventies, characterised by unconventional syntax and semantics and a strong political agenda which resisted the subordination of language to representation—to performance work and hypertext. Distinguished participants included poets Charles Bernstein, Barrett Watten, Leslie Scalapino, Carla Harryman from the USA; Steve McCaffery and Paul Dutton from Canada; and cris cheek, Maggie O'Sullivan and Denise Riley from England. Many reputable critics were also present including Marjorie Perloff, Brian McHale, Stephen Fredman, Susan Schultz, Nicholas Zurbrugg and Geoff Ward. Australian poetry was not featured as a main item—this seems likely to be rectified at the next such conference—but some Australians took part.

One fascinating aspect of the conference was the way it exposed different conceptions of alternative poetry. For some, experimental poetry seemed to be mainly language poetry (and American language poetry at that). Others gave greater importance to intermedia work, performance or hypertext. The conference was marked by a general open-ness, but it was still obvious that some marginalisation operates even within the sphere of

experimental poetries. For example, developments in hypertext were represented in provocative papers and demonstrations by British poet John Cayley on computer realisation and generation of poetry, and American poet Jim Rosenberg on computer analysis of metrics. However, some participants seemed reluctant to take developments in this area very seriously. This conservatism seems likely to persist in the immediate future, as cyberspace meanwhile opens up new horizons for the writing and analysis of poetry.

The conference was an evolving event, and many fascinating issues and cultural conflicts emerged. It was generally agreed that the conference was, depressingly, a predominantly Caucasian affair, and there was some discussion about how this situation could be improved. In addition, many of the Irish writers, such as Billy Mills, felt that their work was not being discussed in terms of its own cultural context, and that language poetry was being used as an irrelevant point of reference. Some American speakers, such as Barrett Watten and Bob Perelman, suggested the need for language writing to reformulate its own cultural position. Particularly fascinating to me were the differences and tensions between American and British poets and critics. In general, while the British have been reading and writing about language poetry since the seventies, this has not been fully reciprocated by the Americans. The conference was a landmark in overcoming this problem, though the Americans were only sparsely

represented at the sessions on British poetry. The situation was not improved by British academic Peter Middleton who, rather than arguing for its significance, satirised and distorted the British scene suggesting that it had been riddled by a cult of individualism and lacked a theoretical discourse.

Performance was quite well represented at the conference. Nicholas Zurbrugg showed an illuminating video of avant garde work in Europe, America and Australasia. My paper delineated recent work involving words and sound as "new sonic poetries", and argued that such work was important in interrogating notions of gender and ethnicity. Other speakers included cris cheek and American performance artist Fiona Templeton. Caroline Bergvall, who is French but lives in England, made a plea for the importance of extending language by means of other artistic languages. In an evening of performances cris cheek created an inventive, improvisational mixture of sound, word and gesture. Christian Bök, from Canada, produced a dynamic performance which included a rendering of a section of Kurt Schwitters's *UrSonata*. Paul Dutton's performance ranged from the evocation of inarticulate emotion by means of throat and mouth sounds to semantic pieces based on permutation.

Other highlights of the conference included a presentation by Steve Evanson on the changing nature of poetry in the post-cold war environment; Tim Woods arguing for ethical poetry as a "poetry of interruption"; Alison Mark on the work of Veronica Forrest Thompson; Stephen

Fredman on Lyn Hejinian; and Steve McCaffery on some historical precursors to language poetry. Australia was thinly, but effectively, represented. Philip Mead spoke about the ambivalent relationship which Australian poets have had with American poetry, and Ann Vickery gave a stimulating paper on the erotics of collaboration. American Loss Glazier supplied useful information about new developments at the Electronic Poetry Centre (available on the web). There were excellent readings by Bob Perelman, Leslie Scalapino, Carla Harryman, Joan Retallack, Kathleen Fraser, Robert Sheppard, Denise Riley, Ken Edwards, Catherine Walsh, David Bromige and many others. In particular, I found Steve McCaffery's reading semantically and sonically compelling.

There were inevitably some minor problems. The schedule was over-packed and speakers rushed—some spoke so quickly that it was almost impossible to hear what they were saying. And although the objective of bringing theory and practice together was admirable, a number of poets proved unequal to the task of giving a structured talk. None of this undermined the considerable importance and excitement of the occasion. More than anything, they indicated the popularity of the event and the necessity for such conference/festivals to be held more regularly.

Assembling Alternatives, an International Conference/Festival was held at the University of New Hampshire, USA, August 29 - September 2 1996

Hazel Smith works in the areas of poetry, experimental writing, text performance and multimedia. Her latest CD is Nuraghic Echoes with Roger Dean. Rufus Records RF025



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Hovering in the multimedia background

John Potts draws attention to sound at ISEA96 in Rotterdam

Sound is catching up with multimedia, or rather multimedia is catching up with sound. This was one of the impressions left by the Seventh International Symposium On Electronic Art (ISEA96) held in Rotterdam in September. Although sound in multimedia was not a privileged theme at the symposium, it made its presence felt (as always, both literally and figuratively) during the week of conference discussion and artistic events.

While most attention—and funding—has so far been directed to the visual field of text and graphics, the potential of sound in the multimedia interface is becoming increasingly evident. The one conference paper to directly address this issue was presented by Sean Cubitt, from John Moores University in Liverpool. Sound, "the repressed partner in most areas of audiovisual space", has for the most part been under-used at the interface, filling the roles of vocal instruction or musical mood-enhancer. Cubitt argued that the reliance on the visual has produced an impoverished interface, based on the office design of typewriter and monitor. The resultant emphasis on individual experience is also a limitation, Cubitt pointed out, extending the user's sense of disappointment at the multimedia experience into the field of networked communication.

Cubitt's paper, "Online Sound and Virtual Architecture", posited sound as a potential remaker of the interface. In contrast to the individuated screen, sound has always constituted a social space. It is both more communal and more subversive. (This latter characteristic was attested to by audience members accustomed to working under audiovisual surveillance at high-tech research centres: workers will tolerate video surveillance but will turn off the audio, leaving them free to mutter to colleagues while preserving a dutiful facial expression.)

While Cubitt's proposal remains idealistic due to current technical limitations to online sound, it is, as he hoped, an inspiration to move between "what we currently have and the possibilities which constitute any possible future". Large-scale interfaces mediated through sound would be collaborative practices, stretching across actual and virtual dimensions.

If a prototype for this ideal interface exists, it would be something like *Anonymous Muttering*, the latest project from Knowbotic Research. This striking installation was part of the Dutch Electronic Art Festival, running concurrently with ISEA96. Built on top of the Netherlands Architecture Institute, it could be heard from many blocks away. Drawn in by the booming electronic sound, listeners could also use their visual sense to locate the site. Pulses of light were flashing around the apparatus, which could be reached by climbing up to the roof. Standing inside this large audio-visual field was an intense experience, to say the least. Intoxicating or disorientating, or both: responses depend on your reactions to strobe light, ferocious sound, and a forced disconnection between mind and body. It was like having parts of yourself separated and scattered around the force-field of sound and light.

Such a dismembering experience had its parallel in the construction of this electronic event. The Knowbotics team took sounds produced by various DJs at party events, processing them in real time into fragments of digital information. This digital material could be manipulated by visitors to the installation by means of a tactile interface: a silicon membrane. This pliable, transparent device could be bent and folded, as it was passed around like contraband at a party. The result: the sounds shooting around the apparatus were bent and folded in sympathy, and the strobe light was also triggered. As both the speakers and light-banks encircled the installation, the visitor was wrapped in an audio-visual felt of their own (partial) making.

But there's more! There were other inputs to the sound and light show. The digital material could also be manipulated via an interface on the website, and could be followed live with RealAudio software. With

so many at the controls, it's impossible to determine who produces which effects.

Anonymous Muttering is a communal interactive space, operating on both virtual and actual planes.

If the Knowbotics project was the most challenging application of virtual and audio technologies, other works exhibited in Rotterdam made more modest contributions. Anyone walking up the steps to the World Trade Centre, the central ISEA96 site, was confronted by *A Music Machine Balancing at the Edge of Order and Chaos*. This work by Peter Bosch and Simone Simons, otherwise entitled *The Electric Swaying Orchestra*, comprised six parametrically forced pendulums—that is, pendulums made to swing in unpredictable motions. Each pendulum had either a microphone or loudspeaker attached to its end; a computer controlled both the electro-motors driving the pendulums and the musical process. However, because irregularity is built into the pendulums' movements, the musical output is also unpredictable. The computer interprets the sounds received by the three swaying microphones, playing notes through the speakers in response. As a result, the computer, as its programmers put it, is "constantly listening and responding to itself".

This injection of chaos into the digital order of a computer-operated system is now a familiar element of the electronic arts. In defiance of the military-industrial precision expected of such systems, artists introduced a dose of anarchy which is itself now becoming predictable through overuse. The Knowbotics project at least pushed beyond the order/chaos paradigm; its multiple inputs played across the terrain of will and chance, with an unfolding audio text of unknowable authorship.

Enigmatic authorship of audio works was one of the topics pursued by Heidi Grundmann in her presentation to ISEA, "Radio The Next Century". Austria's Kunstradio is now on-line, vigorously promoting Internet radio through such projects as *Family Auer*, a sitcom on radio and internet. The writing is done by a host of "pool authors", while the narrative is also shaped by internet users. Other telematic radio-events include the composition of a multimedia music score, with the presiding composer collecting samples offered by other composers on line. *Radio The Ne(x)t Century* is a project instigated by two Swiss artists whose fictional premise is of a disastrous web crash, leaving SOS TNC to webcast for surviving fragments of debris. This and other ongoing works revel in the demise of the finished work of art; bits and pieces are re-contextualised into ever-shifting amalgams.

A similar project using more modest technology was articulated by Ian Pollock and Janet Silk: phone-based art. Although it's seldom mentioned, the phone was the first instrument of cyberspace, generating many of the effects now claimed for the internet. Its democratising network cuts across space, class and race, without excluding the poor and computer-illiterate. As well, being built on the voice, it is an extremely intimate mode of communication. As the two speakers pointed out, attempts to market "picturephones", active in the US since 1927, have always failed: the addition of visuals would destroy all of these advantages. Pollock and Silk have instigated several phone-art projects from their San Francisco base, deploying group phone links, voice mail and other techniques. The phone, they assert, is one network guaranteed to permeate social structures.

Back in the actual world of Rotterdam, several installation works added the sense of touch to the audio-visual dimensions. The physicality of sound found a partner, in these cases, in the pleasure of getting your hands on the works. The most intriguing was Jaap de Jong's *Crystal Ball*. Sticking out invitingly from a portal in the gallery wall, this glass ball responded to touch by producing a flurry of images and sounds taken from live TV channels. Mixed by computer, the images were spread across many small lenses, the sounds were shards of contemporary culture.

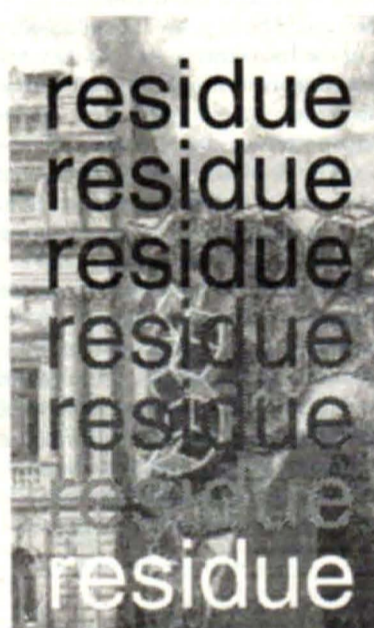
Confusing at first, this work was an enchanting kaleidoscope in three senses.

Jill Scott's installation *Frontiers of Utopia* also added the tactile sense to image and sound. Its eight female characters converse with each other, and the visitor, across time; extra interest is added by the invitation to use real, old-fashioned objects like keys to invoke certain responses. While the work is let down by the banality of some of the monologues, the interface is an engaging use of touch and sound, in particular.

There were other works on display which foregrounded sound, but these I've described were the most effective. The concert

performances at this ISEA were disappointing, with only Mari Kimura maintaining her usual high standard in new works for violin and interactive computer. The most interesting aspect, from an audio perspective, was the impression that sound is hovering in the multimedia background, waiting to make its presence more sharply felt.

John Potts' visit to ISEA96 was made possible by a grant from the Australian Film Commission's Industry and Cultural Development branch, and by a grant from the Conference and Workshop Fund of the Australian Network for Art and Technology.



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New spaces, new Europe

On his departure from Sydney, in an interview with Keith Gallasch, Goethe-Institut director Wolfgang Meissner speculates on the future of international cultural exchange.

In the all too brief two and a half years that he was director of the Goethe Institut in Sydney, Wolfgang Meissner made a considerable impact. Not only did he encourage and support local artists, especially innovators, but he also pressed his fellow European institute directors to rethink the principles and well established practices of cultural exchange in the context of new technologies and a unified Europe. Throughout his directorship, Meissner attended numerous performances, seminars, galleries and screenings, and, atypical of cultural institute directors, was a frequenter of The Performance Space, Artspace and other sites of local arts innovation. He played a significant role in the recent touring of both the Mudrooroo-Müller theatre work *The Aboriginal Protesters* (premiered at TPS) and the work of visual artist Dennis del Favero to Germany. "Because he was in Hanover in the Sex and Crime exhibition", says Meissner, always keen to break the limits of bi-lateral exchange, "Dennis was able to make contact with Jenny Holtzer and they're developing a big project in Leipzig and one in New York".

In Sydney, Wolfgang Meissner promoted contemporary music, sound work, installation and new technology as well as fulfilling the usual obligations of seeking out and providing numerous resources—like films—for exhibition here. He developed the annual *Blur* season of performances, concerts and exhibitions featuring Australian and German artists and performers, each season prompted by a colour taken from the Olympic rings logo and inspired by Goethe's and more recent

theories of colour in science, art and psychology. The Goethe-Institut logo was quietly ubiquitous on programs and catalogues across Sydney over recent years. Meissner's farewell was crowded with artists who enjoyed his intelligence and considerable arts knowledge and had found him supportive, affable and always available for conversation. His parting gift at the farewell was a generous performance by Yuki Takao, winner of the judges' second prize and the People's Choice prize at the 1996 Sydney International Piano competition (see "Asked to listen, asked to interrogate", page 38). Meissner has now taken up the post of director of the Hungarian Goethe-Institut.

Shortly before he left Australia, I quizzed Wolfgang Meissner about the future of cultural institutes, exchanges and Hungary in the new Europe.

WM To me it's fairly clear that if international cultural institutions like Alliance Française, the Goethe-Institute, the British Council have any chance of surviving over the next 10, 20, 30 years we have to forget about the old notion of bringing out the art representative or even cutting edge artist or product or exhibition to a foreign land. That sort of exchange increasingly happens anyway.

Of course, physical exchanges are still very important but given the virtualisation of communication in fine arts, performing arts and literature, I think the internet-driven exchange is going to be so crucial that we have to rethink the possibilities for dialogue between artists. Spaces shrink. Even given Sydney's distance from the rest of the world, even given the relative youth of its artistic community, it's exciting for me to see that there is more opportunity here than in other places where the Goethe-Institut operates—even places in western Europe. Partly this is because of the distance of Australia from North America and Europe. That distance has helped to sharpen minds and concepts to develop—much faster than Europe—new means of communicating within the region and globally.

KG What then will the Goethe-Institut offer in the way of cultural exchange?

WM I think our business has to be more in the production of events. What fascinates and excites me working here is that we can create the kind of events we've done with *Clan Analog* in 1993 and '94 and more recently with a six-hour online connection between the Sydney Goethe-Institut and a German university where artists exhibited their books and were available online via the internet. For some of my generation this is brave new world stuff but for younger artists it's like drinking tea. Artists are potentially in constant dialogue with their colleagues and their works. That redefines our role. The space necessary to create exchange events is reduced. We have so much space which is not being used.

KG How will this affect the director's role?

WM While the autonomy of the individual director doesn't need to be diminished, it becomes their responsibility to recognise the changing world and draw back a little bit from personal idiosyncratic cultural hobbies, to work more and more with Australian partner organisations, like we did for example with *Synapse*, the new media communications group. I think you should respect the collectivity of thought and adapt to the artistic environment you're in.

KG This kind of intimacy is quite different from cultural institutes providing arts festival fodder or supporting concert programs by touring artists.

WM The artist in residence program has a continuing validity but bringing chamber orchestras over here, it's not just a thing of the past, there's a staleness to it. The world market is there for these kind of things. Also, the bilateral exchange idea is a defunct, false notion. It's a way of working in the international exchange arena which is so much linked to a 19th century notion of the cultural nation.

Shortly after I came to Sydney in December 1993, I set up a working group with the four European cultural organisations here. We called it Working Group 128, referring to the number of the cultural paragraph of the Maastricht Treaty. It's the first time that a European Union Constitution paper has included the word "Culture". The first time. The 56th Treaty of Rome didn't. In 1993, two sentences in paragraph 128 place emphasis on the need to co-operate not just on economic and strategic matters but on cultural ones.

KG It's not defensive, like the French fear of the Hollywood invasion?

WM No, it's positive. It's about the multicultural Europe which many Europeans are not aware of after the collapsing of so many boundaries, the new Europe that's being created without cultural institutions. Culture doesn't need institutions like ours to come about so I think if we're doing our work well, we should be of service, we should be very close to the ground and support those activities which find it difficult in the marketplace. It can't be done on a bi-lateral level. It needs to be done on a European union level. So directors from the four institutes—German, French, British, Italian—have been meeting every 6-8 weeks for the past three years and we have developed a couple of projects. The big one is called *Opening of the Mouth*. It's the first ever project proposed by a group of European Union member state cultural institutes outside Europe for funding from the European Commission of Brussels. There's a program called *Kaleidoscope 2000* which supports cultural programs within Europe but also exchanges with regions outside Europe. This is the first genuine Australian-European exchange.

The idea has been developed by Daryl Buckley from the new music group *Elision* together with other composer friends in London. He conceived the idea for the 1997 Perth Festival. It involves a number of European collaborators: people from the Netherlands, France, about 25 young artists in all who've worked with him on the concept. When he first told me about the idea, I said this is great and we developed it a little further. I took it to the working group and they liked it very much. So we proposed it via the delegation of the European Union in Canberra and it's now being considered in Brussels and we've recently had fairly positive feedback. It's a multidisciplinary performance site-specific work with music and sound art and is set in a huge factory. Depending on funding, it will premiere in Perth and travel in Australia before it goes to Europe.



Wolfgang Meissner

Opening of the Mouth crosses borders, national cultural policies, disciplines. It's something which uses new technologies and also the oldest concepts of performance. It's based on the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* and other burial rites and rites of passage. It's also linked to what happened in Europe this century in terms of people's voices being shut out or shut in in concentration camps or gulags.

KG What do you see as the challenge for the new Europe and Hungary in particular?

WM It's one of bringing west and east together within Europe. So many misunderstandings have been traded across those borders because of lack of communication and information. In the last century and into this one, places like Prague, Budapest, Bratislava, Warsaw, Minsk, Cracow, St Petersburg, they used to be Europe, on an equal level with Milan and London and Paris. It's these peripheral metropolises that are coming back into the European fold. A cultural institution just needs to sit and listen. If you're perceptive enough there's so much that will enrich you.

Hungary has been a site of resistance. We know that in 1848 Hungarians were amongst the most fervent revolutionaries and suffered because of it. I was there in June this year and spoke to some artists, gallery directors, authors. The 1956 experience is still very present as part of the Hungarian national experience in intellectual life: a crucial moment of cultural pride when they went out in the streets fighting not just for less oppression and more bread but for a notion of life in terms of culture. The Hungarian people have a crucial bridging role between west and east within Europe. There's also a re-nationalisation there—Hungarian intellectuals understand the danger of that. But I think it's a process the country needs to go through to redefine what its national culture is.

KG What about the challenges you face?

WM I'm going to see if I can do what I think I've been reasonably successful at in Sydney, to link contemporary energies, to encourage young artists (young in mind, not just in age or body) and those that find it most difficult to position themselves within the cultural territory.

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A festival in the technological nursery

Maryanne Lynch sees *The Dreamers*, *Ghost in the Machine*, *Furioso* and #14 at the Brisbane Festival

The inaugural Brisbane Festival is over, and the mop-up is now taking place. Mixed opinions, mixed audiences, mixed results. A reasonable expectation was that some of the mistakes made by other Australian festivals would not be repeated; an unreasonable expectation that the whole shebang would be up and running in four, five, six short months or whatever it took. My view is that this festival is off to a shaky but not wholly unsuccessful start, though I'll take it all back if the same mistakes happen in 1998.

Yes, tick the boxes for lack of passion, uneven quality and a festival in search of an identity. But also tick endeavour, exchange and promise—all of this illustrated for me by two local pieces, *The Dreamers* and #14, and two interstate pieces, *Furioso* and *Ghost in the Machine*. These works combine dance and drama, bodies and technologies, image and word, in manifold manifestations of the alienated self in an alienating world. Two were from the 'main' program and two from the 'community' program, but this distinction never held up—as it didn't in general. Instead, I saw four 'theatrical' pieces attempting to join old and new means of storytelling, notably psycho-social narrative and digital and other technologies.

Two that really failed to deliver were ostensibly at polar ends of the performance spectrum. *The Dreamers*, the latest production by Kooemba Jdarra, from a script by Jack Davis, was a big semi-naturalistic tale of an indigenous Australian family battling the odds created by a white-dominated world. *Ghost in the Machine*, performed by Hellen Sky and John



14, 1996 Brisbane Festival

McCormick, featured computerised imagery in a movement piece that explored relations between women and men. Despite their differences, both succumbed to the same fate: an awkward relationship between tale and technology, rendering the latter as special effect or even gimmickry.

The Dreamers was, I suspect, in difficulties even before it went into production. The text's historical significance may not be up for question, but this isn't enough to make it a good play. Director Wesley Enoch seemed unsure whether or not to play it straight, and the result was a curious pastiche of kitchen-sink acting and whizbangery—for example overwrought lighting and a set in which naturalistic and non-naturalistic production styles collided. The problem partly lay, it seemed to me, in the lack of connection between the action, on the one hand, and

performers, technologies, space on the other. In *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, produced by the same company last year, nothing felt gratuitous.

Ghost in the Machine tired me out with its repetitive twirling-woman-seized-by-man, then spun-and-sent-flying and its insistence on using computer-generated effects, whenever and wherever it could.

Two projection screens provided barriers, frontiers and shelters, as well as visual backdrop, but the Mandala system made the performers merely appear to conjure up the next effect. The work seemed disembodied, an odd thing to say about something as gritty as two interacting bodies, but the point was that the bodies didn't really interact—with each other or with the space—only with the computers. This relationship could have been played up, but it wasn't.

Most readers will have already come across Meryl Tankard's *Furioso*, either in performance or review. In the Brisbane production, dancers, space and technologies coexisted in ever-changing relationships, no single element demanding its own importance at the expense of another. The piece was both more classical and more circus-like than I had anticipated—that

final image of women climbing up the wall of an illusion!—but with Tankard's slant on life and death and meaning. Once again focusing on heterosexual relations, Tankard nonetheless said much about much with minimal huffing and puffing.

Last but not least was #14, a hybrid performance piece devised by a collective of Brisbane artists and staged at the historical Spring Hill Baths. This work also utilised the Mandala system, but with greater success. For its stunning visual impact, picture this example: the pool emptied of water, a male form crucified against its surface, a great gridded rectangle of colour seizing him and splintering him into one, two, three, four self-images, each taking on its own life, taunting, tormenting, cajoling the performer in his agony. Conceptually, however, #14 was all over the shop, its fragmentation becoming its weakness and its visual poetics wearing a little thin. I wasn't looking for a narrative, but I could sense someone trying to tell me one. #14 began to feel a little like the man lying on the pool floor: interesting but high and dry.

Not least from bitter experience, I've come to the conclusion that using digital and other technologies in performance requires many more hours of development than traditional productions. We are still in the nursery as far as this goes, a condition demonstrated by the different levels of engagement with the technological text demonstrated. Similarly, the festival itself still has a heap of growing up to do.

Brisbane Festival, August 25 - September 8 1996

Bodies percussive, gymnastic, enabled

Julia Postle surveys Graeme Murphy's Brisbane Festival dance program

The Brisbane Festival's official dance program, with Graeme Murphy as artistic adviser, presented two American dance companies—Parsons and Momix—alongside Meryl Tankard's Australian Dance Theatre and Sydney Dance Company. Work by Brisbane-based companies, such as The Queensland Ballet and Expressions Dance Company, was conspicuously absent.

The one-off *Dance Gala* was sold-out, with 20 samples from companies and individual choreographers (again not much of a Brisbane presence). It felt like a dance eisteddfod of sorts—the recollected evening is now a series of blurred images. One piece that spoke to me out of the rabble was *Into Dharma*, choreographed by Stephen Baynes and performed by Wakako Asano. Each gesture and each step was so precise and yet also so fluid, she seemed to 'move stillness'.

New York's Parsons Dance Company presented a program of six works from their repertoire. In *Scrutiny* (1987), the dancers playfully hop, skip, leap and float on, off and around the stage, with sweeping, swinging arms. Their movement is percussive, at times matching the rhythm of the music, and at others working against and between rhythms. The constant, often abrupt, changes in direction, rapid arm swings and little solo explosions mark the movement crescendo in this work. Parson's trademark solo, *Caught* (1982), is as much a feat in athleticism as it is in precision choreography. A flashine strobe arrests him

mid-air in successive poses and locations about the stage. It's trickery, but the shaping of it is remarkable. Parson's choreography has a sense of humour too; clever mini-parodies of ballet, unusual combinations of movement styles, and quirky explorations of relationships. Throughout, Parson's dance technique evokes both the formalism of Balanchine and the experimentalism of Cunningham.

In contrast, Moses Pendleton's continuing exploration of dance-illusion with his company Momix was not well-served by a program of twenty short works and excerpts from larger ones. It was a lot of fun, but there were too many weirdly wonderful investigations at once. In *Spawning* (1986), three women in g-strings dance with, play with and bounce around on huge balloons. *Skiva* (1984) has a woman and man (Erin Elliott and Tim Acito), both on skis, demonstrating the possibilities for new movement that sporting equipment creates. They swing out towards the ground over the front of the skis in a delicious, suspended motion. Acito throws himself into backflips over the skis. In *The Wind-Up* from *Baseball* (1995), Cynthia Quinn performs a magical spinning dance with an exaggerated version of a baseball in one hand. Sporting allusions are pervasive, as is the gymnastic, athletic moving body that Pendleton seems to love to challenge and extend.

In *Free Radicals*, Sydney Dance Company pursues the percussive relationship to new ends, with a radically

different approach from their *Synergy with Synergy* (1992). A celebration of rhythm and movement, *Free Radicals* embraces tap, folk, body percussion and alternative instruments, as well as contemporary dance and song. The interaction between the dancers and the musicians is explicit; in one section, the dancers massage the necks and shoulders of the musicians, and then lie down to receive a rapid Swiss massage themselves. In the program Murphy makes reference to the human scale of this work in contrast to the monumental scale of *Synergy with Synergy*.

The most meaningful work I saw at the festival was *Village*, a community project facilitated by the Queensland Performing Arts Trust D'Arts Program. Led by lecturer and artist Janet Donald, the work was realised by a group of young people with intellectual disabilities and QUT's Academy of the Arts (Dance) students. Sally Chance choreographed and directed the final stages of the work, and Colin Offord composed and directed the music. In the opening section, the performers sit or lie in pairs, leaning against each other, and slowly begin to move through a series of resting places; the small of the back, the heel, the curve of a stomach. Later, a duet between a young man and an older woman in an electronic wheelchair is far more powerful than most classical ballet *pas de deux*.

Of the other work I saw, much has already been said. Meryl Tankard's well-travelled *Furioso* left me breathless. Zen Zo's *The Cult of Dionysus* (*RealTime* 14), a Brisbane work, proved a compelling interrogation of classical drama and contemporary movement. Let's hope that the artistic directors and dance curators of future Brisbane Festivals program more local works in future. In so doing they will acknowledge the quality of Queensland dance and also revive some of the magical intimacy of the Warana Festival.



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Dancing in an empty disco

Peter Anderson moves through the 1996 Brisbane Festival

It's Friday night—actually it's Saturday morning—I'm playing at being the daggy single guy alone on the empty dance-floor. I'm at Dale Frank's *Disco (Behaviouralism)*. Like his recent *Pool Shark* installation at the Institute of Modern Art, this is a moment of realism in the world of art—a Disco posing as a disco. Dale has most of the elements just right—the lights, the DJs, the music, even a few of the crowd—but some things don't seem to work. The security guards don't fit the warehouse location, and the Brisbane Festival administration has organised the licensed bar only from eight til midnight, so the piece looks like it will never properly sink into the drunken denouement of a real disco—although, of course, it is a *real* disco, just like this is a real arts festival.

For me *Disco (Behaviouralism)* epitomised my experience of the festival. It was the second last of around 15 Brisbane Festival events I managed to see over the two weeks, most drawn from the *Volt* component of the Festival's program. But, unlike Dale's disco, which was self-conscious (and perhaps a bit ironic) in asserting its status as art, the *Volt* program seemed a little unsure of what it was actually trying to be. While located under the "Community Program" heading, *Volt* (subtitled "the new performance") was also regularly identified by the Festival administration as the "visual arts" program. Now while it is true that some of the program's productions did have clear

links to the 'tradition' of performance art, others seemed more clearly linked to theatre, dance, and cabaret. The fact that the program existed (with reasonable financial support) was a big plus for this festival, but I have to admit I really couldn't divine a reason for some productions being in the *Volt* program, while others were not.

For example, *Parlour Volatile*, a tight piece of camp theatre playing on notions of drag and gender (again), was part of *Volt*, while *Children of the Devil* (which I saw on the same night at the same venue) was not. Both were pieces for solo performers—Moir Finucane and Russell Dykstra—devised in collaboration with the respective directors—Jackie Smith and David Bell—and requiring fairly rapid shifts between characters. In *Parlour Volatile* there were also some nice frocks, and songs to mime along with, as well as some bleak and ugly moments. In *Children of the Devil*, the props didn't get much more complicated than a brick and a stick. However, the piece did begin with what might be seen as a homage to Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (first performed 100 years ago this December), replacing the riot-inducing exclamation "Merde!" with some realistic looking prop-department poo. The whole thing was mostly bleak and ugly...as well as being very funny.

Bleakness was also pervasive in *Pyjama Girl*—devised by Maryanne Lynch, Shane Rowlands, Joseph O'Connor and Scott

Walton—a production I think might best be described as an experimental investigation of a particular murder mystery (the 1930 Pyjama Girl case), in a generically ambiguous performance mode. The fact that it didn't always 'work' in a neat way

gave it a certain edge. It was the only piece I saw that abandoned the audience to a final uncertainty, so much so that they failed to realise the piece had ended, and left after a long difficult pause and an awkward smattering of applause.

Of the two 'new technology' based pieces I saw—#14 at the Spring Hill Baths (a very evocative space) and *Ghost in the Machine* by Company in Space at the IMA—I found #14 the most absorbing. While *Ghost in the Machine* did display an admirable tightness in the interface between the performers and the technology, it came across as a series of set demonstrations. The group producing #14 on the other hand—Keith Armstrong, Anthony Babicci, Panos Couros, Alex Karydis, Brian Lucas, Lisa O'Neill and Ann Wulff—seemed less concerned with the 'wow factor' and built a slow shifting piece with some spectacular visual moments and grabs of text that hinted at an underlying narrative.

In the main drama program, it was Zen



Nigel Pearn - *Pyjama Girl*

Nicola Chapman

Zen Zo's *The Cult of Dionysus* that seemed most often to be marked out for attention. However, I have to admit that while I found the piece engaging and beautifully staged, the Butoh influenced delivery tended to irritate me rather than to intensify the experience. Interestingly, while Zen Zo looked to Japan for ways to heighten the dramatic impact of their work, Japan's United Performers Studio—*The Winds of God*—went for the realism of method acting with a play about Kamikaze pilots.

In a way this sort of tension captures something of the difficulties of this first Brisbane Festival. Not enough of the program really went for broke, and the Festival itself seemed to lack a sense of energy and direction, as if this time around it was acting the part, carefully. It lacked the Kamikaze spirit. I for one would have preferred a little more inspired overacting, and a few bold gestures towards the future...even if that means a few people get irritated along the way.

Above the line

Jean-Pierre Voos talks to Keith Gallasch the challenges for Townsville's Tropic Line Theatre

From time to time regional theatre companies look like an endangered species: several have folded in recent years, others struggle on against significant odds, some are likely to be replaced by a new species, multi-art organisations like Lismore's successful NORPA, in the not too distant future (*RealTime* 14). And not all arts conservationists are convinced that these small theatre companies are worth saving. They are accused of conservatism, of inappropriately mimicking their state theatre company counterparts, and of indifference to community needs. Of course, we all know that there are in fact many kinds of regional theatres with distinctive ways of working that counter these charges.

Townsville's Tropic Line Theatre is an example of strong collectivity, shared management, the nurturing of new Queensland plays, the development of young actors, the programming of mainstream fare with provocative new works, and some community involvement. Originally based at James Cook University, the company produced four to five plays a year and director Jean-Pierre Voos taught as well. Since becoming independent two years ago, Tropic Line creates 10 to 11 shows a year, "almost a show a month", says Voos. "Being independent gives us greater scope, gives me more time to direct, it's what the town needs, and the frequency of productions offers continuity, frequency and higher public awareness."

University support did have much to offer, including access to equipment, transport and administrative resources. An independent Tropic Line is infinitely more reliant on box office, grants (Arts Queensland and the Australia Council) and self-management: "We can't afford to have an administrator so the actors and I share the tasks". However, Voos is clearly proud of the company's independence. The only



Tropic Line Theatre - *The Surgical Table*

problem, he says, is that the press are still inclined to regard Tropic Line as a university company and underrate its abilities. He reports that this is a prejudice on the decline.

Voos directs most of the productions, working with "the ensemble, as we call ourselves", a company of 11, including our young director Tanya Sorrell. Some seven are graduates from Voos' teaching years at James Cook. "That means that some of my performers have been working with me continuously for five years." This is a reminder of Voos' great faith in ensembles. In 1970 he founded the long-lived and influential performance group Kiss, which not only visited Australia several times, but employed a number of Australian artists now prominent in the performance scene here.

The employment of talented local theatre workers is an issue for Voos. "I'd like to cut down the talent drain to the 'south'. Unlike other companies, such as New Moon, that have attempted to make a go of it in Townsville in the past, we would only

import actors from Brisbane and elsewhere when there was absolutely no alternative. It hasn't happened yet, partly because I'm interested in developing our own actors and choosing plays, including new works, with them very much in mind. The same goes for encouraging new directors."

As for play programming, Voos says, "I cast my net very wide to entice a larger general public. I'm not happy with it yet but there are signs of progress. That's one reason why we have to do so many plays. If we want to do four or five cutting edge plays then we have to please the general public with Shakespeare, with *The Crucible*, our next production, and the odd potboiler. These 'safe' plays aren't subsidised by Arts Queensland.

"Part of our policy is to produce new Queensland works, to foster young playwrights in our *New Plays for Queensland Fortnight*. It's limited to Queenslanders, and we get some 30 to 50 scripts submitted. These go to a panel to select the most promising six: then three are workshopped in one week and three the next, and we bring the authors here. They're transformed by the experience.

Michael Beresford-Plummer from James Cook University coordinates the event for us. It's good work that we do because we can offer three or four of these writers productions. This year Tropic Line are doing three that we developed from last year's fortnight; another one's going on in Brisbane, and *Jungfrau* (Dymphna Cusack's novel adapted by Jonathon Hardy) is being done by Playbox in Melbourne in June, 1997. And some of this year's best will go into our own program next year."

Carefully constructed company life is an important part of Tropic Line. "We convene at 9am. The first hour is a spent on administration and stage management. I chair the meetings and the company are like ministers: they take their jobs very seriously. They know exactly what they're doing. It's a profit sharing company, they're all interested in its success. At 10am we do a physical warm-up devised from my years with Kiss. At 11am there's half hour for elementary acrobatics and then, if there's

time, if the play we're working on is not too demanding, the actors train their voices, they learn songs, some are learning how to read music. Lunch at 12. Rehearsals from two to five. With some plays, like *The Crucible*, we use community actors, so we have to rehearse three nights a week until 9.30pm. Some of our actors have part-time jobs so timetabling is critical. One person in the ministry is in charge of that almost full time job. She's my boss!

"There are five community actors in *The Crucible*. They would be professional actors if they had the courage or the right circumstances. For example, there's an optometrist who's excellent, but there's no point my twisting his arm, he's got a family."

I ask Voos if this all-consuming timetable is too much for a senior artist like himself.

He retorts, "It's my life. It's what I want to do and the members of the ensemble do take a lot of work off my hands. I couldn't do this without them".

When Tropic Line was part of the university it toured widely in Queensland, but with its independence, an enlarged program, the huge distances involved and the inevitable financial losses, touring is an ambition rather than a fact. "It's in our charter and we want to do it, but other than a recent successful trip to Brisbane, it's not yet possible. The snag with Playing Australia is that you don't get funded to tour unless you cross state borders. We'll start in a small way."

When Tropic Line went independent, it was rumoured that it would promptly collapse. Two years later, the company has shown the strength of ensemble playing and self-management, the capacity to produce a large annual season of plays and the successful nurturing and producing of a significant number of new Queensland plays.

Jean-Pierre Voos' production of *The Crucible* opens October 8, followed by *Dario Fo and Franca Rame's Female Parts*, directed by Tanya Sorrell, and finishing the year with a family show, *The Four Poster*. Tropic Line Theatre, PO Box 619, Townsville, Qld 4810 ph 077 27 6415

Naked

George Blazevic talks about his play *Nevesinska 17* for Fremantle's Deckchair Theatre

With the assistance of an Australia Council grant, George Blazevic has been commissioned by Deckchair Theatre to write Nevesinska 17. A research grant from the WA Department for the Arts allowed him to be a guest of the National Theatre of Croatia in October 1995.

GB Even though there's anywhere between three to four hundred thousand Croatians and their descendants in Australia, according to our research there hasn't been one play that's tackled the existence of this group.

KG Is there a particular reason for this?

GB Very little has been written about us, because Croats are seen as a very ugly aspect of Australian multiculturalism, a rather warlike, swarthy, contemptible, unyielding, messy, grubby, illiterate, obstinate, mule-like, pig-like people. Unfortunately, it's true! As with any group there's a danger of stereotyping. My writing has made me realise that the problem with Croats is that they are so torn up. They are possibly the most fragmented group of migrants in Australia.

KG Do you mean they have no sense of community?

GB They have a sense of community—their communities, their togetherness. But to take a holistic view, there is no one Croat ethos or psyche because of the deep rooted residue of what happened politically in Europe. Croats and other ex-Yugoslavs are driven people—their greatest ghosts are political ghosts. Given the events of the last five years or so it's only now that the exorcism has begun. Part of that exorcism includes younger Croats in Australian who are completing courses, studies, research

and coming up with their own perspectives as to their place in Australian society. This happened earlier here with the Jewish, Greek and other communities. It's happening with Asians now.

KG Croats have been here a long time.

GB There's been a delayed reaction with the Croats because a lot of them saw themselves as being without a legitimate homeland. The land they came from was an occupied territory under a greater Soviet system. Now they have their own territory, a new home, they have to come up with answers. This is due to the bad habits of 40, 50, 60 years of being ashamed and allowing politics to drive a wedge between everyone at all times. Now they have to realise what they've learnt in Australia over the last 40 years: that there is room for tolerance, that tolerance is not a sign of weakness, but is actually a sign of maturity. *Nevesinska 17* will delve into this morass.

KG Which came first, the idea for the play or the trip to Croatia?

GB The play. The trip solidified my ideas and gave me the chance to promote the idea of an Australian play being played in Croatia...which we are negotiating. Croatia and Australia are going through similar things artistically. There's a lot of pressure for universal product as opposed to local Croatian work. There's a lot of questioning. "Are we peripheral or part of something big?" "We've got our own voice, is it the right voice, who is it appealing to?" There's a dearth of modern works because the establishment keeps going back to the classics. But I think this will give way to a contemporary theatre.

KG What form will *Nevesinska 17* take?

GB We're going as far away from naturalism as possible. It's a theatre of enlargement. We're going for theatricality above all. In 90 minutes we travel with a Croatian family from 1945 to 1991 through some of the bigger issues of Australian historical life. There's a ghost

bringing back the past to storm all over the family. He's a major with the Hussars in the Austro-Hungarian Empire come to warn the family of the doom impending for all of Europe in 1991. There are deaths and intrigues—a combination mystery thriller with a Balkan black strain.

KG And epic?

GB A touch. What I've tried to do is to present a particularly Australian viewpoint of events that were seemingly a long way away for most Australians but touched the lives and hearts of almost all Croats here whether emigres or Yugoslav supporters of the system of Tito. Unknown to most Australians there was a secret war here, people were getting killed, 'accidentally' falling off buildings, bombs going off. Even this needs detective work because some of it was set up. The challenge is to present Croats as humans rather than some sort of beasts of war who have no other feelings than hatred. Breaking down stereotyping is something Australia and Australian theatre is good at doing.

KG What's your relationship with the play's material?

GB I recalled a lot of stories from contemporaries of my late parents about things I didn't ask about or know when I was a child. The depth of turmoil is what intrigues me about this group of people as opposed to the stereotype. Later I knew what was going on but I was working as an outsider and there came a point where that outsider view became invaluable for creating a piece which, as Angela Chaplin says, is "a symbolic play". It's theatre taken out of the ordinary into the bizarre and the abstract, working with a smallish situation, a family, against the backdrop of Australian and larger historical streams. The play poses the need for resolution and reconciliation. There's a joyous rebirth at the end—it's not a bleak play.

KG What kind of Croatian participation will there be?

GB There'll be a guest actor from Croatia,

Tomislav Stojkovic, working with the company. What I realised when in Croatia is that performers like Tomislav have the experiences so many of our actors are denied. He's done many classic and contemporary roles and performed in Hungary, Russia, Scandinavia, Germany, Italy, Britain, France, Spain and South America in international festivals. He's the first Croatian actor to be invited to perform with a theatre company outside Croatia since 1945.

I also brought back piles of sheet music and recordings of contemporary Croatian music and 19th century piano music. Forget the folkloric. This might surprise a lot of Croats and Australians: there is a great heritage of serious contemporary music.

KG Like Milan Kundera's reminder that middle Europe used to be the cultural centre of Europe.

GB The folkloric reinforces stereotypes, especially for migrants who froze culturally and politically when they arrived in Australia. But now the Croatian diaspora is in a state of flux, questioning everything. War has thrown them back into the eye of the storm. The nostalgic window has been shattered. We're in broad daylight, we're naked, we're going to get sunburned and wind burned, snow burned and snow blind and what we've got to do in the modern context is grow up and deal with our problems like mature people. Younger Croats are the hope for this new tolerance, as they are in *Nevesinska 17*.

George Blazevic, a former journalist with The West Australian and The Australian, is a Perth-based writer whose works include the chamber opera Giles Is That You?

Deckchair Theatre, Nevesinska 17, by George Blazevic, directed by Angela Chaplin, designed by Nick Yaksich, lighting by Damien Hanson, musical direction by Marcus Hughes; performers: David Davies, Peter Finlay, Claire Jones, Helen McDonald, Robert van Mackelenberg, Tomislav Stojkovic. Opens October 3 at the Old Customs House, Fremantle. Bookings 09 484 1133.

Into the blue room

Tony Osborne espouses the benefits of a new experimental theatre space in Perth

Not too many contemporary theatres are as well known for their bar as their performances but the Blue Room Theatre (BRT) boasts an R & R room now part of the state's heritage list. Tom Albert's four-wall mural and Paul Wallace's tastefully stocked refrigerator provide the perfect setting for a pre- or post-show drink for artist and punter alike. You often need a drink after BRT shows because their quality, style and impact can fluctuate between the sublime and the not-so-sublime. This is what it's all about, a bit like a year-round theatre version of *Open Season* at The Performance Space or *Putting On An Act* at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA).

Situated in Northbridge, BRT is located in one of those once abandoned Federation school buildings which was renamed "Arts House" in the late 80s shortly after PICA moved into the main house of the old James St. Technical School (formerly the grand old Perth Boys School). An annexe was left to be shared out amongst various needy arts organisations. Once known as the WA Actors Centre, the BRT has since shifted its emphasis and modelled its annual program on a La Mama style venue for new works and works-in-progress.

By the end of 1996, it will have hosted 40 new shows in two years. However, it has maintained many of its former

programs (regular new-play readings, workshops with visiting and resident performers) as well as providing an



Sarah Cullity and Andrew Robinson in *Disappearances*

Artrage and Pride (annual Gay & Lesbian event) venue.

This year, apart from new plays, dance, comedy, and innovative reworkings of the classics, it has housed shows that don't quite fit into the 'theatre' pigeon-hole. The management is not afraid of those tricky generic determinations and has given voice to many pioneers of theatre. For instance, in August BRT housed *The Midnight Tea Party*, an "installation" based around the

idea of a sensory theatrical experience. In May, Performance [Re]search offered a thrilling exploration of the possibilities of the theatre environment.

In *Disappearances*, Sarah Cullity, Andrew Robinson and Serge Tampalini pushed the boundaries, taking the audience in promenade beyond banality and into an exciting world of fragmented sound, movement and emotion. Suspensions from

the window frame of the high first floor and the manic movement (sometimes seeming dangerously close to audience-members) made this 'edge-of-the-seat' theatre with a design element that was at times breathtaking. I want more of this.

The BRT is an essential point of contact for new work and audiences, a point is borne out by a survey and report by Rhodes Consulting for the BRT earlier this year. Most "users" reported that they would not have been able to produce their show without BRT facilities and the nominal grant provided by the organisation. No other Perth venue can provide a room, a lighting rig, a modest publicity/production budget and a two week season to try out a new show with a paying audience. This does not, however, prevent a

funded artist such as Phil Thomson (*Initiation*) taking advantage of the intimate atmosphere of the space to enhance a smaller scale delivery.

Rhodes Consulting also found that although there was reasonable awareness of the BRT amongst those who normally go to "live performances", this didn't necessarily translate into seeing BRT shows—punters were reluctant to break their attendance habits.

A remedy could be the involvement of better funded organisations for whom a valuable resource for experimentation remains sadly under-used. In addition to the practical assistance already lent by the Perth Theatre Trust, a once a year project from each of the agency-funded theatre companies could go a long way towards raising the BRT's profile, developing audiences for new Australian work.

All The Blue Room needs for greater 'success' is a slightly broadened audience base. *Bindjareb Pinjarra* and *Vita* both started their life in Blue Room seasons and it would be appropriate if these (now) main-house shows could be the catalyst for broader support from the community. Is it time for more of the agency-funded companies to acknowledge the value of The Blue Room by lending some support to this venue which generates new work and enhances the health of WA theatre culture?

Tony Osborne performed his Festivals, Vestibules and a Humourless Bastard at The Blue Room, March 20-31

OnScreen

film, media & techno-arts

Editorial

The recent federal budget may have been but a taste of things to come for Australian screen culture. Last issue, *OnScreen* reported on cuts to new film acquisition by the National Library, and the effects of this policy on screen culture, including its potential to decimate film teaching and scholarship in this country. The Australian Film Commission also took a \$4m budget cut to its special production fund, which means a significant reduction in support available to a range of areas of production, including shorts, documentaries and features. But the Coalition razor gang is apparently yet to apply the full force of its bean-counting "efficiency" and "productivity" initiatives to national screen culture.

In late August, Arts Minister Senator Richard Alston announced a major review of commonwealth assistance to the Australian film industry, code for a potential 'rationalisation' of the country's major screen funding and support agencies, the AFC and the Film Finance Corporation. The review will undertake a "strategic assessment" of government support for the industry. Its terms of reference include an examination of the "efficiency and effectiveness" of existing industry support arrangements, including, ominously, the "extent of any unnecessary overlap or duplication between the

Commonwealth's support mechanisms", a clear indication to many in the industry that an AFC-FFC merger may be on the cards despite the very distinct natures of these two bodies. (The FFC, unlike the AFC, for example, requires a return on its production investments, and thus supports only demonstrably commercially viable product). Unsurprisingly, given the political colour of the present administration, the review will also investigate the extent to which "existing arrangements encourage private sector participation in the industry". The resurrection of the 10BA tax incentives is also mooted.

Given the Coalition's recent record on the arts—its cuts to the Australia Council and the disemboweling of the ABC, despite sustained and widespread protests—the signs are not good. Public submissions will be invited and the outcomes of the review are due in time for consideration in the 1997 budget. See *OnScreen* in the next issue of *RealTime* for a full report on Coalition screen policy and the impending review.

Details of the review of commonwealth assistance to the Australian film industry are available from webmaster@dca.gov.au. See page 26 for review submission address

Feature

From ethnography to self-representation

Wal Saunders explores the history and fate of images of indigenous Australians

Last year the world celebrated the centenary of cinema. During this period the camera has accompanied the colonial enterprise, recorded many of its activities and indeed, some would hold, abetted this enterprise; especially as it was used in the growth of ethnography, designed initially to assist in the administration of colonised people. The celebration of the centenary of cinema provided a good opportunity to rectify the lack of exposure of these records not merely because there may be funds available to do so. The occasion, as with the bicentenary of white invasion, gives pause to reflect on Australia's colonialist culture as it relates to the history of the cinema.

Australia, as a result of having been a major British colony, its strange antipodean nature and the vigour and scope of its photographers, filmmakers and earlier artists, has amassed an enormous hoard of images of colonialism since European invasion just over 200 years ago—one of the most complete photographic records of the colonial enterprise known. For Indigenous Australians, this colonialism persists and images of us are still largely manufactured by the dominant invasive culture. Despite what these images may reveal of colonialism, especially as it persists today, there has been little focus on them or their construction. Brave attempts, like Langton and Stacey's *After The Tent Embassy*, are a rarity and undeservedly little known outside Australia.

Australia's involvement in the cinema began with the projection of films in Sydney in late 1894. The first film about both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders was made by a visiting English academic, Alfred Court Haddon, on Murray Island off the Queensland coast in 1898. Haddon's film was the first use of the motion picture camera as an aid to ethnographic field work, and thus began a tradition of filmmaking which has kept the cameras rolling ever since.

Vast ethnographic projects based on photographic records were undertaken from the 1920s onwards reflecting the containment on remote reserves of Indigenous Australians. As government involvement with the administration of Indigenous people increased, its partnership with ethnography was secured and the discipline was often the handmaiden—albeit occasionally reluctantly or recalcitrantly—of colonialism. These projects were most often concerned with establishing a racial typology of the continent which reflected the scientific concerns of its day and influenced the decisions of governments, as well as contributing towards the construction of racial stereotypes still so prevalent today.

The cinema everywhere manufactured entertainments based on exoticism, and from its early beginnings used such notions as a paradise in the Pacific and the strangeness of lands like Australia and Africa to fill seats in cinemas. Just as understanding the role of Indigenous Australians in the Australian cinema, especially in the documentary, is vital to any understanding of the history of that cinema or of its contemporary practice, much the same can be said for the other cinemas of our region. The exotic 'other' has been the focus of countless lenses since Flaherty's *Moana* tried to capture the 'essence' of the Pacific. From the Inuit of North America to the Maori of Aotearoa, from the Twa Mutos to Kanaky, cinema has either appropriated these people's lives for fictions ranging from *Mutiny on the Bounty* to *South Pacific* or for documentaries from those about weird

• continued page 16



From ethnography to self-representation

• from page 15

cricket to those exposing the deliberate dropping of H-bombs on these same unsuspecting people.

The contribution of these 'exotic subjects' to the pervasiveness of primitivism in this century and its effect on 'western' (or more recently world/global) intellectual culture has been much noted recently. As it is in Australia, the impact of this primitivism through colonial administrations on the lives of the Asia-Pacific region is also coming under closer scrutiny. Debates and discourses on these types of subjects were given great impetus by the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the 'discovery' of the Americas, and the controversy surrounding the celebrations of this event has resulted in many publications telling us "to take Tarzan seriously" as Torgovnik insists we must do in her recent book on the influence of primitivism in the 'west' (M.Torgovnik, *Gone Primitive, Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*, University of Chicago, 1991).

The impact on Europe of the discovery of the Americas was matched 300 years later by the discoveries of Cook, Banks, Baudin and others in the Pacific. Just as the earlier revelations changed western science, arts and culture for all time so did the newest revelations from the 'Spanish lake'. Just as the colonial gains from the Americas fuelled the growth of international capital and the expansion of colonialism to Asia, the colonial gains from the Pacific and Australia underwrote the industrial revolution of the 19th century.

The second great colonial expansion coincided with the spread of the camera and the development of the documentary form, first in still photography and then in motion picture production. The mere name of Grierson's Empire Film Unit suggests the close link between this genre and colonialism. From that time on, that genre became intertwined with colonialist and primitivist discourses. The symbiosis spread to the dominions, prevailing in India, Canada and Australia. In Africa, films from those of Jean Rouch to those made by today's Granada teams show the disappearing world of the colonised other, rather than the emergent worlds which in fact exist and have grown in response to colonialism and post-colonialism.

The fiction or feature film industry has only been peripherally interested in Aborigines since its earliest days when Gaston Méliès visited Australia and used them as exotic subjects in such titles as *The Black Trackers*, *Captured by Aborigines* and *Cast Amid Boomerang Throwers* (all released in 1913). From this period onwards Aborigines were generally cast in the role of 'Indians' in outback westerns. If a role called for a more central character this was generally played by a white actor in 'blackface' make-up. This unfortunate practice continues to this day. A notable exception to the practice was Charles Chauvel's *Jedda* which cast Aboriginal actors in leading roles but otherwise remained a standard piece of exotic melodrama with the Aboriginal characters trapped by their supposedly savage nature.

The situation has changed little in recent times. The 'quintessential Aboriginal' was played initially by David Gulpilil (for example in Nicolas Roeg's *Walkabout*, Peter Weir's *The Last Wave*) and increasingly today by Ernie Dingo and David Ngoombujarra. These films still do little to present any attempt to understand Aborigines or their cultures. One feature which did present a more realistic picture was *Wrong Side of the Road* in which Ned Lander directed a group of musicians who played themselves. This virtually unscripted film presents a most evocative portrayal of the lives of young urban Aborigines.

Today, Indigenous people have clearly shown that we wish to control our own representations in all the forms of the media, as individuals or as community organisations. We now produce paintings, photographs, films, video, radio, television theatre, popular music, newspapers and magazines about ourselves and our cultures. At the same time we have developed a critique of mainstream media representations that calls for change. Since the early 80s a number of Aboriginal community media organisations have been formed. These are regionally based, such as the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) and the Townsville Aboriginal & Islander Media Association (TAIMA) or located in a single community such as the Warlpiri Media Association (WMA) at Yuendumu or the Pitjantjatjara/ Yankunytjatjara Media Association (P/Y Media) at Ernabella.

P/Y Media operates the television station EVTV (Ernabella Video Television). This is a video network in which tapes are broadcast to a limited range of outstations and communities or used in a domestic video exchange. CAAMA has the distinction of owning Imparja Television, the only commercial broadcast licence controlled by an Indigenous group anywhere in the world. As with all Aboriginal media organisations the production of materials, which includes not only video, radio and television but also artworks, graphics, radio and print, is community controlled.

The work of Eric Michaels in the AIAS project on the impact of the introduction of television by satellite broadcast systems to remote Aboriginal communities shows the extent of this community involvement. Michaels' *The Aboriginal Invention of Television in Central Australia, 1982-86*, based on a study of the establishment of the Warlpiri Media Association at Yuendumu, demonstrated how community based production is the method by which these communities incorporate the new technology into their own information systems. Information in these communities is not generally broadcast but channelled through Warlpiri law or systems of kinship and its rituals. Individuals learn the law under strict control and certain classes of information are kept secret by certain classes within the community, such as senior men or women. Only if the community controls the production of these knowledges can these systems be maintained.

Today, there are over 90 Indigenous broadcasters in operation, the majority linked in the BRACS or Broadcasting in Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme. Here, filmmakers like Wayne Barker of Gunada Productions in Broome produce films for consumption within their own community and for exchange within BRACS for screenings in other communities. On the east coast TAIMA supplies production services to BRACS users. The demands for self-representation in the media are also being heard in mainstream television with both ABC and SBS producing prime time Aboriginal programs. Unfortunately the commercial networks have yet to show much interest in either media about Indigenous Australians or made by them.

In the cinema as well as on television Indigenous filmmakers, such as Tracey Moffat (*Nice Coloured Girls* and *Night Cries-A Rural Tragedy*), Richard Frankland (*No Way to Forget*), Sally Riley (*Fly Peewee Fly!*), Rima Tamou (*Round Up*), Darlene Johnson (*Two Bob Mermaid*), Sam Watson (*Black Man Down*), and Warwick Thornton (*Payback*), are proving that when given the opportunity to produce our own representations of our cultures we are capable of creating works which are not only stimulating and intelligent but also go a long way towards addressing and correcting the limited range of stereotyped images of Aborigines used by Europeans since the invasion.

Many archival films have a very real and ongoing value today. Many stock shot libraries including those of our national broadcaster charge huge rates for use of such film. Depending on how exotic the piece is, the rates vary from \$65 per second to \$100 per second. In these times of Mabo, others like mining companies also have a very real interest in archival films that depict Indigenous people, using them against land claimants throughout the top end. Individual communities are also using these early films in cultural maintenance programs. The rapacious new media producers are also showing a keen interest in these old films of Indigenous Australians. For example, a leading British institution, in conjunction with a leading Australian university, is preparing to put all films in the public domain about Indigenous people onto the internet.

We have Cooperative Multimedia Centres (CMCs) that have been funded by government to develop CD-ROM production to a level where they will be self-funding in three years. The composition of some CMC boards, with their close links to multinational games manufacturers, does little to give me any confidence that these Centres will have the best interest of Indigenous peoples at heart when deciding on funding project development, production or distribution. In fact, a manager of one of these CMCs stated openly that the only Australian content worth developing which would provide the returns needed to be self-funding was Indigenous content.

To date, the writings and discussions surrounding new media have been the domain of technocrats and the elite who have used jargon to exclude lay people, particularly Indigenous people, from the debate, preferring to allow the huge marketing machines of the multinationals and their hype to convince us of the merits of new media.

There are ethical and moral questions that need to be addressed before we run helter skelter down the information superhighway and allow all and sundry to cannibalise the archival records of Indigenous people. Who owns these images? Whose intellectual property are these films? Who should have access to them? What uses should they be allowed to be put to? Who owns the profit from exploiting them? Without the protection of intellectual property legislation these archival images and any new ones recorded for use in films and new media will be open for exploitation with no consideration being given to the owners of culture or the right of self-representation.

Wal Saunders is the manager of the Indigenous Section of the Australian Film Commission



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AUSTRALIA'S INNOVATIVE UNIVERSITY

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Interview

Memory detective

Virginia Baxter takes a close look with Kathryn Millard at her new film, *Parklands*

Parklands is a film about looking; a film rich in detail in which the patterns of wallpaper, dresses, colours, the rhythms of editing, music and performance resonate to evoke place and create story. The dramatic logic of *Parklands* is that of memory with all its associated emotional undercurrents. As I spoke to writer-director Kathryn Millard my own memories of her quietly disturbing film were re-surfacing

VB I know that the film is based on your own experience of Adelaide to some degree.

KM The loose starting point was that I grew up in Adelaide and lived there till I was about 30 and that my father was a detective. And there's a bit of detective in me.

Voiceover (Rosie reads): Instructions to police officers regarding the keeping of diaries: general entries will not be accepted. The object of visiting places must be recorded. Movements must be arranged so that different enquiries may be combined. Impressions may be usefully recorded and even matters not of a strictly official character that may be of interest to the service. The mere entry 'Visiting' or 'Patrolling' is insufficient as it is almost impossible that a vigilant officer whilst in the performance of his ordinary duties will see nothing worthy of closer notice.

VB What sort of detective work did you do?

KM It's always surprising the amount of research you do that provides the undercurrent of a film. It's a way of thinking your way through things. I talked to detectives and people in the police band. I wrote the treatment based on some of my own memories and then I looked at lots of archival footage of Adelaide from the 40s, 50s and 60s. I'd always intended to use this film and once I saw it, it started bleeding into the script.

Voiceover (1950s tourist documentary): Adelaide. A city in a desert. Light's vision. The only city in the world to be planted with a ring of parklands, a green belt to act as a buffer between the worlds of work and home.

KM The colour red was really prominent in all those early Adelaide tourist films, so was flower imagery. These became motifs in the film. I revisited the houses I grew up in, interviewed lots of people, looked at photographs, my own and other people's—more for the form of family snapshots.

Voiceover (Rosie): I stared at the photographs of my father, absorbing the smallest detail, the most insignificant shadow, looking for any traces of myself in the photographic record of dad's life.

VB Some of those images are iconic: dad's shadow on the ground as he aims the camera at the two kids squinting into the sun. Others are more idiosyncratic: Cliff watering the roses as the kids sit on the lawn staring blankly at Ernie Sigley's *Adelaide Tonight* on the TV.

Ernie Sigley: We thought if we had a Festival Theatre show we'd have to put a bit of culture up the back. So we've decided to do a ballet.

VB Beyond a couple of points of intersection with your own life, *Parklands* is fiction?

KM I think childhood memory is coloured by your own adult memory so that by the time you recompose it, it becomes a kind of fiction.

Blue night. A little girl lies awake in bed as car lights cruise across her lace curtains, over faded ballerinas in frames.

VB When did the crime story enter the script?

KM I wrote an early draft as a much more conventional thriller before I decided that I was completely unsuited to the task.

Exterior. Night. Rosie runs past a line of sprinklers in the Botanic Gardens.

VB Sprinklers have never looked so sinister.

KM I just wanted to borrow from the thriller genre—the idea of an investigation, some unsettling devices like the burning car. I decided that the form makes its own demands and they didn't quite fit with my preoccupations with memory. I wanted to fuse the two without the story taking over. It's a difficult balance.

VB Maybe there's a deeper connection between thrillers and memory than we know. Richard Vella's melancholy 'memory thriller' score works really well. How did you handle the script during the filming?

KM It was a very tight shoot in terms of our budget and time. My hunch was that if I had worked on something that long, I shouldn't let go of things lightly. I should be prepared to let go of them later but not on a whim. I did add a few things like the story of the dress.

Rosie and Cliff laugh about the horrible dress he brought home for her from a robbery—abandoned even by the robber.

KM Or where I thought there were missing beats. Once you get into that environment of making something, you find you can write really quickly, partly because of all the preparation. I'd like to be able to do more of that. In the editing, Frans Vandenburg and I found some transitions worked well as scripted but the film seemed to have a kind of potency that meant that the archival stuff sometimes overwhelmed so I was keen to keep cutting it back.

Voiceover (1950s promotional film): John Martin's Christmas Pageant. Police come from all over Australia to watch the Pageant as an exercise in crowd control. Half a million people lining the streets and not one barricade in sight—just a blue honour line that runs on either side of the route.

VB Where does the archival film fit in the memory logic of the film?

KM To me it represents collective memory.

VB Like the film's own memory of itself. It also provides a counter to the personal investigation, a notion of civic pride and order.

KM It's a kind of image bank that could belong to generations who'd grown up in a place like Adelaide. They're mostly tourist and sponsored films.



Cate Blanchett as Rosie in *Parklands*

Simon Cardwell

VB *Shine* was shot in Adelaide to look like Perth but it actually looks more like Melbourne. How important was it to shoot this film in Adelaide?

KM The place is almost a character in the film. I like the idea of writing stories for particular places. It seems to me that film can handle that really well.

VB Did you hunt down the locations yourself?

KM The producer Helen Bowden and I did it. She believes that to be successful with low budget films you need good pre-production. It meant driving around Adelaide asking to see inside people's kitchens. It was a good way to get into the film, placing it ourselves.

Interior Jean's house. Rosie appears to hold her breath as she enters the house of her father's companion for the first time. She slowly takes in the details—lamps, wallpaper, pictures, the fan in the corner. She breathes easily, enters the room.

VB The structure of the film works as an unfolding of closely observed details that slowly form a shape. How did it come together?

KM An early key collaborator was Keith Thompson. I'd worked with a script editor before but always different people for different drafts. Keith was interested in my ideas about form and was there from the treatment to fifth draft which is unusual but it felt like a pretty amazing dialogue. I also had some interesting talks about structure with the composer Richard Vella, also involved from first draft stage. In terms of cinematography, I wanted a different look for different strands. The childhood memory scenes I wanted to be quite saturated with colour like some of the archival film. Mandy Walker came up with the idea of shooting reversal stock and treating it as negative. It's a filmstock that used to be used in place of negative for news and things that were going to air on the day. I like the idea of unstable colour. I like the look of old films where the colours fade and shift.

VB Like memory.

KM Like memory. For each strand of the film we worked out different colour palettes and looks which were to do with time, texture, movements of the camera. As we went along it formed more of a continuum. I suppose all those things are about implied meaning. They work at that kind of level of emotional undercurrent.

Interior. Rosie wipes something from her eye. Words trip and fall out. "Not much of a writer. Dad was more of a list-maker really. When I was a kid I used to find these little scraps of paper with things like 'Investigate washer on front tap' or 'Plan to replace dining table in two years'. Anybody else would have just bought the bloody tap. Used to drive me crazy." A cry catches in her throat. "That'd be Cliff", says Jean. They laugh.

KM We had Cate Blanchett in mind from very early on. She's such a skilled actor, someone who pays a lot of attention to detail. I find the understated way she plays Rosie very moving. I thought Tony Martin's performance as Neddy Smith in *Blue Murder* was quite amazing—very different from Cliff. He has compassion and insight and because he's done lots of television, he has an incredible technical ease with the camera. You can take off from there. We had a week's rehearsal. I dragged them all over to Adelaide. We talked a lot about place and memory.

VB The father-daughter relationship is really interesting. She is remembering her life with him and at the same time trying to put together a part of his life she knew nothing about. I like the awkwardness of it.

KM When I look at the way people relate to each other in the film, there's a lot of awkwardness.

VB And fear and restraint.

Voiceover (Rosie): The police force always brought fear into our lives. Dad at the scene of the crime, pointing to the evidence. Hardly the kind of thing most kids find in the family photo album.

VB How interested were you in the current fascination with innocence and corruption?

KM It's such a big issue in Australia, police corruption. But I've always been fascinated by how these things look from the perspectives of other players in the story, particularly people's families. Why is it so easy to be black and white? How do people over time become desensitised in their jobs? All of us, not just people like policemen. But the corruption story in *Parklands* is one important aspect. What I'd like to do is make films that pay attention to really small detail in all areas—colour, light, gesture, tone and carry all of those ideas across the film.

Parklands previewed at this year's Sydney Film Festival and opens at the George Cinema in Melbourne in December and in other cities later this year.

Italicised text composed from the interviewer's own description of parts of the film and dialogue from the soundtrack.

Essay

Digital poiesis

Rachel Kent examines the art of Jon McCormack

the object is that through which we mourn ourselves

Jean Baudrillard

The rise of the cabinet of curiosities, or wunderkammer, in 17th and 18th century Europe brought with it a keen interest in the collecting of natural history specimens and exotica. Prompted in part by colonial expansion and the establishment of trading routes into the New World, the collection and display, study and scientific classification of rare and unusual plants, seeds, shells, rocks and exotic fauna offered a microcosmic glimpse of the natural world to the viewer. Computer artist Jon McCormack's *Turbulence: an interactive museum of unnatural history* likewise offers contemporary viewers a glimpse into a strange and exotic world. Unlike the traditional wunderkammer, however, *Turbulence* proposes a digital alternative in which computer-generated organisms inhabit the virtual space of Artificial Life.

Known as AL to its adherents, Artificial Life aims to replicate biological evolutionary patterns within the computer via simple numerical codes or algorithms, the digital equivalent of DNA. Computer scientist Christopher Langton describes this process succinctly:

Artificial Life is the study of man-made systems that exhibit behaviours characteristic of natural living systems. It complements the traditional biological sciences concerned with the analysis of living organisms by attempting to synthesise life-like behaviours within computers and other artificial media. By extending the empirical foundation upon which biology is based beyond the carbon-chain life that has evolved on Earth, Artificial Life can contribute to theoretical biology by locating life-as-we-know-it within the larger picture of life-as-it-could-be.

Christopher Langton, *Artificial Life*

Artificial Life is premised upon the notion of life as dynamic form rather than material embodiment, taking a 'bottom-up' approach to the modelling of its organisms. That is, it starts with simple, recursive rules out of which more complex structures can then evolve, branch out and randomly mutate. This represents an alternative strategy to that often taken in traditional biology, which works downwards from organic complexity to underlying simplicity in search of the so-called 'building blocks' of life.

While the study of Artificial Life is by no means new in itself and can be linked to the emergence of cybernetics in the late 1940s, the development of more recent high-end computer systems has enabled both scientists and artists to experiment with the many possibilities it offers. McCormack's work represents one instance of this, the results of which are both conceptually rigorous and visually startlingly beautiful. Other



Jon McCormack, *Turbulence*

contemporaries in the field include English computer artist William Latham and American Karl Sims.

Turbulence takes the form of a video laserdisc upon which a menagerie of synthesised organisms, exhibiting life-like behavioural patterns, are stored. Images are accessed by a touch-screen computer and projected via an overhead projector onto a large screen before the viewer. Echoing conventional systems of biological classification, life forms are grouped thematically into five imaginary realms entitled 'Signals', 'Flow', 'Spaces', 'Organisms' and 'Metaroom'. Almost 30 minutes of computer-generated animation is accessible through these groupings, each sequence representing a particular organism and its environs. Thus we see a pulsating, translucent creature with thread-like tentacles in an aquatic garden, a strange, ant-like creature scuttling through the sands of an imaginary desert and a vivid green plant splitting open in a sudden, violent burst to project its spores into the cosmos. An evocative soundtrack by the artist accompanies each sequence, adding to the overall impact of the work. Within the constructed world of *Turbulence*, nature is both beautiful and terrible, meditative and destructive.

Writing about *Turbulence* McCormack has described the work as dual lament and celebration:

A lament for things now gone. A celebration of the beauty to come, and the fact that we can appreciate and create it (Turbulence) heralds a new evolutionary landscape made possible by technology: a digital poiesis.

Jon McCormack, *The Beauty to Be*

The rapid destruction of the natural world which we inhabit, coupled with the desire to establish alternative spaces for beauty and contemplation, is a driving force behind the creation of *Turbulence*. Alternatively, it is the ability to create forms so close to, yet so dissimilar from 'nature' as we know it that motivates the production of the work. As one recent publication suggests, we are living in an age when nature teeters on extinction yet, at the same time, its exact definition as a category of representation becomes increasingly problematic (G. Robertson et al eds, *Future Natural: Nature, science, culture*). Endlessly reproduced and analysed, mediated by technology, economy and politics, what constitutes nature anyway?

Created over a three-year period between 1991-94 with financial assistance from the Australian Film Commission, *Turbulence* is the recipient of several international multimedia and film awards. It has been exhibited at the 1995 International Symposium on Electronic Art (ISEA) in Montreal, the 8th Tepia Multimedia Art exhibition in Tokyo, the Berlin Interfilm Festival and at ACM Siggraph in Orlando, Florida. The work was previewed before Australian audiences in 1995 at the Australian Film Commission conference *The Filmmaker and Multimedia: Narrative and Interactivity* and has since been exhibited at the Ian Potter Gallery, The University of Melbourne Museum of Art, in 1995 and at Science Works Museum. *Turbulence* was displayed at the Ian Potter Gallery in a large, darkened amphitheatre, next to which a room of dimly lit zoological specimens provided an eerie biological counterpoint to the synthesised creatures of the interactive.

Audiences in Sydney also have the opportunity to view *Turbulence* between 5-20 October at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, where it is accompanied by two film screenings on the 5th and 12th. Collectively entitled *Elastic Light: an international retrospective of computer animation*, the screenings have been coordinated by the Sydney Intermedia Network (SIN) with individual works selected by McCormack. Many of the works included within these screenings have never been seen by Australian audiences. The seminal 1969 documentary *Experiments in Motion Graphics*, based upon the work of animation pioneer John Whitney Sr, forms the centrepiece around which a selection of more recent works are assembled. Animations by Australians Ian Haig and John Tonkin can be seen alongside Michelle Robinson's *When I was Six* (USA), Kazuma Morino's *Stripe Box* (Japan) and Ian Bird's acclaimed *Pet Shop Boys* video clip, *Liberation* (UK).

As a philosophical meditation upon nature and its multiplex forms, *Turbulence* questions traditional definitions: what constitutes life and how can we define it? As 'digital poiesis', it represents a unique and breathtaking fusion of sound, imagery and poetry.

Rachel Kent is the curator at The University of Melbourne Museum of Art, and works regularly in the area of digital media

Jon McCormack, *Turbulence*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Oct 5-20



Sydney Intermedia Network Inc

presents

elastic light

an international retrospective of computer animation art

Domain Theatre AGNSW Saturdays 5 & 12 October 1996

\$10 / \$7 conc / members

For this international retrospective Jon has selected a diverse range of works, loosely based around the notion that all in some way distort our perceptions of space or time. Jon has selected works on the basis that collectively they clearly demonstrate the diverse and exciting possibilities of the computer medium and the potential of the computer for the individual artist.

Jon McCormack will personally introduce the October 5 screening.

Pacific Wave

100 years of anthropological film across Oceania.

A program of two screenings at the Museum of Sydney, presented by SIN, curated by Dr. Ross Gibson who will introduce both sessions, contextualizing the selected works.

Program One - a selection of historical material & rare missionary society footage

Thursday 14 November at 7.00pm

Excerpts from a collection of 'older' ethnographic material arranged under three themes - modernism and the aesthetics of estrangement; generic experimentation and innovation & Missionary representations.

This session followed by drinks and a private viewing of the brand new 'Places of Memory - Sydney home-movies' installation by Virginia Hilyard, MoS Floor 3

Program Two - recent adaptations & 'perversions' of the ethnographic genre

Saturday 16 November at 2.30pm

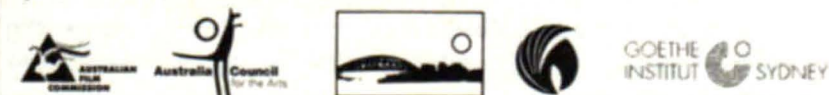
Excerpts from a range of more contemporary works undercutting, modifying or criticising ethnographic orthodoxies.

tickets \$12/\$10 single session

\$20/\$16 both sessions

bookings MoS 02 251 5988

SIN gratefully acknowledges the support of the Goethe-Institut, Sydney for this program.



SIN encourages the development of innovative film, video and digital media in Australia, and exhibits this work to a broad range of audiences.

SIN receives financial assistance from the Industry & Cultural Development Branch of the AFC, the Visual Arts & Crafts Program of the NSW Ministry for the Arts, the NSW Film and Television Office, and the Visual Arts/Craft Fund of the Australia Council - the Federal Government's arts funding and advisory body. SIN gratefully acknowledges the ongoing support of the Art Gallery of NSW.

Interview

EMAgining the future

As it heads into its second decade, the Melbourne-based Modern Image Makers Association (MIMA) has reinvented itself with a new name—experimenta media arts—and a new direction. Kathy Cleland talks to new staff members Shiralee Saul and Peter Handsaker about the changes to the organisation, and previews some of the highlights of the upcoming experimenta media arts festival in Melbourne.

KC Why the name change? "New Name, New Image, New Direction"...what exactly does that mean?

SS The time had come to re-invent the organisation and reposition MIMA in the public perception. Feedback from present and potential members indicated that the concept of 'modern image makers' had reached its use-by date and there was a widespread perception of the organisation as catering to and for a very small group of mainly Melbourne-based 16mm film practitioners working in very formalist and structuralist modes. Many other practitioners felt disenfranchised by a perceived bias in the organisation's activities and public presentation and suggested that the organisation was not representing either new concepts or aesthetic directions in film and video practices nor innovations in practices brought about by the digital revolution. Along with the name change to experimenta media arts, which has allowed us to redesign our organisational identity to reflect a more professional and less partisan approach, we have initiated a series of strategies to more effectively promote, publicise and distribute experimental media. These strategies include using the www to provide educational, archival and associated information about Australian media arts and artists, increasing the scope and coverage of *MESH*, so that it is becoming a truly national journal, using new(ish) screening possibilities such as community television and building strong alliances with similar organisations to share resources and support each other's activities.

KC Does the change in experimenta's focus mean a shift away from film and video based practices towards the digital domain? Will you still be representing more 'traditionally' based experimental film and video practices?

SS We will continue to represent 'traditional' experimental screen works. We are extremely concerned that the achievements and advancements of past experimental media pioneers is not forgotten or overlooked, and that contemporary discussions of production and aesthetics take them into account...that what is new today is seen to be growing from the 'new' of yesterday rather than simply springing up out of nothing. Of course, many practitioners are switching to or augmenting their practices with digital media—and through *MESH*, our exhibitions and the festival we hope to explore and support this development. Digital media and electronic networks are increasingly being used by creative artists of all kinds to generate innovative and exploratory works—it is only natural that as the amount and quality of works using digital media increases so too will our exhibition and promotion of them.

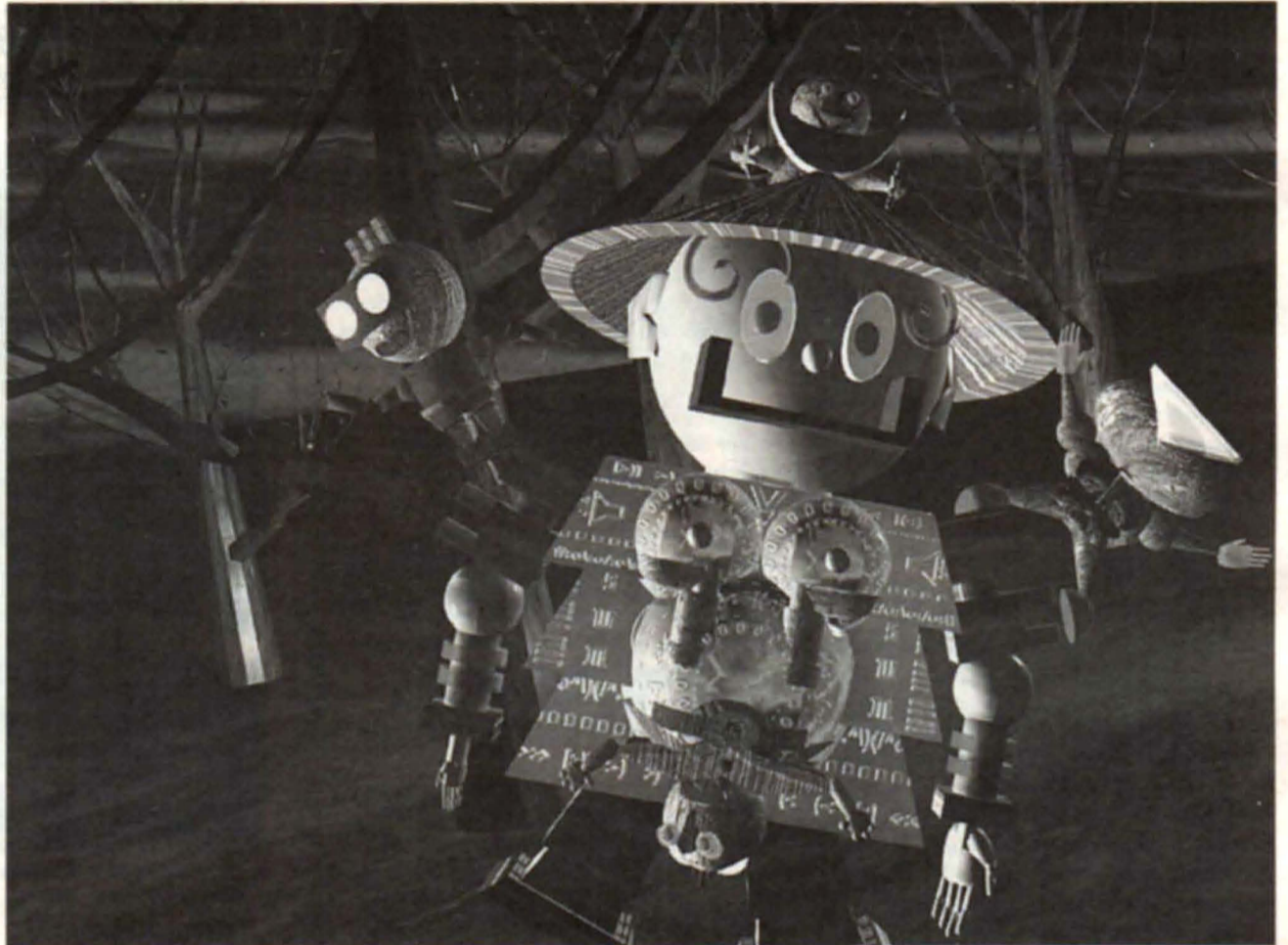
KC So, what can we look forward to in this year's festival?

PH *Short, Sharp and Very Current* at the (Lonsdale Street) Power Station is the centrepiece of the festival. It's an integrated program of installations (by over 20 artists) plus screenings (by some 50 artists), performances and a closing night rave party/event at the Power Station. It's the first time experimenta has had the use of a single exciting, multi-purpose venue enabling us to exhibit a range of practices alongside each other (a one-stop shop) plus there's a bar and festival club with a games arcade—which will encourage people to come along, have a drink and linger.

SS The Power Station events will, in turn, be extended by the festival's series of satellite exhibitions at the CCP (*Burning the Interface* and *mediaSphere*), ACCA (*The Body Remembers*—an interactive survey by Jill Scott), NGV (*Domestic Disturbances*), Linden Gallery (*ATOM Australian International Multimedia Awards exhibition plus mediaSphere*) and the CMEC's *Reflective Space* concert series at the Power House in conjunction with *Short, Sharp and Very Current*. We are also running *eTV* (experimenta Television)—a curated program of national and international work in conjunction with SKA-TV and Open Channel. *eTV* will screen on Channel 31 and will also be available on tape via our *mediaSphere* viewing rooms at various satellite exhibitions.

PH Highlights within the screening component of *Short, Sharp and Very Current* are the Stan Brakhage new works (1990-1995), the Guy Madden retrospectives and the Super-8 screening, talk and photo exhibition by New Yorker Richard Kern—which should open a few eyes!

SS The juxtaposition of historic programs and materials alongside new is intended not only to stimulate discussion about the current state of play in the media arts, but also to question whether multimedia is in fact a 'radical new development' or simply on the continuum of the history of experimentation and innovation within the experimental media arts.

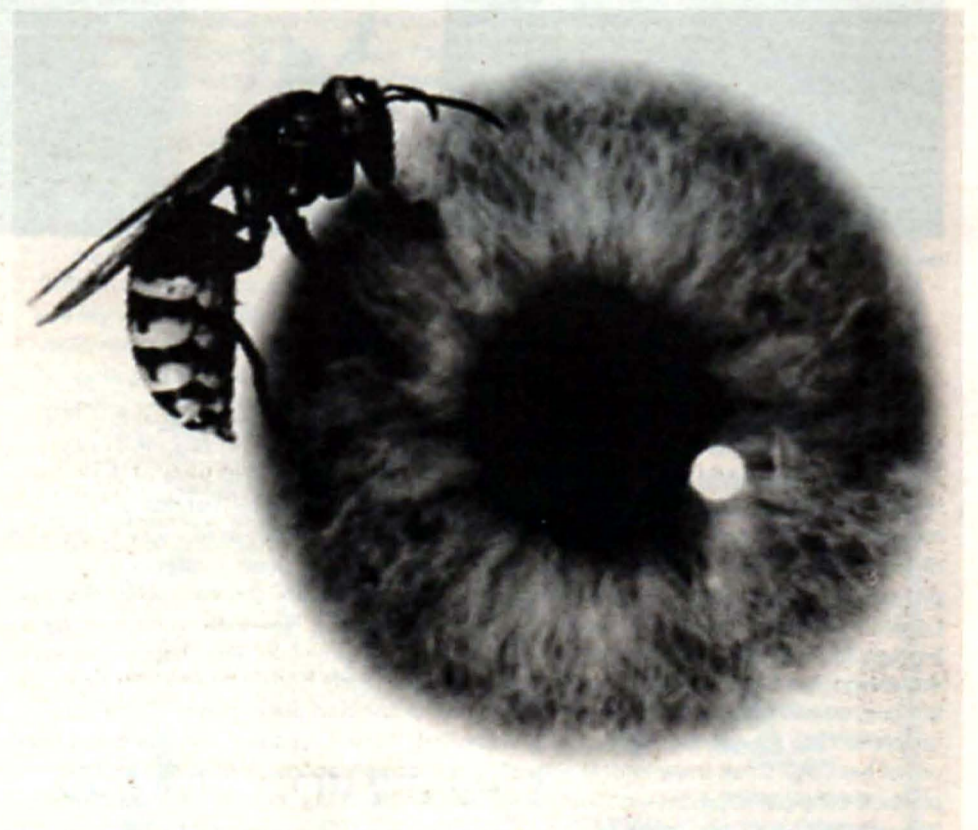


Troy Innocent

For more information on the experimenta media arts festival and program details, contact: experimenta media arts, phone 03 9525 5025, fax 03 9525 5105, email experimenta@peg.apc.org, PO Box 1102 St Kilda South VIC 3182

experimenta publishes the quarterly media arts journal *MESH*, also available on-line as e-*MESH* from the experimenta web site <http://www.peg.apc.org/~experimenta>

Kathy Cleland is a Sydney-based writer and curator. She works with *Street Level* and is currently curating stage two of the *Cyber Cultures* project which will be hosted by Casula Powerhouse in March 1997



experimenta media arts festival image

Report

The essential auteuress

Anna Dzenis on the Melbourne International Film Festival's Ida Lupino Retrospective.

Film culture has its guardian angels—curators, archivists, collectors, and critical writers who keep alive and in the public domain films which may otherwise, either through neglect or inaccessibility, simply disappear. A film festival is a place where such angels gather.

The 45th Melbourne International Film Festival was interested in many things. It offered a broad sweep of accomplishments ranging from the latest in contemporary Australian cinema; recently accoladed films from Cannes; exploratory documentaries with subject matter from Orson Welles, Jean Seberg, the Skladanowsky Brothers, to Richard Avedon; and on-line digital experiments and cutting-edge work preoccupied with the new technologies and contemporary imaging practices. However, one of the greatest joys of a festival is to be found in its historical excavations—in the lost treasures retrieved from the past. Orson Welles' rarely seen *F for Fake* was one such jewel. But overall I feel that the Festival's most significant achievement was the Ida Lupino retrospective, curated by Amree Hewitt.

Hard, Fast and Beautiful, the title of one of Lupino's directorial efforts, also evocatively refers to Lupino herself. It is a most apt description of this astonishing woman and her broad and breathtaking lifetime achievements. Lupino's work as an actor spanned 50 years and produced many memorable character studies. She worked with most of the very greatest directors—Walsh, Ray, Lang, Peckinpah, Leisen, Wellman, Seigel, and Negulesco. MIFF's retrospective gathered together some fine examples: such diverse Lupino performances as the sultry, sparky and longing nightclub singer Petey Brown in Raoul Walsh's *The Man I Love* (1946); the chain-smoking, piano-playing torch singer Lily Stevens, twisted in the middle of a disturbing love triangle, in Jean Negulesco's *Road House* (1948); the stuttering, victimised, isolated naif in Negulesco's *Deep Valley* (1947); the knowing, blind sister of a dangerous killer in Nicholas Ray's *On Dangerous Ground* (1951); and the wise mother and disenchanted wife in Peckinpah's *Junior Bonner* (1972).

However, the heart of the retrospective and its greatest revelations lay in its bringing together a selection of the film and television work directed by Ida Lupino: significantly, she was one of only a handful of female directors working in post-war Hollywood. In 1949, in a climate not particularly supportive of such efforts, Lupino, with her producer-husband Collier Young, set up The Filmmakers, a small independent production company committed to low-budget filmmaking. They worked with lesser known actors, writers and directors producing a real and innovative alternative to the product of the larger studios.



Ida Lupino and Edmund O'Brien in *The Bigamist*

Lupino directed, and in most cases co-scripted, six films for The Filmmakers: *Not Wanted* (1949), *Never Fear* (1950), *Outrage* (1950), *Hard, Fast and Beautiful* (1951), *The Hitch-Hiker* (1953), and *The Bigamist* (1953). These formed the core of the retrospective. The films are distinctive—fascinating and memorable hybrids of melodrama and documentary. They are social issue films, similar in this way to the work of another of Lupino's contemporaries, Nicholas Ray. Their subject matter is provocative—rape, bigamy, unwanted pregnancies, illegitimate children, polio. Many of Lupino's characters are young women on the verge of adult life—looking for love, for a partner, for marriage and commitment, for a dream career—but these 'happy endings' are always inevitably thwarted. In *Not Wanted*, Sally (Sally Forrest) waitresses in a cafe but her romantic hopes focus on an intense, self-possessed piano player (Leo Penn) unable to care for anyone. Very quickly Sally finds herself pregnant and alone and heads out of her cosy small town to deal with all of the complications. A brief moment of planned conjugal happiness in *Outrage* spirals into psychotic despair when Ann (Mala Powers) decides to work back late and is brutally raped. Overwhelmed by her immediate circumstances she also flees into strange worlds. Her decision to return in the end, however, is more traumatic than utopian and highlights the limitations of her choices. *Hard, Fast and Beautiful* takes as its subject matter a mother-daughter relationship in the world of amateur tennis. Talented Florence Farley (Sally Forrest) finds that her hard work and ability is exploited by a mother who is compensating for her own thwarted social



Ida Lupino directing *The Hitch-Hiker*

aspirations. Narrative closure finds the daughter retiring her talent and the mother alone. These are dark and complicated tales.

After the demise of The Filmmakers, Lupino directed extensively for television. Her credits include work for *Screen Director's Playhouse*, *Mr. Adams and Eve*, *Have Gun Will Travel*, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, *Thriller*, *The Rifleman*, *General Electric Theatre*, *The Untouchables*, *The Fugitive*, *The Twilight Zone*, *Bewitched*, *Gilligan's Island*, *Dr. Kildare*, *Mr. Novak*, *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* amongst others. The other great revelation of the retrospective was the showcasing of some of this material—in particular the Lupino scripted outing for *Screen Director's Playhouse* No.5: *Checked Out* with its story of a deaf girl whose separation from sound becomes a critical plot point, and the gothic *Twilight Zone* episode *The Masks*. It is clear from these small excursions that there is a wealth of undiscovered television work and that the aesthetic history of television in all of its complexity is yet to be written, let alone understood.

This retrospective was a rare and wonderful treat. Unlike her contemporary Dorothy Arzner who directed at Paramount (and has therefore always been more accessible), Lupino's work has been difficult to see. Because of Lupino's 'outsider status', because the films do not belong to one of the big holding houses, and because she worked extensively in television with its inconsistent approach to archiving, much of her work might have been lost for all time if not for the commitment of individuals like the film scholar Ronnie Scheib. For Scheib, acquisition was the only choice: "Not that I started out to collect them, but it was the only way to see some of them".

Scheib, a guest of the festival, was invited to provide a context for the Lupino material and to participate in a forum convened to discuss Lupino's work. Scheib has been responsible for some of the key Lupino scholarship including *Ida Lupino: Auteuress* (Film Comment, 1980) and a chapter in a recent book on Lupino edited by Annette Kuhn, "Queen of the B's: Ida Lupino Behind the Camera". Scheib's potently descriptive analyses offered important insights. In particular she counters what she regards as feminist disapproval of the 'passivity' of Lupino's characters and their lives. Scheib describes Lupino's protagonists as somnambulists, nomadically wandering the world, socially immobilised, unable to act. But for Scheib this evident passivity of the characters is problematised by the films' narration. Passivity as a state is 'denaturalised', presented as deeply unsatisfying and psychologically devastating. She notes that visually the films often have a 'spacey' quality tied to character subjectivity. The point of view of a rape victim, a young girl playing a major tennis tournament, a birthing scene in a hospital bed, are all sinister and deeply troubled. When Scheib was asked if she was planning to bring these many insights together into a book-length study, she responded by saying that she was more interested in researching further into Lupino's television work.

Curator Amree Hewitt remembered Martin Scorsese's acknowledgment of Lupino in his own personal journey documentary about the American cinema as the moment when she knew this was fertile ground for a retrospective. Scheib also began her festival catalogue essay on Lupino with words from Scorsese—his tribute to Lupino's directorial career. Scorsese wrote: "She was a true pioneer; the six films she directed between 1949 and 1953 are remarkable chamber pieces that dealt with challenging subjects in clear, almost documentary fashion, and are a singular achievement in American cinema. What's at stake in Lupino's films is the psyche of the victim. They addressed the wounded soul and traced the slow, painful process of women trying to wrestle with despair and reclaim their lives. Her work is resilient, with a remarkable empathy for the fragile and the heartbroken. It is essential".

After seeing this Lupino retrospective, I agree with Scorsese. Lupino is absolutely essential.

Report

Looping time

R.J. Thompson looks for risk and innovation in new animation at the Melbourne International Film Festival

This festival's International Animation program is a reminder that in this huge area of diverse, sometimes barely-related activity, an academic agenda still operates, locating the present in the past—past forms, concepts, styles. The program spun me back 30 years to my first job, working for a non-theatrical film distributor specialising in "curriculum enrichment" shorts, animation from the National Film Board of Canada, Bruno Bozzetto, abstracts from Eastern Europe, Pintoff's japes, self-conscious style from John and Faith Hubley, Eliot Noyes' *Clay* slapping claymation to centre-stage. Here was that world of animation, preserved, nurtured, and continuing.

Part of this has to do with the culture of festivals: for many short films, the first and most important target venue is film festivals, and from this symbiosis it is not surprising that an umbrella of styles and genres establishes itself as "film festival films". All short films tend to be single-concept films; among them, animations are further prone to salonisation because: 1. they are incredibly "expensive", that is, time-and-labour intensive; they cannot be done casually or quickly; 2. they are locked into a high culture/low culture, envy/shame conflict with commercial animation ('toons); they would like to be as effective and stylish, but certainly not as vulgar; 3. their graphism binds them to the world of pictorial art styles, massively reinforced by the repetition inherent in animation-making, which is to say that 99.99% of an animator's time is spent very physically (re)producing the visuals, leaving little time for elaborating the concept. These are objects of obsessive craft, physical labour, and art in a very traditional sense.

One expression of this is intense absorption in a visual style carefully wrought to carry suggestive weight beyond visual information—as illustrations do in deep-dish children's books-as-art-objects. Good examples in this program were Amanda Coleman's deft *Australiana*, *The Stupid Piano*; Georges Sifianos' *Odeur De Ville*, which starts as a perfectly observed chamber piece about a cat and turns around as a subjective account of a woman's identity crisis; and Vera Neubauer's *The Lady In The Lake*, a very long faux-naïf and politically correct fairy tale about a prince marrying (and physically abusing) a mermaid, voice-overed by a little girl and contained in broad, simple brush-and-ink drawings, camera movement substituting for animation most of the time.

Jon Rowden's *Penguins Off The Page* is a sharp claymation desk-top film with wit to burn about a nasty boys-school science master and the metamorphoses his books get up to as he chivvies his class—an encyclopedia of penguin gags. Ponderous prize goes to Michael Zamjatnin's *Die Suche/The Search*, which uses Monty Pythonish style to render A Myth about an everyman born and raised to pursue an arduous quest, at the end of which he comes face to face with...himself. The worm Ouroboros form recurs in art cartoons: Tyron Montgomery's just-right *Quest* invests a lot of character in a clay blob trying to survive and transcend a hostile, arid, rocky environment while searching for water, finally crashing through the ground to another, very different environment, and after considerable struggle, crashing through to yet another, and so on until he crashes through to...the original environment. Extremely effective matching of KlinkitaCLANK metallic soundtrack with hard, sharp image development.

The Danish *Larm/Noise* is a conceptual piece manipulating distorted live-action images as programmatic illustrations of two sound sequences: a motorcycle trip and a train trip. Very focussed, but that's all there is. Kirsten Winters' *CLOCKS* works this area much more elaborately, relating a musical piece of the same name to photographic images which have been blurred, speeded or slowed, and kinetically oil-painted over, sometimes miming the image, sometimes obscuring it, sometimes providing an alternative image. The most fascinating—and busiest—concept film is Paul Driessen's *The End Of The World In Four Seasons*, set to Vivaldi and in four parts. Each part 'Windows' the screen into about eight sub-screens separated by strips of blank frame; thematically-linked characters and activities take place in all the sub-screens at the same time in a sort of Bozzetto style. Slowly it dawns that this is a spatial IQ test: events begin to involve two or three screens at a time—but never in their apparent relationships of adjacency, and Driessen runs each of the four quiz sections just long enough for one to figure out the puzzle. I think.

Two of the best are line animation films concerned with the simplicity and plasticity of line drawing. *Interview With Tallulah*, *Queen Of The Universe* is Cynthia Wells' camp *Sunset Boulevard* over-the-top over-the-hill star monologue which you may or may not listen to as you watch the lush serpentine line swish around the character in the manner of Gerald Scarfe's work for *Yes, Minister*. Gail Noonan's *Your Name In Cellulite* is a fast, funny, grownup cartoon about a woman trying to dress up fashionably without the cooperation of her clothes, her makeup, or her body. It even succeeds in fashioning a successful overturning conclusion. Nothing new, but don't miss it.

Quirkiest, hardest to categorize, and most successfully escaping from earlier paradigms: Paul Vester's *Abductees*, an *X-Files* documentary on the experiences of people abducted by aliens. Filmed cinema-verite interviews with abductees telling their stories in flat, prosaic rooms segue into animated versions of the events, each animation in a slightly different style, from doco-animation rotoscoped versions of the live-action rooms to very stylized fantasies. This definitely strange balancing act between taking the abductees seriously and the alternatives slips into darker and darker areas as it moves along. Compulsive.

What one misses in this program is range, edge, trial. As a whole, the program celebrates tradition, a tradition with enough puff to survive all these years, but doesn't give much of a look-in to more fidgety, danger-courting, chancy work.

Richard Thompson is the Chair of La Trobe University's Department of Cinema. He has written about animation and other aspects of film, television and crime fiction

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Report

Northern exposures

Helen Yeates surveys the 5th Brisbane International Film Festival

The Brisbane International Film Festival (BIFF), held this year August 1–11, is a shorter, tighter festival than its more established southern counterparts. With vast energy and not inconsiderable élan, BIFF has reinvented itself now for the fifth time in the 90s, giving a 'bigger-than-Ben Hur' flavour to the modest former Brisbane Film Festival that began in the 60s and regrettably faded in the early 80s.

Film culture in Brisbane has suffered years of outright neglect, punctuated by desultory, tokenistic governmental funding for such worthy groups as Queensland Cinematheque, Women in Film and Television, and Brisbane Independent Filmmakers, who have had to compete, not always elegantly, for mere crumbs. Arthouse cinemas have also experienced a chequered history here, while belonging to the Australian

experience as a savouring of a small sample of films rather than as a commitment to the festival as an organic whole.

Entitled *From Silents to Cyber*, the festival also probably encouraged this scattergun approach by its very structure. As a tribute to the Centenary of Cinema, the festival took a bold sweep in showing historically and culturally significant productions ranging from Early German cinema, to a strong contemporary Asia/Pacific focus, to multimedia productions or 'cybercinema'. This involved offerings across five festival sites, three of them new. In all, the festival screened around 65 feature films, 80 short films and a dozen documentaries across several venues.

These venues included the handy but rather uncomfortable Regent Showcase cinema (in the heart of Brisbane), the



John Hannah and Bernard Hill in *Madagascar Skin*

Film Institute does not give Queensland members much of a film bonanza apart from the members' screenings at awards time. Since 1991, things have been looking up for the undernourished filmgoer, and BIFF now seems assured of a firm place in Queensland's burgeoning artistic events calendar.

Under the capable guidance of Gary Ellis (general manager) and Anne Demy-Geroe (artistic director), the Brisbane International Film Festival team run the annual Young Filmmakers Awards and Cinematheque program, as well as occasional filmic events for the Friends of BIFF between festivals (all too occasional, as some Friends would claim). Overall, however, the festival has gone from strength to strength after a rather shaky start.

One problem confronting festival organisers has been targetting and keeping a committed audience. Brisbane does not have a sizeable, established contingent of filmbuffs with a strong tradition of film festival attendance. Therefore, the more flexible ticketing arrangements this year were welcomed, and audience figures, according to Gary Ellis, rose by 30 per cent, from 15,000 to 20,000. The Stanley Kubrick retrospective, introduced by film critic and writer John Baxter, attracted a sell-out 'niche' audience for *Doctor Strangelove*, many taking advantage of the new single ticket admission possibility for that session. Another popular ticket was the 'five pack', such trends revealing that many busy people see their festival

State Library theatre for the historical program on early cinema (which played to a small but dedicated crowd), and the three 'buzzy' new venues which worked well from an audience perspective: a downtown night spot called Grand Orbit for experimental cinema, a cyberspace cafe called the Hub for the multimedia experience, and the Southbank promenade for a series of Buster Keaton movies with live organ accompaniment. A new addition of a competitive strand was welcomed by 80 young entrants around Australia, and the Fast Film (five minutes long) competition winners' films were screened in the City Mall to an appreciative audience of about 500 on the night before the festival opened.

In 1994, the opening night film of the Brisbane festival was *Muriel's Wedding* a spectacular success at every level as a celebratory filmic event. Everybody partied well into the night, dancing and cavorting with the stars of the film to the strains of Abba. It is hard to 'do a *Muriel's*' every year; *Carrington* fell rather flat in 1995, and the 1996 premiere of the new Nadia Tass film *Mr Reliable*, with Colin Friels and Jacqueline McKenzie, was a more appropriate choice. While the capacity audience was generally appreciative, it was not a major crowd pleaser like *Muriel's Wedding*. The film did labour the main premise about the so-called innocence of the 60s, and after the sorry demise of the recent film *Shotgun Wedding* based on exactly the same

story, *Mr Reliable* does tend to beg the question: why do a remake?

A hallmark of the Brisbane Festival is the Chauvel Award given to an outstanding Australian filmmaker every year. This year George Miller of *Mad Max* and *Babe* fame earned the award. Clips from Miller's films were shown with a live commentary by David Stratton, and then Miller himself was interviewed by Stratton in front of the festival crowd. Miller mused that most of his films were about heroic journeys—*Lorenzo's Oil*, *Babe*, *Mad Max*—with heroes who 'had to relinquish themselves until they could find the answer'. The night was capped by the screening of the *Mad Max* trilogy.

The film voted most popular by the Brisbane audience was Mike Leigh's superb *Secrets and Lies*, a very deserving choice. However, my personal festival highlight was the extraordinary British film, *Madagascar Skin*, by writer/director Chris Newby. While Mike Leigh does take risks in his filmmaking, Newby's work is even more cutting edge in its appeal. The thrill of this film is its unexpectedly sensual qualities, especially its visual and tactile power, interwoven with bizarre, fantastical elements. Part of a strong gay and lesbian package at the festival, *Madagascar Skin* centres on an unlikely, tender love affair between a lonely, disfigured gay youth and a wildly funny, ostensibly heterosexual, middle-aged rogue. Two other lyrically beautiful, surreal films about non-conformists were the Polish/French co-production *The Man who Reads Music from Plates*, and *Gabbeh*, a stunning Iranian film. Discovered by Anne Demy-Geroe at the Berlin Film Festival in February, these gems reveal a heartening willingness to look beyond the mainstream.

Another distinctive 'niche' feature of the festival was the challenging series of five Japanese independent films, which included *Tokyo Fist* and *Sadistic City*. This follows in the festival's tradition to showcase alternative Asian films (eg *The Beijing Underground* series in 1994). In the future, I hope that the festival organisers will eschew even more the mainstream fare which gets immediate post-festival release, and consolidate their own style with such innovative strands. Demy-Geroe chose the gay and lesbian feature films for 1996, eg *Beautiful Thing*, *Buddha of Suburbia*, *Madagascar Skin* (from the UK), *Life* (Australia) and *Like Grains of Sand* (Japan), and the documentaries *Paris Was a Woman*, *The Celluloid Closet* and *Tender Fictions* because, in her words, "they were the most controversial, interesting and exciting films" previewed for the festival. They were certainly appreciated by the Brisbane audience.

I was once told rather disdainfully by a leading film culture player from the AFI, "If you want film culture, you have to move south to Sydney or Melbourne. If you want rotary clothes hoists and backyards, stay in Brisbane". Since 1991, the revamping of the fast and furious Brisbane 'International' Film Festival has provided a substantially satisfying 'fix' for jaded Brisbane filmgoers wishing to steep themselves in diverse, full-on cinematic overload, or merely dabble in a distinctive niche of their own choice. I have postponed the migration south, and contrary to popular belief, I don't even have a backyard or a rotary clothes hoist.

Brisbane International Film Festival, August 1–11

Helen Yeates is a lecturer in film and media studies in the School of Media and Journalism, Queensland University of Technology

Review

Playing in the labyrinth

Trish Fitzsimons visits the CD-ROM component of the Brisbane International Film Festival

The twenty or so CD-ROM discs selected for this preview of interactive multimedia are those related to the aesthetics of cinema. In particular, my focus was the traditions of the narrative form that have evolved through the cinema of documentary, but demonstrate and explore the ways in which a new aesthetic is beginning to emerge from a new medium.

email from Mike Leggett, curator of *Cynema: An Interactive Playground*

For someone currently researching the possibilities of the emerging form of interactive documentary, *Cynema: An Interactive Playground* was a kind of manna from heaven to be found in the streets of Brisbane. Twenty CD-ROMs—loosely subdivided into the games, music, reference and experimental categories—were collected together at the Hub Internet Cafe, in an exhibition curated by Mike Leggett as part of the Brisbane International Film Festival. This was a new initiative of the festival, and one that is to be applauded given the difficulties of seeing other than a narrow range of commercially distributed interactive multimedia outside of this kind of specialised exhibition.

There was something of the feel of a 'new frontier' for the festival in this exhibition: numbers of patrons were low early on, elements of the viewing environment were still being refined, exhibition assistant James Thompson was in constant demand to assist people unfamiliar with the medium. By the end of the week the audience had built up very significantly as word of mouth spread. Thompson describes a number of patrons returning several times, often for hours on end, to engage with the works.

Apparently, it was the games that were a particular drawcard. *Bad Mojo*—where users are drawn by sumptuous graphics into identifying with the point of view and navigational possibilities of a cockroach—incited particular loyalty in some patrons. So too did *Discworld*—an animated mediaeval adventure game where users attempt to vanquish a dragon terrorising a mythical city. My five year old son had to be coaxed away from *Kids on Site*—where the user enters the driver's seat of major construction equipment—after an hour's complete absorption. For me, it was the works in the experimental category, and the Laurie Anderson work, *Puppet Motel* (oddly categorised as music), that were the highlights of the exhibition.

An issue in reviewing CD-ROMs, given their non-linearity, is how long you need to have spent with work, how many various pathways you need to have taken, before you feel able to comment upon it. Those works that immediately reveal their complete contents can be less satisfying than those which manage to construct their interface in ways resembling a labyrinth that draws you in. Those in the latter category, however, always leave you wondering 'what have I missed' and 'will I be contradicted by that

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Review

Playing in the labyrinth

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which is hidden just beyond my chosen pathway'.

Puppet Motel very successfully created a sense of boundlessness within the necessarily limited confines of the CD-ROM format. From the opening imagery of a vortex disappearing into infinity, accompanied by spinning clocks and a seemingly random series of further choices, the work reveals itself as a game-like maze. Within this maze are to be found vintage Laurie Anderson performance monologues, soundscapes and music. Rather than using its navigation system to direct the user down clearly signposted pathways, *Puppet Motel* works as a series of linked sites whose main interactions relate to the challenge of escaping into the next one. I for one was not up to the task in one instance and had to quit out of the application to escape a particular location. Intriguing graphics and an enigmatic and curiously satisfying soundtrack generally maintained my interest until each puzzle was solved. At one point Anderson's sensuous whisperings had my ear pressed to the

computer speaker to catch every word and nuance.

Christine Tamblyn's *Mistaken Identities* explores the life stories of ten famous women (Marie Curie, Margaret Mead and Frida Kahlo amongst them) in a work "which combines aspects of an academic essay or documentary film with intuitive associations between graphics, film, text and sounds...the boundaries between fact, interpretations and fiction are intentionally blurred in the project" (accompanying 'read me' notes). Short fragments of archival movies are cleverly incorporated into screen designs that naturalize the small screen QuickTime format. The structure of this work encourages users to explore both individual women's trajectories and the thematic analogies that linked their lives. A woman—presumably Tamblyn herself—is woven throughout the work, visually commenting on the subject's life stories. Often she mimes exaggerated facial responses in mute QuickTime images, in one section she transforms 'into' her heroines in a series of morphed pictures. Whilst this strand of *Mistaken Identities* did not seem to me to have been sufficiently integrated into the overall text, it was refreshing to see an exploration of self reflexive strategies in a work of interactive multimedia.

Graham Harwood's *Rehearsal of Memory* powerfully evokes the closed world of the Ashworth Maximum Security Mental Hospital patients with whom he worked in producing this piece. One of its most striking features is the conglomerate human form—created as a mosaic of scanned body parts—which becomes the large but bounded space through which we navigate and in which we discover various looped fragments of oral history and soundscape. Harwood's use of contrapuntal sound is deft: a soundtrack of trickling water alongside the scanned ECU image of pubic hair and the head of a penis opened up meaning in the space between the image and sound.

Not all the works were as engaging. George Legrady's *the clearing*, whose project is to "explore the cultural meaning in the language of news representation [of the former Yugoslavia]" (quoted from the 'read me' note), seemed to me to reproduce rather than deconstruct the frustrations of following that conflict through the vehicle of daily news reports.

Taken as a whole, this was a very successful exhibition that reflects some very interesting recent work at the nexus of cinema and interactive multimedia. It also confirmed, however, that this is still very largely a medium of graphics and

animation, with digital video only a small component of most pieces.

As a reviewer who both visited the exhibition twice and had the privilege of taking a number of the works away to view on my own computer, I found much to enthral me, though some works goaded me into musing how they could be even better. In the exhibition itself, users had to contend with the cafe's usual muzak as well as with the conflicting soundtracks of works on adjacent computers. For the many works where the soundtrack was critical, this was a real problem. This is perhaps unsurprising for a medium still finding its audience and developing its optimal viewing environment. Given the number of these CD-ROM based works that had associated web sites, it could also be an advantage if works were displayed, next time, on networked computers.

Perhaps these issues will be addressed in 1997 in the Brisbane season of the much larger *Burning the Interface* exhibition, originally shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, which was also curated by Mike Leggett (with Linda Michael). I sincerely hope that this kind of new media exhibition will become a regular feature of the festival, and play a key role in exposing Brisbane audiences to emerging genres of interactive work.

Interview

Genre fluidity: celebrating Howard Hawks

Noel King interviews Ed Buscombe and Jim Hillier

1996 marks the centenary of the birth of director Howard Hawks, a figure who once occupied a central place in film study, at least as it was constituted in the 1960s and 70s but who now seems to have shifted to a more marginal position. Some of the reasons for that are touched on in the remarks made below by Ed Buscombe and Jim Hillier whom I interviewed in London and Reading respectively in May 1996 in relation to the forthcoming British Film Institute (BFI) *Hawks retrospective*, slated to tour the US and Japan. Quentin Tarantino has pronounced Hawks' *Rio Bravo* (1959) his favourite western, and an earlier New Hollywood director (admittedly one whose authorial star has darkened over the last few years), John Carpenter, remade that film as *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976). Perhaps we in Australia should be thinking of mounting some sort of Hawks retrospective. The wonderful film collection in the National Library contains many Hawks gems and others are available from commercial rental sources. Since it seems unlikely that any local film cultural institution will attempt to bring the touring Hawks collection in its entirety to Australia we must look to our own resources: no better place to start looking than the national treasure that is the National Film Library.

NK Can you say something about the Howard Hawks retrospective with which the BFI is involved?

EB The BFI plans a total Hawks retrospective, showing every Hawks film that is extant. Two, unfortunately, have been lost and aren't likely to be found. So that's 46 movies in all, plus some other bits of Hawksiana. Several of the films will be shown in restored versions, and we will be striking a lot of new prints, and I'm sure it's going to be the best thing on Hawks ever done. We're publishing an anthology of Hawks criticism edited by Peter Wollen and Jim Hillier, and there's also a biography of Hawks written by Todd McCarthy of *Variety*, which will be published next year, and the BFI might acquire the English rights to that. And there are various other things going on: a *Guardian* lecture with Lauren Bacall, and the film season will go to Paris, New York, and Japan. It all comes out of a feeling that Hawks is one of those directors whose films have been much viewed, but if you asked people to describe the characteristic Hawksian ethos, what it is that makes a Hawks' film different from other films, what is the Hawks touch, it seems less easy to identify

than, say, the Hitchcock touch. But if you see a lot of his films together you'll see that the similarities are remarkable.

What is very evident about Hawks is that he's the director that so many contemporary Hollywood directors say they've learnt from. And the BFI is producing a documentary on Howard Hawks, made by John Carpenter, that arises from Carpenter's reverence for Hawks. What should come out very strongly as a theme of the season is the extent to which Hawks has been an influence on other filmmakers. We hope the season will include some sessions or workshops in which these things will be explored.

NK What's notable about Hawks is that he's worked in almost every Hollywood genre.

EB And produced masterpieces in virtually every one: the gangster film with *Scarface* (1932), the horror film with *The Thing* (1951), screwball comedies with *His Girl Friday* (1940) and *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), westerns such as *Red River* (1948) and *Rio Bravo* (1959), thrillers such as *The Big Sleep* (1946), and musicals such as *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953). So that sets up the possibility of some interesting reflections on the relationship between genre and an individual's body of work.

NK It also seems to me that Hawks' critical fortunes haven't fared as well as, say, those of Hitchcock. Hawks clearly was important for *Cahiers du Cinéma* and the 1960s and 70s moment of Anglo-American film criticism — books or bits of books by Robin Wood, Joseph McBride and Peter Wollen, appreciations by Peter Bogdanovich and Manny Farber. But then he fades somewhat from the centre of what is taught in film studies.

EB It's certainly true if you look at *Cahiers du Cinéma*. The two Hollywood directors they really favour are Hitchcock and Hawks. But whereas Hitchcock has never been out of the syllabus and is more taught today than ever, and a huge amount of material has been published about him, it seems that Hawks is much less taught and written about these days. But the anthology of Hawks criticism will show that some major pieces of criticism have been devoted to his work, it's a very rich seam to work.

NK Jim, together with Peter Wollen, you are producing an anthology of criticism on Howard Hawks, to coincide with the

centenary of his birth. What logic will underpin the selections you make for that collection?

JH One of the things I discovered while working on the *Cahiers du Cinéma* books was that the precursor of *Cahiers*, in 1929 or so, had identified Hawks as an important filmmaker. (Jim Hillier ed., *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s—Neo-realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, Harvard 1985, and Hillier ed., *Cahiers du Cinéma: 1960-1968: New Wave, New Cinema. Re-evaluating Hollywood*, Harvard 1986) So even in the period of early cinema he wasn't a non-entity, at least not on the French agenda. Here in England, on the other hand, when Graham Greene writes about a Hawks' film he doesn't identify Hawks as the author. It's hard to think of anyone other than Hawks who could play the same role, someone who has been critically discussed, consistently, over the period from 1927 to the present. Hitchcock would be a candidate but it's hard to think of anyone else of whom you would be able to ask: how are changes in critical writing reflected across a 70 year period of time?

NK Will you organise the anthology chronologically in terms of the films or by chronological clusters of critical writing addressing particular issues?

JH If the book were arranged chronologically in relation to criticism, Laura Mulvey's piece in *Sight and Sound* on *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* would be at the end because it was written in 1996. The book is meant to be about the ability of Hawks' work to generate a range of critical approaches, strategies, all of which take his work seriously. I think it's Eric Rohmer, writing on *The Big Sky*, who says "if you love cinema, you have to love Howard Hawks". And then, David Thomson, writing on Hawks in the latest edition of his *A Biographical Dictionary of Film* (Alfred A Knopf, 1994) says that Hawks' cinema is the epitome of all that is best about Hollywood.

NK As he says, "the films grow in wonder". Not only has Hawks worked across all the major genres, he's also worked within the studio system and 'outside' it in the sense of being his own independent production company: will the writing reflect on this?

JH Yes, I hope we'll use the piece on *Bringing Up Baby* on his relation to the studio,

showing how he intervened. I'm sure the collection will also give a sense of the history of the changes in Hollywood and Hawks' place in that. So both critically and historically he's a figure who can represent a lot about changes in Hollywood and attitudes towards Hollywood.

NK What of the question of Hawks and women? Thomson speaks of the need for a book to reconcile the "mess of the life" of a "ruinous womaniser" and the "heroic grace" of the films.

JH There comes a moment when women start to talk about Hawks, he gets attacked and then some women challenge those attacks. (Molly Haskell, "Howard Hawks", in Richard Roud ed., *Cinema: A Critical Dictionary Vol 1* Secker and Warburg, 1980). In Laura Mulvey's piece it's not plain at all what she's saying about Hawks the person, as it were, but it's certainly clear that it's not a rejection of him on the grounds of sexism. On the contrary, she claims he understood exactly what he was doing. So that's one instance of the more general way Hawks' work has been able to generate a critical discussion. People of very different points of view have been able to find things in his work, it's been an enormous mine of thought-provoking work.

NK In the early 70s you reviewed, for *Screen*, Manny Farber's book, *Movies*, which collects some of his stuff on Hawks. Farber talks about Only Angels Have Wings very fondly, mentioning the flyers' campy costumes, etc. Will Farber be in there? Especially where you think of Farber's connection with people like Scorsese and Schrader who admired his writing even if he didn't always admire their films?

JH I'm still thinking about that. I'm not sure whether what he's saying is really coherent, but it certainly occupies an important historical place. This collection is not gathering material which could be said to be the 'best'; rather, it's saying 'how does the material represent a certain moment or phase of Hawks criticism?' I hope it'll be both interesting to read, if you want to find out about Hawks but equally interesting in the light of the cultural history of critical writing on Hollywood. The Hawks project isn't trying to be comprehensive. We're not assembling all the writing on Hawks. We're anthologising a selection of work with which we already are familiar, with this particular focus of the centrality of Hawks to critical thinking and the way in which he's reflected it. I don't think of it as a major research undertaking. If I had thought of it in that way I don't think I'd have undertaken it!

Noel King lectures in film at the University of Technology, Sydney

Essay

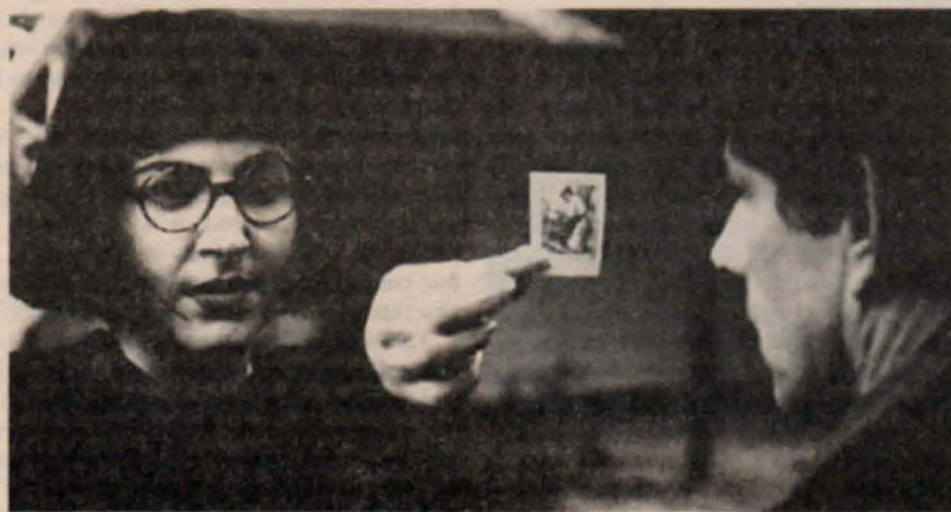
Local wants to go national

John McConchie details the complexities of short film distribution

In October, Adelaide's Mercury Cinema changed hands. Built for, and operated by the Media Resource Centre, the Mercury runs first-release art-house product and is subsidised (at a tiny fraction of its operating costs) to screen a variety of cultural programs: shorts, local films, cinémathèque and *Frames*, Adelaide's biennial festival of Australian shorts and independent film. The new management is a partnership consisting of the Australian Film Institute and commercial arthouse exhibitors Chris Kiley and Alex Meskovich, the team which currently operates Sydney's Chauvel Cinemas as a successful symbiosis which addresses the mix of commercial and cultural exhibition. The new arrangement will maintain the Mercury Cinema's viability in a rather cinephobic city, allowing it to remain film culture friendly—supportive of local filmmakers, devoting screen time to non-commercial exhibition, importing AFI screenings and seminars and the like. Basically, this is in keeping with the fate of subsidised screens across the country and offers itself as a commendable solution in a highly fraught area.

If the Mercury saga is paradigmatic of national trends, it could be time to address the issues of subsidised exhibition of Australian shorts. What does it achieve, and how should we go about it? The short answer is that it serves to promote a vehemently active but marginalised sector. But unravelling this reveals a terrain of contradictions, conflicting agendas and the all too familiar story of too much to do and no money with which to do it. Of course, there is strength in adversity. I was taken by a comment that emerged from *Cinessential*, Newcastle's recent festival of low-budget film. It's strength, said its director Robert Alcock, lay in the fact the festival had grassroots support. It celebrated its regionality. Like similar festivals, including *Frames* and St Kilda for example, the low budget film and the short is given the dignity of being a form unto itself, not just a stepping stone to the first commercial feature or a television career for its creators. These festivals are necessary antidotes to the imaginary maelstrom that is Hollywood and the other commercial fields that dominate the medium. This is also how events like this seek out and establish their

audience base, providing a supportive community for the artists and practitioners within their folds. Yet Alcock also knows that other agendas need equal attention, as witnessed by the presence of special guest Roger Corman. It is not enough for festivals to act as ghettos for shorts, docos, low or no budget features. They must also promote careers, and extend the viewing life of the films. The best of them should travel beyond festivals, which also need to provide a context



Caroline Mignone and Roger Newcombe in the unforgiving weight of anatomy

to bridge the gap between the aspiring and the successful. They must develop strategies to successfully convey the hallmarks of their form and content to a wider audience, as Corman once filled drive-ins with ideological dissidence, sex and violent mayhem.

The St Kilda Film Festival is also increasingly aware of its profile and that of the filmmakers it supports. It grew out of a potent mix of an area with a strong, even bloody-minded community spirit, even more sharply defined in the Kennett era, which contained a high proportion of independent filmmakers and students. Although its support base is local, the festival has garnered enough editorial press and other support to make its mark on

the Melbourne scene, an approach clearly favoured by the Council of Port Phillip which provides funds and resources as an integral part of its community program. To the festival's credit, the curatorial philosophy still disdains the slick and vacuous in favour of the rough and ready with genuine content at its core. No doubt its presence has encouraged one local arthouse cinema, the George, to offer screenings of Australian shorts on a regular basis as well as providing sponsorship to the festival itself. Bridges are being forged here, independent product is finding its way onto commercial screens. Accordingly, St Kilda sees itself as developing a national profile. It may widen the field from which it draws judges for its competition base to reflect this, for example. It may continue to court exhibitors.

homogenise the form. Its selection criteria and competition produces more interesting results than the higher profiled Dendy Awards at the Sydney Film Festival, or the shorts selected for competition in the Australian Film Institute Awards. St Kilda preserves the flavour of regionality with all its faults and strengths.

St Kilda offers a comparative idyll, a loyal local audience cushioned within a supportive cinephilic city, with access to a nationally significant press. Further afield circumstances are trickier. These kinds of festivals and events are often the only way to screen independent product in the community. But costs are enormous, audiences often thin on the ground. *Frames* in Adelaide has developed a very similar approach to St Kilda in a city more attuned to live performance than film. It services a small audience base, often devoid of practitioners who are too isolated from their interstate colleagues to find them interesting, or are too poor to attend. Its loudest support base are interstate filmmakers who have understood and generally supported its curatorial practices in a climate where there are too few opportunities to get their films up onto a screen. Yet *Frames* plays intermittently, held hostage to availability of the considerable finance it requires, and Adelaide's fickle social calendar. In contrast, the Media Resource Centre has developed *New Adelaide Films* which now plays to packed houses of crews, family and friends in an orgy of localism. If the Mercury Cinema has been saved to promote these kinds of activities, for the time-being anyway, the central issues of subsidised exhibition remain firmly on the agenda.

So what is the future? Remote access via digital technology? Yet there seems to be a demand for the community event, the need of filmmakers to see their work projected in all the glory they intended, a strategy that continues to promote diversity locally, nationally and internationally. South Australia, along with several other states, now finances several shorts which cost between \$30,000 to \$100,000 each year, and they are worth seeing. So are a number which cost nothing. Is there a way of marshalling the different exhibition strategies across the country into a strategic platform that preserves the contradictions, answering the range of needs from regionality to international exposure, that caters for isolated audiences but bridges filmmakers, that shares resources yet duplicates activities, all without constantly reinventing the wheel?

Review

Past presence

Mike Leggett at the *Dawn of Cinema* conference

The *Dawn of Cinema* event was supported by the Australian Film Commission, organised and promoted by Barrett Hodsdon and David Watson through the Museum of Contemporary Art with the collaboration of the Museum of Sydney. Dr Peter Emmett acknowledged the central role screen culture had to play in the planning of the Museum. The museum's director Leon Parroissien spoke of the MCA's continuing search for the resources to meet the need for a national cinémathèque in which to showcase a repertory of national and international screen history.

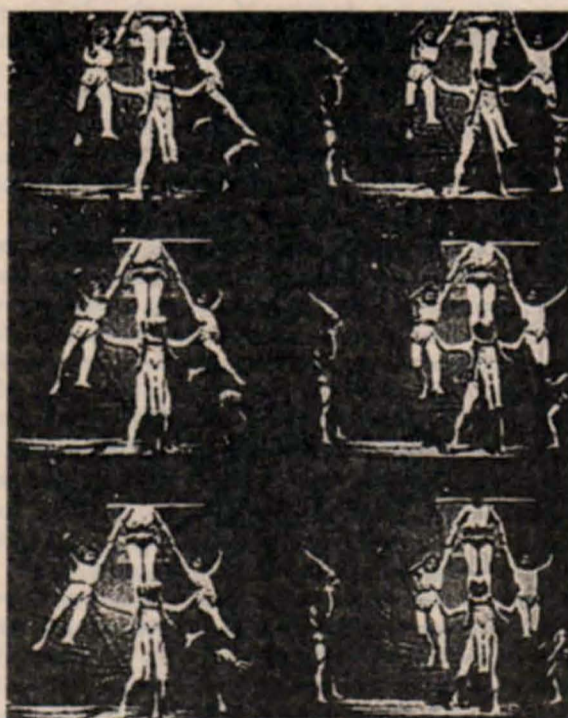
Each contribution to the *Dawn of Cinema* Conference examined, in fascinating, detail changes to the film medium that occurred between the turn of the century and the 1920s, the period when the craft skills of artists from various backgrounds combined with engineer/inventors to develop a whole apparatus of signification which began to gel, on celluloid: the cinematograph and the photo-play had become the cinema.

It is tempting to view this period as directly parallel to the convergence, using contemporary jargon, that is currently occurring between film/video, sound, graphics and text within computer-mediated communications. Ian Christie, one of the keynote speakers, made reference to the linkages that can be traced. "What we're all

looking for of course, is larger analyses that will give us a sense of framework...I'm arguing for a comprehensive view of the world that produced early film—that you actually look at little bits of it, bringing a lot of different sources and perspectives to bear on it and understand something of the complexity of which it is a product. That's very relevant to today...we are at a time when technology is out-running a sense of what to do with it—what have we got all this stuff for? Do we need it? The feeling of being saturated in technological advance immediately returns us to a situation in the 1880s and 90s where there was that very same feeling..."

In the early days of cinema in Australia, itinerant entertainers like the Corrick family, using the public railway network, provided 'family' variety entertainment to all classes and ages. Talent was one of the attractions but so was technology. The electric carbon-arc rather than the watery 'limelight' had a distinct advantage, for the illumination of the performers and the cinematograph picture show: and the generator could also power the electric fan in sweaty tents and halls. By 1907, the Corricks were using one of the first cinematograph cameras to arrive from Europe to record short actuality scenes in the places they visited. In Perth, using processing and printing gear that they carried with them, they were able to advertise "Come and be in the Picture".

Dr Richard Waterhouse from the University of Sydney pointed out that the "commercialisation of recreational forms in general—sport and the live stage—and the



From Wim Wenders' *The Skladanovsky Brothers*

popularity of distractions based on transgression" were to lead to the rise of mass rather than popular culture. Interaction between audience and performers, including projectionists, was to be replaced with passivity and acceptance, and with the coming of sound, the end of the popular stage.

Live performance in Germany was similarly a mixture of circus skills, musical items, recitations and short melodramas.

Wim Wenders' new film, *The Skladanovsky Brothers*, sets out to loosely recreate the milieu when technology offered access to greater novelty and so opportunities for further exploitation of the fickle public. Made with a group of Munich Film School students, Wenders' production concocts an 'edutainment' about the showmen brothers, "artisans with courage and enterprise, adventurous tradesmen rather than bourgeois blockheads..." (Thomas Koebner in *Film Dienst*, January 1996)

Dr Andreas Rost of the Munich City Film Department traced the demise of the Skladanovskys, Max's attempts at his re-invention of himself as an inventor, and their quarrels with other film industry luminaries. In the tradition of popular cinema, Wenders' film ignores the politics and celebrates their contribution, literally, from a child's perspective.

Simon During from the University of Melbourne described the viewer's experience as a continuation of the history of 'secular magic': sleight of hand, conjuring, automata, 'philosophical fires' and, more recently, optical illusions. "...fictionalisation requires a disposition to be entertained within a cultural zone set apart from, but dependent upon, truth, reality, the serious...fictions of the

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real...fictions of the true...film being the first technology able to fuse the two successfully..."

A short section from *The Wizard of Oz* was one of many, if uncharacteristic, extracts shown during the weekend. Dr Tom Gunning of the University of Chicago screened the scene of the adventurers' entry into the Hall of the Great Oz to illustrate the way in which early film was perceived by early audiences never far removed from the realm of the phantasmagorical. The "sceptical but astonished gaze" is central to Gunning's "cinema of attractions", a gaze quite distinct from the apparatus-disavowing voyeur described by Laura Mulvey and Christian Metz. 1906 is the point identified before which this cinema's "energy moves outward towards an acknowledged spectator rather than inward towards the character-based situations essential to classical narrative" (Tom Gunning in *Early Cinema: Space/Frame/Narration*, BFI, 1990). It was this point at which film moved away from the space of the nickelodeon (not unlike the space offered by the computer screen) and into the space of regular public screenings.

Jeanette Delamoir analysed this cinema of spectacle and narrative through the presentational and representational forms of the period and the ability of the photo-reproductive technology to visualise the traditional narrative forms of theatrical gesture, regarded as an educative part of a process of spectacle. Two other speakers from La Trobe University took the statistical and analytical approach. Bill Routt assessed the hundred or so feature films made in Australia between 1906 and 1913 including the extraordinary 40-60 minute *Kelly Gang*, originally screened complete with lecturer, sound effects and a program booklet to ensure that the moral message of the folk hero's cause was not lost. A multimedia extravaganza mode of presentation was not uncommon—as early as 1901 the Salvation Army Limelight Unit had used specially shot material as part of their evangelising presentation, *Soldiers of the Cross*.

Ina Bertrand examined the production of *After Sundown* in 1911 through the accounts of a journalist who covered its production in St Kilda, where the large numbers of people involved varied for no apparent reason and with no apparent centralised direction or control. A regular publication of the time, the *Kinematograph Weekly*, used its columns to debate the methods and needs of the fledgling industry. In spite of this enthusiasm and ability to extemporise, an essentially artisanal approach kept the industry dispersed in every sense and made it vulnerable to the rival industry in the US, which was consolidating around the studio model and to which the early Australian industry eventually succumbed.

Yuri Tsivian from the University of Chicago electrified the audience with the full spectacle of recent scholarship. He quickly established the 1910s as a period of production in Europe that was quite distinctive and not simply a limbo land between 'primitive film' and 'classical narrative'. The film-makers of the 1910s paid great attention to painters of the time, for instance when framing and lighting shots conceived in sequence and through which movement occurred. Such 'blocking' took account of quite elaborate set designs and use of mirrors to extend the narrative possibilities and the insertion of the spectator into the film experience. He showed astonishing examples from 1911 through to 1916 which used deep focus and movement throughout the space of the frame to avoid use of the cut, "because they didn't know how to cut".

The work commissioned from the Queensland Department of Agriculture photographer Fred Wills in 1899 was illustrated by Pat Laughren from Griffith University who screened a recently completed video (sadly very few prints are available even for events such as this). In a medium that was rapidly adopted throughout the industrialised world this was probably the first example of a government sponsored promo, and this at a time when a one-minute roll of

film cost a week's wages and the Lumiere camera a year's salary.

The year before in 1898 on Murray Island in the Torres Strait was the first occasion the cinematograph was used for ethnographic purposes. Alfred Court Haddon, leading a Cambridge expedition recorded with a static camera some of the dances, and the greeting of the local colonialist administrator, evidence which was to be used some 90 years later by Eddie Mabo to disprove the doctrine of *terra nullius*. Such access to images of Aborigines has not usually benefited indigenous people, commented Wal Saunders, Manager of the Indigenous Branch of the AFC. In 1901 at Haddon's suggestion, Walter Baldwin Spencer took a motion picture camera on an expedition and commenced the accumulation of some 10,000 items of record by him and others in central Australia. Much of the extant material creates problems for Aboriginal communities across the continent, collected under duress and revealing much that is regarded even today as confidential, or copyright according to white law.

The global village was described by *Punch* magazine in the by now familiar 1878 illustration of the Telephonoscope, providing images as well as sound across the world—from England to the antipodes! Ian Christie observed that this was two years after Edison established sound technology with the telephone, followed but a year later with the phonograph—the engineer tends to modify and improve rather than creatively invent, there is a 'lineage of invention'. Format and content wars between rival companies, then as now, began to develop as 'hardware' and 'software' producers began to emerge. In some senses the new media were regarded as spiritual, abolishing the effects of death in a secular sense, with religion displaced and becoming instead the content of many of the films. These events, occurring quickly in a relatively short space of time, created an unstable commercial and social situation. Entrepreneurialism thrived and opportunities were exploited, some with success and many without, events not dissimilar to today, where new tools are shaping social relationships and new political formations.

Book review

Countering cyber-desire

John Conomos reviews Mark Dery's *Escape Velocity* (Hodder and Stoughton)

Mark Dery's perceptively written *Escape Velocity* is a welcome addition to the growing list of new media publications. It is unique on a number of aesthetic, cultural and technological fronts. Most significantly, it is a comprehensive overview of computer culture, incisively x-raying the myths of the many different digital subcultures that constitute techno-culture more broadly. In this critical sense, Dery's book is a first: nowhere else (in book form) will the reader encounter the complex historical, mythic and cultural configurations of the cyber-hippies, New Agers, techno-pagans, Extropians, rogue technologists and so on—groups which have substantially contributed to our wired world of 'terminal identity' (Scott Bukatman). Dery has done his vital historical spadework, and this is one of the book's more enduring accomplishments.

In an era where much of the critical writing on digital media is marked by a problematic ahistorical emphasis, *Escape Velocity* critiques the 'context-free' metaphysics of new media literature. Dery searches afar the more (in)visible sites of cyberculture in his relentlessly scorching critique of the postevolutionary romanticism of the on-line world—the relatively unexamined will to leave our 'obsolete' bodies behind as we become superlunary voyagers of extraterrestrial silicon bliss (viz. Hardison, Moravec, and Vinge). Dery's invaluable project to counter the postmodern cyborg desire to 'objectify ourselves to death' (Vivian Sobchack)—a discernible trend in contemporary life, traceable to Walter Benjamin's observations on humankind's propensity to experience self-alienation as "an aesthetic pleasure of the first kind"—is grounded in a rigorous attempt to italicise the ethical, social and political implications of the mind-jarring nonsense that is propagated in the name of cybernetic technologies.

Book review

One of the first things that the reader will enjoy about *Escape Velocity* is the author's inimitable prose style. Dery writes like Lenny Bruce on speed: it's a neon-lit, hallucinatory scalpel writing style that captures the highly kinetic quality of author's freewheeling speech. We know how writing about digital media is remarkably conducive to the creation of metaphors, neologisms and phrases, but to read Dery's visceral Celinean writing is to exactly experience the author's lava-hot lecturing style.

Dery's omnidirectional capacity to coin sharply-etched neologisms not only deflates the more spurious hyperbole of the information age (for example, the promotion in some circles of the new media as a welcomed expression of bodily extension and disembodiment, what McLuhan aptly termed "auto-amputation"), but it also allows Dery to significantly contribute both substantial historical information of the digital underground and a critical, scholarly spin on value new media theory. *Escape Velocity*, in a word, reminds us of the urgent necessity to address the new media technologies with all the rigour that is evident elsewhere in contemporary cultural studies. It behoves us to speak of digital media in an informed historical context, to know our subject in terms of a self-reflexive materialist analysis grounded in the task of addressing the "social physics" of technology (Avital Ronell). One of the premises of *Escape Velocity* is that the new media technologies (especially the personal computer) and their techno-transcendental promotion in everyday life is primarily an American phenomenon. Dery is correct to point this out at the beginning of the book, for what is clear in the context of global digital media is how technological progress (read Leo Marx's notion of "the rhetoric of the technological sublime") has always been stressed as an American phenomenon. Consequently, the personal computer and the internet, and their post-GATT promotion as the centre of a supposed coming electronic Jeffersonian democracy, suggests not only human disembodiment but also (what Buckminster Fuller once termed) "the ephemeralisation of labour".

Dery seeks to probe beneath the techno-hype of cyberculture and question the many contradictions, shortcomings and tensions that characterise the mutating computer-mediated interaction between our immaterial and material lives. This requires nothing less than a fundamental negotiation of our collective and individual capacity to delude ourselves into thinking that with media technology we can escape from the very bodily, cultural and epistemological features that define us as we approach the end of this century. Dery's anti-idealist investigation of computer culture goes beyond the Sunday Supplement hyperbole to define a penetrating critique of the futurological mysticism and techno-eschatology that colour the various digital subcultures comprising our high-tech world. Dery's contextualisation of these (till now relatively unexamined) digital subcultures apropos of contemporary science fiction, science, robotics, genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, futurology, and the counter-revolution of the 60s, is a major achievement.

Dery focuses on the runaway millenarian fantasies and myths that are defining the 'escape velocity' rhetoric of post-Darwinian posthumanism—what in the author's vivid phrase constitutes "a theology of the ejector seat"—that we encounter in many forms: cybernetic body art (Stelarc, Therrien, Orlan), cyberdelia (*Mondo 2000*, *Whole Earth Review*, Leary and McKenna), techno-paganism (Bulletin board systems like Modem Magick, Deus ex Machina, and Scared Grove), cyberpunk, metal machine music (Throbbing Gristle, Elliot Sharp, and Trent Reznor/Nine Inch Nails) and the 'techno-surrealist' mechanical spectacles of Mark Pauline's Survival Research Laboratories. Dery argues persuasively against the self-deluding end-of-the-millennium utopianism of postevolutionary robotics and space migration (Burroughs and Moravec) insisting of the hermeneutic urgency of the "moral gaze" (contra Baudrillard) of posthumanist thought. We must, that is to say, critically address the biological and socio-cultural fictions that comprise the reductionist theology of cyborg escapism.

The disembodied rhetoric of posthumanism, for critics like Dery, Vivian Sobchack and Andrew Ross, suggests a vast unchecked contempt for the body and the material world. The many rosy paeans sung for high technology as an expression of the Enlightenment project, for American techno-utopianism and for the Olympian Cartesian fantasies of 'downloading' our brains onto the global cybernetic circuitry of our cyborg futures (a la Lecht, Moravec, Vinge and Zey), are deconstructed by Dery and shown to be misguided, unconstructive and dangerously distorted. Dery insists on staying earth-bound, and this is one of *Escape Velocity*'s more appealing characteristics.

Dery attacks the technocratic elitism of Moravec's ideas on advanced robotics, *Mondo 2000*'s airy, high-minded endorsement of a "dictatorship of the neurotriad" and the free-market expansionism of computer technology by digging deep in the interzone between the giddy technophilic pronouncements made by today's cyber-zealots and the actual socio-cultural impact of the computer at this historical moment. Dery's provocative book insists on probing the refusal in our techno-media landscape to adequately negotiate the social and political currents that

are germane to the main concerns and direction of our emerging on-line world.

At the centre of Dery's deftly constructed arguments is the notion of the computer as a "Janus machine, an engine of liberation and an instrument of repression". *Escape Velocity* demonstrates the many shortcomings of the seductive, self-fulfilling apocalyptic fantasies of computer-mediated "transcendental" ideology that feature in the digital over- and underground. Whilst some of us may be preparing for a posthumanist lift-off from the ecological devastation, social anomie, impoverishment, polarisation, and political alienation that characterise planet earth as we hurtle towards the next millennium, Dery begs to differ. He insists that our voyagers of techno-rapture who wish a life beyond our stratosphere are ignoring (at their peril) the critical and moral wisdom of keeping their feet on earth.

Escape Velocity is an essential read for anyone who is concerned with the complex, shifting intersections between culture, biology, politics and digital technology. Dery's morally charged insistence on locating the new technologies within the everyday orbit of ecological and socio-political gravity is appreciably timely. Because Dery values crashdowns, not lift-offs, earth-bound historical observations not apolitical cyber-abstractions based on the Icarus myth, *Escape Velocity*'s critical future is assured.

Film reviews



Aida Mohammadkhani in *The White Balloon*

The White Balloon

a Dendy Films release

directed by Jafar Panahi

currently screening nationally, except WA (to be screened at the Festival of Perth, February 1997)

Iranian cinema, a stockpile of stereotypes and all-pervasive propaganda films, favourable only to the ruling theocracy, is in many ways comparable to that of the former Soviet Union. But, like Aladdin's magic lamp, the Iranian feature *The White Balloon* blasted its way from the Iranian cave of censorship across the West, winning several major international awards, including the Camera d'Or for best first feature at Cannes in 1995.

With the exception of the little Razieh, wearing a white headscarf, and her mother, dressed in a black veil, the film unusually brings out images of pre-Khomeini Iran: Persian bazaars with snake charmers and dancing minstrels, throngs of idlers passing by on an exuberant New Year's Eve, a traditional Persian celebration which the Iranian regime, as part of its cultural revolution, wanted to replace with religious festivals. This is a story of Razieh, a stubborn little girl with a resistance to following her mother's instructions and the family's taboos. With indomitable persistence, she begs her mother for money to buy a goldfish for New Year's Eve. With the help of her brother she manages to wheedle her mother's last 100 toman (Iranian currency).

On her way to the shop Razieh strolls in the bazaar, enjoying the snake charmer's performance, and loses her money down a street drain. A young balloon seller helps Razieh and her brother recover the money. The girl buys the goldfish and happily races for home with her brother for the celebration. The balloon seller, an unhappy Afghan boy all alone in the bazaar, desperately stares at the running children. The balloon seller represents the Afghan diaspora and moderates the film's happy ending. "There is one character that I particularly like, and that's the Afghan balloon seller" says director Jafar Panahi. The title even comes from him (the original title of the film was *Happy New Year*).

A young soldier who is portrayed as a tender-hearted and sympathetic character represents a propagandistic angle in the film. For an ordinary Iranian the ruling regime's soldiers are figures of hatred, administering public lashings and beating women who refuse to wear veils, and attacking filmgoers who dare to watch foreign films which are branded as 'unsuitable' for Islamic culture by the government. Iranian filmmaking has been stifled by harsh censorship and government interference. Last year about 200 filmmakers protested in a petition to end the government's interference

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in scripting, production, funding and distribution. The response from the Mullahs was a ban on the export of any film showing a 'negative image of Iran'; but *The White Balloon's* pragmatic image of modern Iran perhaps explains why it has been allowed to be released in the west.

Ehsan Azari



Chikako Hara and Miho Nikaidoh in *Flirt*

Flirt

directed by Hal Hartley
a Dendy Films release
screening nationally

New York. A couple discuss their future. She is leaving for Paris and a possible reunion with an ex. Before leaving she poses the commitment ultimatum to her lover who requests 90 minutes to decide before he drives her to the airport. While investigating if he has a future with a married woman he is interested in, he gets shot in the face by her distraught husband. After a painful but strangely sensual experience on the operating table, he emerges from hospital, transformed and aware of what he has let slide through his fingers. He hails a cab to the airport...

Berlin. A couple discuss their future. He is leaving for New York and a possible reunion with an ex. Before leaving he poses the commitment ultimatum...

Tokyo. A couple discuss their future. She is leaving...well, you know the rest by now.

Across three continents the familiar ultimatum-betrayal-getting-shot-in-the-face-realisation-of-loss scenario is replayed. In *Flirt*, Hartley takes his fondness for looped dialogue to an extreme. What started off as a short, grew into a feature constructed from three episodes where the city, language, gender and sexual orientation of the characters change but the dialogue remains essentially the same.

This structure neatly encompasses all of Hartley's usual preoccupations—performativity, the artifice of storytelling, reflexivity and the spectator-actor identificatory process. In previous films, he has managed to compensate the viewer's desire for emotional involvement with deadpan wit and stylish performances. *Flirt* is no exception—it is often very funny and quietly moving. This, along with the fact that the recycling of the story serves as an apt metaphor for relationships, saves the film from potential self-indulgence. The sense of having heard it all before does not occur with the second act but before the film begins. In portraying indecision, fear of commitment, desire, jealousy, pain and regret as not only universal but also unoriginal, *Flirt* suggests that—despite the faith we place in the unique experience of love—the modern relationship might not be much more than the acting out of a well-rehearsed script.

Karen de Perthuis

The Nutty Professor

directed by Tom Shadyac
a UIP release
screening nationally

Director Tom Shadyac's Jekyll and Hyde scenario has Eddie Murphy reprising Jerry Lewis's *tour de force* as Julius Kelp in the 1963 original. Only this time, "calorically challenged" chemistry professor Sherman Klump, object of campus derision, invents a fat-busting concoction which transforms him into the ectomorphic high-octane Lothario, Buddy Love. Love can now pursue what the terminally inhibited 400 lb Klump never could—romance with the object of his affections, svelte graduate student Carla Purty (Jada Pinkett). Only problem is, the volatile experimental formula wears off at the most inopportune moments. Enter the special effects guys: in moments of cartoonish grotesquerie, Love's washboard abs and buns of steel repeatedly morph into uncontrollable flab.

This body-morphing scenario complements the film's preoccupation with things alimentary. A series of Rabelaisian dinner table sequences involving Klump's dysfunctional family—with Murphy also playing Klump's grandmother, mother, father and uncle—are choreographed around an escalating chorus of farts. In a nightmare sequence, a flatulent, monster-sized Klump stalks the streets of the campus town, blowing it sky high when a vagrant lights up a cigarette. The film telegraphs its thematic early on when escapee gerbils from Klump's lab run riot on campus, shitting in the Machiavellian Dean's coffee mug and emerging from

the backside of a boxer-shorts advertising poster.

Despite Murphy's comedic virtuosity, and the film's focus on colonic objection, *TNP* fails in the belly laugh department. Producer Brian Glazer and Murphy contend that the film is a humorous exploration of "contemporary culture's obsession with weight". Oh yeah? Strictly for the anal demographic.

AMJ



Kristy Swanson and Billy Zane in *The Phantom*

The Phantom

directed by Simon Wincer
Paramount
screening nationally

The Phantom was a comic book favorite of mine (I had the gold skull ring with the ruby red eyes) and the film's serial tactics recall Saturday matinee pleasures. It is what it promises, low brow, action packed, with a hero who's not a killer, utterly and happily improbable rescues, details important to fans reasonably close to the comic book original (based in fact on two of the earliest stories) and the whole thing garnished with full colour, exotic locations, a nice recreation of New York in the 30s (*You and Me* with George Raft and Sylvia Sydney is playing) replete with matching sadistic capitalist villain Xander Drax—Treat Williams enjoying a new baddy/nutter movie career; see *Things To Do in Denver When You're Dead*. (Williams looks curiously like Howard Hughes—the moustache, the tilt of the hat—when he pilots his sea plane.) The women still play second fiddle, but are allowed to biff men and each other. Of course one of them is to be mother of the next Phantom (we know he's mortal but the local natives think him immortal, of course). Billy Zane is charmingly wooden as our hero, though his purple costume appears to be textured with something like dollar bill detailing. Still it's a snug fit (a big team of specialists are credited with its creation) and promises much in the genital area. The resurrection of *The Phantom's* politics is less promising—white ruler of Bengalla indigenes sorts out power monger, gets girl and continues lone vigilante line, just in case the rest of us can't get the democratic justice thing right. You can, of course, have it both ways, enjoy the film and hate enjoying it.

KG

Courage Under Fire

directed by Edward Zwick
distributed by Fox/Columbia/TriStar
screening nationally

In the opening moments of Edward Zwick's *Courage Under Fire* you hear the voice of President George Bush announcing that the "liberation" of Kuwait has entered its final phase. However prophetic those words may have been, uttered as they were prior to the 'turkey shoot' at Basra, somebody forgot to tell Hollywood. This is the obligatory Gulf war film that they had to make.

Following the end of the war, Lt. Colonel Nathaniel Serling (Denzel Washington) is charged with the responsibility of determining whether Captain Karen Walden (Meg Ryan) should be the first woman awarded the Medal of Honour. She is being considered posthumously as a candidate for the US military's most prestigious medal because of her valour in attempting to rescue stranded US soldiers in the desert. In investigating the circumstances of her death, Serling is faced with conflicting testimonies from Walden's comrades at arms. If it sounds familiar, it should, because Patrick Duncan, the film's co-screenwriter, draws on Kurosawa's *Rashomon* for inspiration.

Serling's investigation becomes a cathartic exercise for him. He is haunted by an engagement with Iraqi forces which ends in the death of a close friend in combat, the result of friendly fire. In resolving the conflicting accounts, Serling is able to come to terms with his own nightmare, that of giving the order which led to the death of his friend.

The film provides a staid, sanitised account of the war for

American audiences. Iraqi forces are demonised. Nothing like the real troops who, when faced with superior technology and firepower, laid their weapons down and fled. But I suppose it wouldn't be much of a war movie if you had to tell the truth.

Speaking of which, Mary Elizabeth Walker, a civilian surgeon in the Civil War, was the first woman to receive the Medal of Honour. But as they say, the first casualty in war...

Peter Lowe



Sam Bould, Martin Donovan and Ian Hart in *Hollow Reed*

Hollow Reed

directed by Angela Pope
a Dendy release
screening nationally

A child runs through a windswept forest, a pensive camera visions his distress, frantic movements caught close-up in the peripheries of frame. When we see a fragile, bloodied face for the first time, we also see ourselves positioned within a narrative that demands a moral response. Oliver is bashed by his mother's lover. He is forced to repeat "I must learn to control my excesses" to the man whose own violence knows no restraint. His mother's bitterness at being left by his gay father is assuaged by the affections of this new man, so she disavows what she knows to be true. Oliver's father (Martin Donovan) fights to protect him through a homophobic, nuclear family-at-whatever-cost legal system.

Hollow Reed transcends an expositional script stuck in reproducing the thriller format where evil preys on innocence, and where complexities are reduced to easily identifiable moral conclusions. Although the final sense of closure is too complete—the abuser's nature revealed to all by his own violence, everyone living redeemably ever after—the haunting space of Oliver's fear is something that lives between and beyond simplistic positioning. Sam Bould's performance as Oliver is almost silent, emoted through simple, refrained gestures and a face registering more damage than what we have seen.

Independence Day

directed by Roland Emmerich
Fox/Columbia/Tristar release
screening nationally

Independence Day has landed, box-office earth united in a global epiphany of spectacle, xenophobia and the erotics of dread. The Aliens are coming...for our Winebagos, our exotic dancers, our dodgy economies, our rust-belts, and we will not go quietly into the night...not without a fight.

30-40 script writers binged on enough cocaine and cliché to make *Independence Day* an *arte totale* of fragments plundered from the cinematic memory of sci-fi/alien fear. But *ID4* is also revenge fantasy on an operatic scale, drawing heavily from the vigilante narrative of the Western. The president, a 'hunky' version of Bill Clinton, flies in person to enact some nuclear mob justice, helped along by assorted white trash in hi-tech avionic hardware. A hitherto 'misunderstood' Nam vet becomes a hero when he lands the killer blow. Blockbuster one-liners prompt uneasy laughter, the only relief possible as the perversity of this US born-to-rule power-patriot fantasy unfolds before you in totalising panavision splendour.

A conscious effort has been made to ensure earthly enemies cannot be distilled from the ubiquitous haze of paranoia. One of our heroes is black, the other Jewish, and even Iraq capitulates without resistance to the US as the young president assumes global command. While 15 mile-wide attack ships decimate New York and LA in what is a formidable vision of apocalypse, more haunting is the image of hundreds of Winebagos escaping across a salt lake, because this is the idea of 'earth' that *Independence Day* is really defending. As most of the major capitals of the world lie in ruins, one wonders what city will be the governing metropolis of the new world order—Nashville or Vegas? DV

Newsreel

Film West Shorts Get Longer

Following the success of open air screenings at Paramatta's Riverside Theatres earlier this year, Film West is to hold three more short film events, representing more opportunity for film makers from the West to have their 16mm and 35mm films shown. *Film West Short Film Screenings*, Macquarie Mall, Liverpool, November 30 and December 1; Paramatta Riverside Theatres, January 27; Dumaresq Street Cinema, Campbelltown, February 2. Send preview tapes to Film West, PO Box 153,

Newsreel

Milperra, NSW 2214. Call 02 9774 2043 for more details. Entry deadline: October 21.

Careering Queers

Nearly 18,000 people attended the *My Queer Career* film festival this year, and the festival is now calling for entries for the 1997 event. Money and prizes are on offer to Australian and New Zealand film makers. Films sought will be those made by gay, lesbian or transgendered people or made about or of interest to the aforementioned. For further information call 02 9332 4938 or email: queerscr@magna.com.au. Entry deadline: Late December

Flickerfest

The Flickerfest International Short Film Festival is now calling for entries. The festival opens at Bondi Beach in January where it runs for ten days before touring nationally. Flickerfest is a competitive festival open to any film or video production under 40 minutes. Entries are preselected on VHS video cassette and projected on 16mm film, 35mm film, U-Matic Video or CD-ROM. For more details, contact: PO Box 52, Haymarket, Sydney NSW 2000. Tel: 02 9266 7242 Fax: 02 9262 4774; email: Flickerf@tmx.com.au. Entry deadline: October 18

Celluloid Briefs

A new film tradition will be born in Brisbane early October with the first Brisbane Animation Festival. *Celluloid Briefs* will feature otherwise inaccessible local and international films, including new releases and old favourites. Amongst the shorts on offer are British and European animations, as well as specialty programs from *Eat Carpet* and Cinematheque (an international film organisation promoting rare and unrated films). October 5-6, Schonell Theatre, The University of Queensland, St Lucia campus. For further details contact Jane Creasy, Tel: 07 3875 3173 email: j.creasy@qca.gu.edu.au, or visit the website <http://www.gu.edu.au/gext/amim/anim.htm>

White Gloves Film Festival

A festival that provides a series of known limits for film makers. Work must be silent, be shot within a two day time frame, be edited in camera and be no longer than three minutes. Premier screenings: Melbourne, Hoyts Regent; Sydney, Valhalla (early October). Best of screenings held late October. Tel: 03 9416 0122.

Naked 8

The raw nature of super-8 gauge is the force behind Melbourne Super-8 Film Group's annual festival. This year will include a retrospective of the work of Australian artists Richard and Pat Larter as well as a selection of Canadian super-8 films. State Film Theatre, East Melbourne, October 24, 26 and 27. Tel: 03 9417 3402

Back to the 'Loo

The Museum of Sydney will present a series of talks on Australian films which have documented Sydney as location and character. Session one will consist of a paper by Marilyn Dooley and will feature silent narrative films made between 1896 and 1929. Session two (Graham Shirley) will focus on the changing historical perspective of Sydney as witnessed by film and television up to the 1980s. AGL Theatre, Museum of Sydney, October 24 (session 1) and October 31 (session 2). Tel: 02 9251 5988; email: info@mas.nsw.gov.au

Resources for the Reel World

Reel Resource is a publication listing names, addresses, suppliers, facilities, legal and financial information for Victorian producers working in film, television and multimedia. Call 03 9537 2325 for more information

Beige Assassins

The federal government has announced a review of its support for the film industry, and is calling for submissions (see *OnScreen* editorial). Submissions should be directed to David Gonski, Review of Commonwealth Assistance to the Film Industry, GPO Box, 2154, Canberra, ACT, 2601. For further information Tel: 1800 242 577; fax 06 279 1688; email: Filmenquire@mailhost.dca.gov.au website: <http://www.dca.gov.au/review/torfilm.html> Submission deadline: Friday November 1

Representation and Media

Directors, producers, actors and writers discuss issues of ethnicity and representation in film and television in a forum co-ordinated by Metro TV. Speakers include Clara Law and Annette Shun Wah (director and performer respectively, *A Floating Life*), Lex Marinos, director of *Carnivale*, and Joy Toma, executive producer of *eat carpet* at SBS. Metro television, Sydney Film Centre, Paddington Town Hall, September 25. Tel: 02 9361 5318

Forbidden Files

SBS and the NSW Film and Television Office are currently seeking short film or video scripts inspired and based upon the idea of 'Forbidden Files'—the starting brief for script ideas is as follows: On the eve of the Opening Ceremony of the Sydney 2000 Olympics, eight short films have been stolen from ASIO headquarters. The *Forbidden Files* contained sensitive footage marked 'not for the eyes of the public'. Ideas can be any style or genre—sci-fi, drama, mystery, mockumentary, fantasy, cyber-horror, magic, comedy—and use any form of imaging from film and video to computer animation. The upper limit of the cash component will be \$25,000, with post production facilities provided by *eat carpet*, SBS Television. Entrants must be residents of NSW, and must submit a one page treatment, storyline and/or script to *eat carpet*-Forbidden Files, SBS Television, Locked Bag 028, Crows Nest, NSW, 2065. Entry Deadline: Friday October 18

Truth can only be stated subjectively.

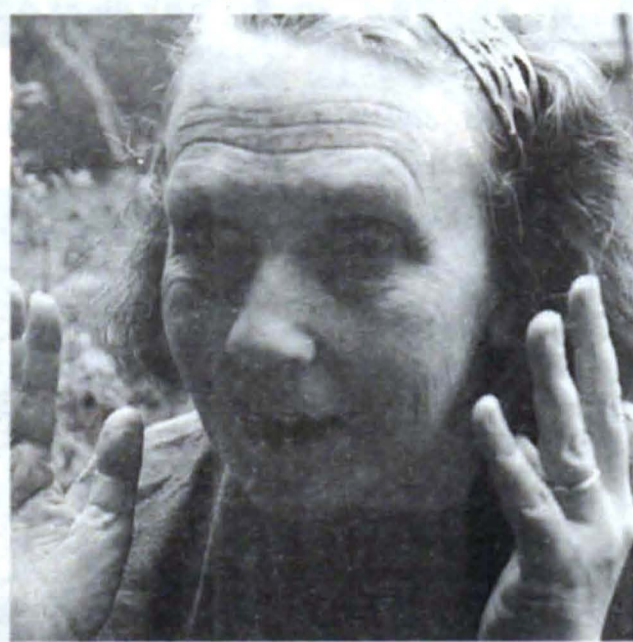
Federico Fellini

The return season of *L'Amante Anglaise* to La Mama is, in a small way, a recognition of the life's work of Marguerite Duras. *L'Amante Anglaise* first appeared as a theatre piece in 1968 after being published as a novel in 1967. It was originally performed at La Mama in 1994. The structure of the Duras play is divided into two parts: Part 1 involves an interview with Pierre Lannes (John Flaus) and it is followed by an interview in Part 2 with his wife Claire Lannes (Brenda Palmer). The two actors alternate their roles, playing both the interrogated and the interrogator. This plurality of voices revolves around the crime of murder, a woman's madness, her husband's indifference, and the quest for truth on the part of firstly a female and then a male investigator. Each story involves a different re-telling and the accumulated experience of the piece is about complicating our understanding of the people concerned and the possibility of knowing what really happened. The text's narrative structure recalls Kurosawa's film *Rashomon*, where the opposing accounts of a rape and a murder are recounted successively by several people. Many of Duras' texts deal with the effects on women of their exclusion from dialogue. Structured around this very issue, *L'Amante Anglaise* suggests Claire Lannes commits murder because of a passionless life, absent of any communication. Claire is isolated in a small town, in a large house, where her husband ignores her but has many affairs. The only other person sharing the house is her deaf mute cousin who works as their servant. There is no-one who hears her, no-one with whom she can speak. And so she kills her cousin, Marie-Therese Bousquet. But the meshing of lives is always more complex than the surface reveals.

In the tiny spartan space which is La Mama, where the actors are to be found already seated when the audience enters, Duras' tightly structured work was powerfully energised by the performances of both Flaus and Palmer. Flaus as Pierre Lannes is abrupt, insensitive, self-possessed, revealing cracks between what he knows about himself and what others can see. As the interrogator he is harsh, aggressive, expansive, unyielding. Palmer is more quietly determined, more curious and more quizzical as she tries to understand the relationship between Claire and Pierre. When she speaks as Claire, her descent into madness is inexorable and compelling.

Anna Dzenis

L'Amante Anglaise. An Investigation by Marguerite Duras (1914-1996). A tribute season directed by Laurence Strangio. La Mama, Melbourne, June 27 - July 14



Brenda Palmer in *L'Amante Anglaise*

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What's new?

RealTime previews La Boite's 1996 *Shock of the New*

Jean-Marc Russ, coordinator of the third *Shock of the New* Festival (October 20-26) at Brisbane's La Boite Theatre is issuing no grand statements this year except to say that this is not a festival of shocking theatre nor is it a festival of the universal "new" (a concept which is as likely to get people steaming from the ears as "truth", "reality" and "the human condition"). *Shock of the New* is simply the response of Brisbane's growing innovative arts scene to La Boite's invitation to use their theatre space and resources to create work that stretches artists and audiences alike. The result is a generous festival of music, theatre, poetry, circus, dance, interactive installation and visual art which explores the possibilities of the theatre space and beyond it, spilling into courtyards, foyers, studios and the street outside.

The program features some 20 events including three works from Access Arts (*Winkin' and Blinkin' and Nod*, a collaboration between choreographer Scotia Monkivitch and a group of disabled and able-bodied performers; *The Stir* a semi-improvised drama dealing with the risky navigation of public space by people in wheelchairs; and *The Lives of Sara*, the story of a woman who survives the near-fatal); Sarah Dobkins' *Box Paintings* in which the audience creates pictures and

then polaroids them; Vulcana Women's Circus in their premiere *Bodies in Space*; *Water Dreams*, a work by visual performance group Sanctum which takes the audience through shallow pools and raging torrents; percussionist Motoyuki Niwa's *Behind the Magic* offering polyrhythmic images and soundscape; more interaction in Evelyn Hartogh's installation *Millennium Mermaid* combining sculpture, slide projection and stamps; and *Philosophising with Socrates* in which the audience is invited to swap philosophy with actor Alan Edwards' impersonation of the thinker. *roarfish* collaborators are performing *lizard aliens*, a multi-art poetry performance and *vinyl kitten vamps*, a cross-dress dyke camp cabaret. *roarfish* also lead the way with a range of new career options for artists: *roarfish* is toni lawson (sonicstylist), lucinda shaw-lamont (storyboard visionpainter), michaela costigan (queer theory assassin) and sally robb (poet lorikeet). Each night of the festival from 7-10.30pm, *Shock* audiences will be offered eight performance/events and for times when too much 'New' is getting to you, a chill zone with internet access and pinball machines. RT

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SHOCK

A body of words

Keith Gallasch surveys the word in recent Sydney performances



In the event of amnesia

Denis Beaubois

At a frustratingly brief but scintillating forum on the last day of CPW7, Nigel Kellaway, William McClure and Open City addressed The Unspeakable in Performance, exploring the limits on what "can be articulated not just what can be spoken", as Victoria Spence put it. Subsequently we've all promised ourselves that it's time for the Sydney performance scene to engage in some decent lengthy debate after all these years of fruitful collaborations, Open Weeks, CPW's and all too brief forums. In the meantime, it has to be said that the word has been in the ascendancy in local performance. After over a decade of focus on the body, on image and music as the sites and means of generating expression, a growing number of performers are working with their voices and with words. These voices are part of the body and come out stuttering, chattering, raging, singing, speaking-singing, heightened and stylised or alarmingly everyday real. These voices are in evidence in numerous performances this year; were heard at The Performance Space's *Eventspace 2—Looking for Spalding* earlier this year; and some have been inspired by the Adelaide Fringe workshops which have brought some notable and unusual voice teachers to Australia over recent years.

Contemporary Performance Week 7 Sidetrack Theatre, September 17-21

Reverse & Ode to God. Victoria Spence, an angry usher (or is she?), collars her unsuspecting audience outside the Sidetrack Theatre: "Just shut up shut up shut up shut up". This is Spence addressing her audience directly as self, as artist, aptly quoting from Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* the Fred MacMurray lines: "I suppose you'll call this a confession when you hear it. Well I don't like the word confession. I just want to set you right about something you couldn't see because it was smack up against your nose". A credo for the performance milieu? Spence spits out anxieties domestic (an unfed cat) and metaphysical ("I looked up God in the dictionary"), moral ("I am an ungrateful, foul mouthed bitch", "it's too late for me, I've already swallowed the bad seed"), artistic ("I've dragged my body kicking and screaming into the foyer of yet another theatre providing pre show morsels of nothing for you to choke on as I do before you enter into the main event of cultural tom foolery that leaves you vaguely bemused, sorta titillated, bored, asleep or screaming for more"). She demands to be heard. The ground shifts nervously. Is she angry with us, with herself? She is funny, she is alarming. Do we want to know this person? "I have a bad attitude and a propensity for mood swings no longer waiting for the time to open my vain, vein mouth so be careful." She lets us in. She lets us into the theatre... "the show will always go on".

Joel Markham's chilling *Betty's Foot*, a true story of a woman whose foot is shot off by an American GI who later proposes to her,

is delicately, sparsely told with a neat natural rhythm accented by the watering of little pot plants from two tea pots. Markham is dressed as Betty, but there is nothing camp about the voice or the body to distract us from Betty herself. Dean Walsh in *Hardware Pt 1* dances naked on high heels singing "My heart belongs to daddy", his body etching into the space sudden passions, slivers of narrative, his voice grabbing the lyrics, speaking, tearing and yelling them, pushing beyond the body. If Joel-Betty is still and reflective, the control in his/her voice evidence of trauma overcome, then Dean's dance, for all its pace, seductive articulation and calculated hostility is always controlled—it's the voice transforming the lyrics over and over that reveals the full hurt and the anger, and that yell shakes you in your seat. Ros Crisp's all too brief *Untitled*, strands the dancer shyly in front of the audience. She wants to dance, the music is reaching her, a half sway, a hand swings, but no... The struggle to dance escalates nervously. Next, the struggle to speak, but finally she stutters out a few ill-formed German expressions... to us, the audience, suddenly aware we're the other in this brittle courtship.

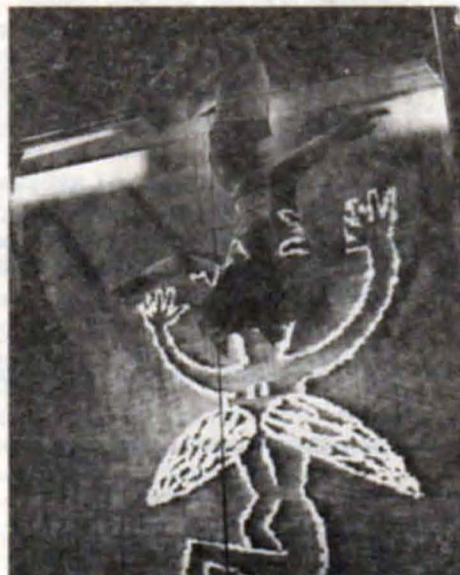
Mémé Thorne sits sun-glassed and elegant on a towel on an imagined beach, monologuing about care and responsibility in a coolly distracted tone, the text (by Regina Heilmann) abstract and circular and finally evasive. She is joined by three dancers from the Aboriginal and Islander Dance Theatre—Linda Bonson, Illona Tim, Sydney Saltner—equally elegant, sun-glassed, one with a copy of the latest Henry Reynolds, dancing the pure pleasure of sunning the body and beach pleasures. This is a Sidetrack-AIDT work-in-progress directed by Don Mamouny, heaping irony on irony on irony, and a foretaste of an unusual work.

A few words: a simple instruction. As part of his developing work "on the incrimination of light", *In the event of amnesia the city will recall*, Denis Beaubois asks the audience to reach under their seats for a word he has placed there and hold it above their heads. In a nuclear strength flash, he photographs them and leaves. The blind audience applauds. This is worth thinking about.

As always, CPW is intimate, communal and provocative—I missed Azaria Universe's *Burn*, a performance of sexual passion that dangerously realised its title as well as forcing some walkouts and heated debate. Gravity Feed gave yet another impressive if formative performance, drilling holes into the theatre walls from the outside and casting thin shafts of light into the theatre for us to glimpse shuffling figures dancing up dust and chalk. *Sites Unheard*, a night of sound/music curated by Rik Rue, was a highlight of the week, in particular the Social Interiors trio piece (Rue, Julian Knowles, Shane Fahey) and Switched on Mellotrons (John Jacobs and Ian Andrews). The resuscitation of these "machines from the dawn of the sampling

era" showed how different they are from computer music making, how clunky, how subtle, how beautiful. Jacobs' engaging demonstration of one of the machine's innards and the showing of an accompanying video were a bonus.

Deborah Leiser, *Hungry* The Performance Space, August 7-18



Deborah Leiser, *Hungry*

Corrie Ancone

In *Hungry*, in which Deborah Leiser hungers for a share in the male-dominated spiritual life of her Australian-Jewish community, voice and text range from informal anecdote to litany ("Imagine a world where all poetry is written by men, about men... Imagine a world where women were forbidden to read men's poetry aloud... Imagine a world where women who read men's poetry aloud were called agents of the devil..."), to letters from a more spiritually liberal New York. Another layer of voice recurs in the repetition of her mother's spat out "tuh tuh tuh" and in the pulsing of "I gossip I gossip I gossip" as Deborah recalls the separation of women from men in the synagogue (another litany: "I sit... I feel... I think... I sit... I watch... I sit... I watch... I think... I want... I want..."). In another layer of text, Deborah—as falling angel—hangs suspended in tumbling letters from Hebraic script in Michael Strums' projected exquisite computer images. And Cantor Janice Cohen sings the Kol Nidrei prayer. *Hungry* is physical theatre rich in images of spiritual craving. Deborah occupies the world of the spirit by swinging herself into and over Tim Moore's huge live-in corrugated iron Torah. *Hungry*'s words are essentially reflective and occasionally physical: in a performance with such potential, a more integrated text and a drawing together of language and body would offer the audience more sense of the transcendence Deborah hungers after in this significant quest for the rights to spiritual practice for Jewish women. (Directed by Tanya Gerstle.)

Sydney Asian Theatre Festival: Mémé Thorne, *Burying Mother* August 6-18, Belvoir St Theatre



Mémé Thorne, *Burying Mother*

Heidrun Löhr

We sit clutching mock bank notes as Mémé burns others and explains Chinese burial rites, the tone relaxed and intimate. This is an informative seduction into the world of death and the unforgotten dead—"Her umbilical cord strangled me dropping out of her. All I desired was everything... I grew up without a mouth. I learnt not to cry. I grew up silent". This is a work in

which a voice is recovered through recreations of moments with mother (violence, threatened suicides), fraught poems of distress (Stop! she said as the child stood weeping/Stop! she said as the hammer swung high/Stop! she said as her toes kept bleeding/Stop she said...). The mother cannot be forgiven, but that does not stop the daughter transforming into her with wig and make up, a frightening experience of identification; it does not prevent the daughter from addressing the mother directly with the accusations that have to be spoken. Some of the audience after the show were insistent that the mother must be forgiven. But in this act of exorcism, the daughter's



Mémé Thorne, *Burying Mother*

Heidrun Löhr

final words can only be "I mourn the absence of her. Yes, I guess that's it, I mourn the absence of her, a mother I always wanted and couldn't have". Perhaps in a later work, as this grieving is worked out, we'll find out what made the mother what she was. The weight of *Burying Mother* is in the word, delivered with an easy naturalism (occasionally forced with too many ums and ers) pitched against a great contemplative stillness and spare potent images like the daughter's back arching up against a rocking chair. Like *Hungry*, *Burying Mother* deserves another life. (Directed by Jai McHenry.)

Last words



Kantanka, *AveAves*

Elsewhere in Sydney, and shortly before going to press, the new Kantanka collective showed considerable prowess with a large cast, the Bondi Pavilion Amphitheatre, and Aristophanes' *The Birds* as *AvesAves*. Physically adroit (some fine bird-acting, deft use of feather dusters as wings, abseiling, playing with fire) and spatially inventive (dune buggies delivering Gods and circuiting the auditorium, roller door revelations), Kantanka show great potential. However, while the choice of *The Birds* allowed for rampant theatricality

• continued page 29

Mary Azar, Leo Tanoi and Tanya Mead; DDT, *Danger*

Tasso Taraboulsi

Death Defying Theatre's *Danger* featured recordings by western Sydney hip hop artists from an inspired CD where the accents of diverse westies make hip hop their own. Three young dancers (Mary Azar, Leo Tanoi, Tanya Mead) perform their driving, articulate, often lyrical interpretations of the songs under the guidance of director Gail Kelly. On launch night at the

• from page 28

(fully exploited by Chris Murphy and a chameleon Michael Cohen), there was little sense of critical distance or contemporaneity. Company B at Belvoir Street take on Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* with a strong sense of the now and the then in design, physicality and delivery—Geoffrey Rush's *Subtle* is the master of language, a poet of a con man, and it is made perfectly clear that others can only fumble with esoteric and mock codes where he flourishes. A witty sprinkling of contemporary terms reminds us of the new linguistic density of our own times. Rush and Hugo Weaving excel in language and body, and over a curiously ragged ensemble.

Border Crossings, in which the native languages of refugee Kurds and Assyrians begin to be replaced by English, and Handycam images of their homelands are supplanted by western suburbs' backyards, was a moving experience. This inventive multimedia work was presented at Belvoir Street for Carnivale by the Fairfield Community Arts Network and performed, scripted and video-ed by young refugees.

Lyric in East Sydney, the words were driven home by the singers themselves performing immediately after *Danger*. A richly celebratory night, new voices reaching out. We'll return to *Danger* in *RealTime* 16.

Last words go to Artaud—for whom words were problematic to say the least—ringing in my ears, as I drive home on successive nights from live performances, car-radioing in to *Radio Eye* and *The Listening Room*. Virginia Madsen's fine recreation of Artaud's *To have done with the judgment of God* performed by Artaud (from the original taped for radio broadcast), is 'subtitled' by a female voice (best listened to on earphones pitched low as it is against Artaud's high toothless cries and intonings) and interwoven with enlightening accounts of the man and his ideas from Jane Goodall and Alan J. Weiss. (More of Artaud in RT#16 when we report on the *One Hundred Years of Cruelty Conference* in Sydney.) It seemed fitting but not 'easy listening' as I reflected on the way home on the shifting relationship between word and body in contemporary performance and between the spoken and the unspeakable.

Arab calligraphy suggests a quality of line analogous to music...using the line not as a decorative, but as a free element...as a key to the unconscious
Husni Radwan, Iraqi artist

The writing is on the walls—slips of fabric and paper cutouts lead us into the open mouth, through the door of the theatre, past white walls, performers as human screens for the projected calligraphy. Flesh made word. We take our seats and are written in. Projections of lips and teeth. Stage left, a tongue of paper unrolls from a fax machine, spilling electronic sounds of printers, typewriters. Sounds become words become music become vibrations taken into performers' bodies. As they move towards us, lines on their clothes slide off as words onto walls and floor. Finding physical forms for the movement of the writing, they run their hands along the letters, trace lines, dots and curves with arms, hips. They move in 'Dubki' rhythms. Vocal orchestration builds to an improvisation on the sounds of 'a', 'b', 'th'.

It seems so much of the language we hear in the theatre has never been through lips, much less hips. What we long to hear is the complexity of rhythm and intonation that we know is possible in human voices. Performance poets lead the way—Amanda Stewart's explosive utterances and half-sentences; the multi-voices of Ania Walwicz identify some of the sounds and textures of Australian voices. [To's inner city patois is something that once heard, yoo rimemba. Theatre experiments generated by multicultural theatre companies like TAQA are articulating more of those voices. In *Writing with the Hip*, particularities of speech are the material of the work, its drama. When Elizabeth Jabour describes the sounds that go missing as another language inhabits her body we feel as deeply for her as in any tragedy.

what are the sounds?

how do they describe

how to make the sounds

with your tongues tonsils

palates cavities

teeth throats

gums breaths

mouth lips

linguists have scientific descriptions

but

we learn we know

we hesitate we stutter

in the process of rejection

we silence ourselves

we swallow our sounds

we are silenced

by the presence

by the disappearance

by the absence

of the 'ghayn'

of the 'daad'

of the 'khaa'

of the 'ayn'

ghayn daad khaa ayn



Writing with the Hip, TAQA Theatre

In devising *Writing with the Hip* the performers (Saleh Saqqaf, Alissar Gazal, Elizabeth Jabour), working with dramaturg Barry Gamba, researched not only the calligraphy and phonetics of the Arabic language but also (with choreographer Fiona Munro) the 'Dubki', a gliding, stamping Middle Eastern dance. Composer Ismail Abdi introduced 'Derbaki' percussion exercises that allowed them to translate musical rhythms into a phonetic language. The performers talked about their individual relationships with the language. One is a fluent Arab speaker to whom English is a second language; another is bilingual, crossing easily between two languages; a third represents the second generation to whom Arabic is the second language. These separate journeys were transcribed across the Australian landscape connecting and interconnecting mathematically like an Islamic design.

A fourth performer, Eliza Chidiac who began the rehearsal process with the others, continues her collaboration in the form of a faxed correspondence from the West Bank where she now resides. In one powerful scene, the performers appear touchy, their skins sensitive to the words they are reading from the page. They avoid contact as slide images of prickly pear (symbol of patience because that's what you need in order to peel it) take the place of the calligraphy. In Palestine, this weed is used to mark out the land. Borders are bulldozed by Israelis but the plant grows back—like the land re-writing itself.

TAQA Theatre began in 1990 with the aim of developing innovative, contemporary Australian theatre with a strong Arab-Australian perspective. Since then they have created two works: *Al Qamareya (The Moongate)*, 1990 and...and they called her *Silence*, 1992. *Writing with the Hip* premiered as a work in progress at the 1993 Multicultural Theatre Festival. It is an eloquent piece that speaks volumes but it's still a short work that could do with more development. I had a strong sense that if TAQA keep moving along these lines they will find much much more to write.

Virginia Baxter

Writing with the Hip, TAQA Theatre, Belvoir Street Theatre Downstairs, Sydney, September 5-18



In the event of amnesia

Denis Beaubois

...OF THE NEW!

Spilling over the walls

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According to Lesley Watson, director of the Actors College of Theatre and TV, few students enrolling these days for their three year fully accredited Diploma course have dreams of clamorous agents and glamorous careers. Most of the 80 students at the college are in their mid-20s—some are older, and these days they're likely to have a much more realistic idea of what constitutes a working life in theatre, film and television. As well as offering a range of vocal and movement skills, the college's Diploma course encourages students to look at performance in its social context and to create their own work opportunities by initiating projects. One of last year's third year graduates chose a project on the subject of teenage suicide. With tuition, she researched the subject, came up with a creative concept, a theatre in education performance on the multiple effects of suicide; budgeted the project plus a tour and put the creative talents of her fellow students to work for a forum presentation. Now her project looks like being taken up by an organisation developing educational resources to deal with the issue of suicide in schools. For further information on the college's full and part-time courses phone 02 9212 6000 or fax 02 9281 3964.

An insistence on red

Terri-ann White feels the pulse of performance and installation at the *Art, Medicine and the Body* project

muscle and blood

The *Art Medicine and the Body* project, a long-term dedication by a group made up initially of visual artists, came together in August at PICA with an exhibition that used the whole space, a symposium that was over-subscribed weeks before the event, and a performance that was presented only twice to full houses. A rollicking success.

I attended the Sunday night performance. The performance space was opened up and resembled a marketplace. Doctors and nurses at the front door, some of us given appointments on the way in. Blood pressure tests, questioning about our dreams, last bowel movements, favourite colours. A mix of what might happen in a consultation, a mix of the fanciful and the banal. Some lucky people moved straight through to the food and drink, refreshments that included stir fry cooking, and cigarette girls giving away items of need.

Performances were segmented into discrete pieces: solos, group devised, animations with voices, stories and bodies. The performers included visual artists, musician-composers, an anaesthetist, nurses, performers. They traded in stories and held me compelled. Direct, deeply felt stories about connections with people,

about being a night duty nurse and caring for a rebellious old woman; about losing a patient during surgery, reviving and then losing him for good. As it was the night before my mother was scheduled for surgery, this account had a certain edge.

Aside from the personal stories of intersections between bodies and the practices of making art and doing medicine, of having a body and living with it, there were displays of inventions and bravado. A device requiring the entire group to manoeuvre and coordinate a mechanical arm to pick up a wine glass. Full of thrills and, inevitably, spills.

Erin Hefferon walked a tightrope. So taut was the mood of performer and audience, the threshold of pain and the timing of any decision to abandon it that it was a great relief when the end came. As a study in the body's tensions and fears it was remarkable.

The night carried many sharp and fine moments. My problem was with time management: often there were lags between those sharp moments, or time for setting up when experiments failed, or just for setting up, and these periods were not contemplative ones but more distractions from the momentum, a loss of effect.

excavating loss

At the risk of slighting the rest of the elaborate work made in the exhibition, I would like to focus on one work. Judy Durey's installation *Mother. Martyr. Fy Mam. Mair. Merthyres*. A work that excavates loss. Grief. The daughter reclaiming her birth mother and their separate stories, thinking about naming and identity, the moulding through memories, the missed chances. Giving away a baby, your only baby, so late in life, and then regretting it. Being that baby: living the drama as an adult. A chain reaction of sorrow through to the child. Adoptive parents both loving and cherishing a child they couldn't have, gained

miraculously because someone else couldn't keep hers. A tricky business.

Durey's work is so complex in its layering of story and effect, of the repercussions of relinquishing that loss. Her visual images and the experience of being in her space are breathtaking. We sit at a table replete with faces and shades of red: wine-red, jellies moulded into the letters of the name of her work—Mother.

This insistence on red in the slide show; firstly blood, bowls of it, staining calico sheets, and a twisty twirling umbilical cord as a sign of the production of a baby. And through the narrative, that red turns into raspberries, a pulpy mash, the product of the birth mother's labour and shared in memoriam by her family and her daughter come to meet them. I will not forget the anguish of her letters to the adoption office after the event, the recognition of a mistake, "I cannot settle", wanting back her secret baby, born far from her village in Wales. The isolation of that grief.

The work was layered with all of this detail of lives, presented boldly with big images on the wall and a soundtrack of voices, a pile of preserved rose petals in the corner. We sit at the table and as the weeks of the exhibition pass, the smell of the wine in the glasses turns pungent, the blood letters grow mould. The surprising intimacies of the work: I was confused by the soundtrack when it included panting, heavy breathing, noise through pleasure. Confused between my recognition of sounds of lovemaking and the bloody images up there of birth, the child on the nipple, her smooth skin. The cherished baby.

Art, Medicine and the Body Project, August 1 - September 1, PICA, Perth

Terri-ann White is a fiction writer from Perth currently teaching writing at the University of Western Australia and working on a second book

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Triassic tribulations

Jacqueline Millner reviews the 10th Biennale of Sydney

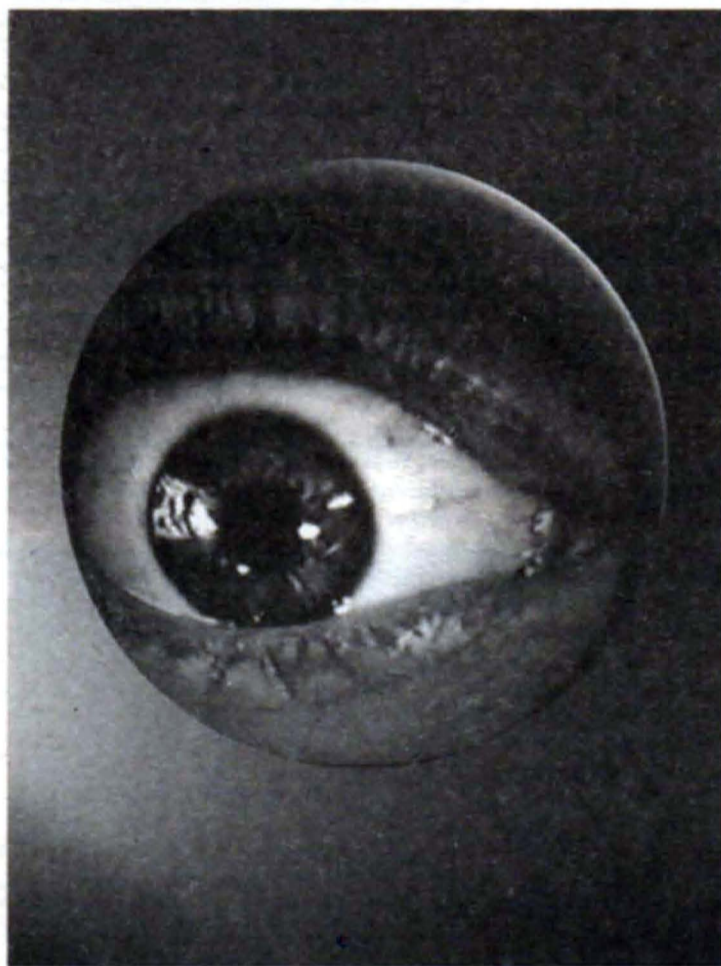
Jurassic Technologies Revenant: the title itself evokes a certain saurian inertia, sluggishness inhering in the very choice of words and ultimately suffusing the experience of the 10th Biennale of Sydney as a whole. First touted as *Screen Options* with all the breathless enthusiasm that accompanies 'the new', at the eleventh hour the new media juggernaut abruptly screeched to a halt, and the Biennale swung around to face the past and not the future. Clearly money was the issue: high-end technologies, the focus of the original *Screen Options*, are expensive and museums and even private cultural institutions like the Biennale are strapped for cash, particularly when it comes to contemporary art. But artistic director Lynne Cooke, an ex-pat Australian based in New York, sought to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, and announced that the decision to switch the focus from high-end reproductive technologies to a consideration of 19th century, "time-honoured approaches to art-making" was motivated rather by a realisation that the far more challenging examples of contemporary arts were issuing from practitioners in traditional media.

Given both that the overwhelming majority of contemporary artists are still working with 'traditional media', and that Australia has yet to fully experience the range of new media art, Cooke's statement sounds less like a curatorial premise than an apologia for failure to secure sufficient institutional support to stage the original high-tech theme. No doubt, an awareness of its troubled lead-up inflected my first impressions of the Biennale—perhaps the work in general, with some notable exceptions, might not have looked so tired had the dream of high-tech virtuosity betrayed not haunted my experience. As it was, the vast majority of work on exhibit comprised rather pedestrian photography that failed to excite and provoke in the manner expected of Australia's premier showcase of contemporary international art.

While the Biennale does not foreground new media works, such works haunt this exhibition like an excluded other, their absence almost palpable in the choice by some featured artists to engage with self-consciously rudimentary industrial technologies such as the slide projector, the photocopier, and the lightbulb. A certain nostalgia pervades some of the works—even the better works—here, nostalgia perhaps for a time when the inexorable momentum of technological change and the hype surrounding it did not apply continuous pressure on artists to hop on the bandwagon or risk redundancy. Nostalgia perhaps also for a time when the artist could command the contemplative attention of the audience enough to evince a deep psychological or even visceral response. Douglas Gordon in *24 hour psycho*, a work which comprises the original Hitchcock film slowed down to just under a frame per second so that it takes 24 hours to run, together with Claude Closky's *En Avant*, a manically edited video of dramatic zoom footage from an impressive number of Hollywood action films, remind us of the impatience which seems inherent to our consumption of culture. Similarly, Stan Douglas' piece *Overture*—which links images derived from early filmic experiments of an ever-travelling train emerging from shadow into a sublime mountainscape—evinces a nostalgia for cyclical time.

Not all, nor even a majority, of the works here attain to this level of evocation, but exceptions prove the rule. In his installations, Tony Oursler typically animates anthropomorphic but static objects by way of video projections. The overriding metaphor is that of the body

invaded, written by the technology of the spectacle, as in *Three Faces*—a grotesquely large globular eye blinking with vulnerability. Oursler's animation of the inorganic also occurs through use of spoken soundtracks, which often work to resist the colonisation of the visual. *Talking Light* is composed of a forlorn naked bulb hanging in an otherwise empty space, flickering on and off in synch with the most subtle nuances of a spoken text. Each gurgle and strangled cough, each gasp and whisper is manifested in the wavering energy of light, a simple but quite beautiful echo of one technology in another, sound as light, voice as power. In his characteristic fashion, Oursler has animated this inorganic object with a wrenching, pathetic presence, all alone—if plugged in to its power-source—left to voice its fears to an empty room: "don't turn out the light, I can't stand the darkness...yellow is dangerous; stay away from yellow. Stay close to pink; pink is good". In other words, flesh is good; the touch of skin, a body against a body, that is

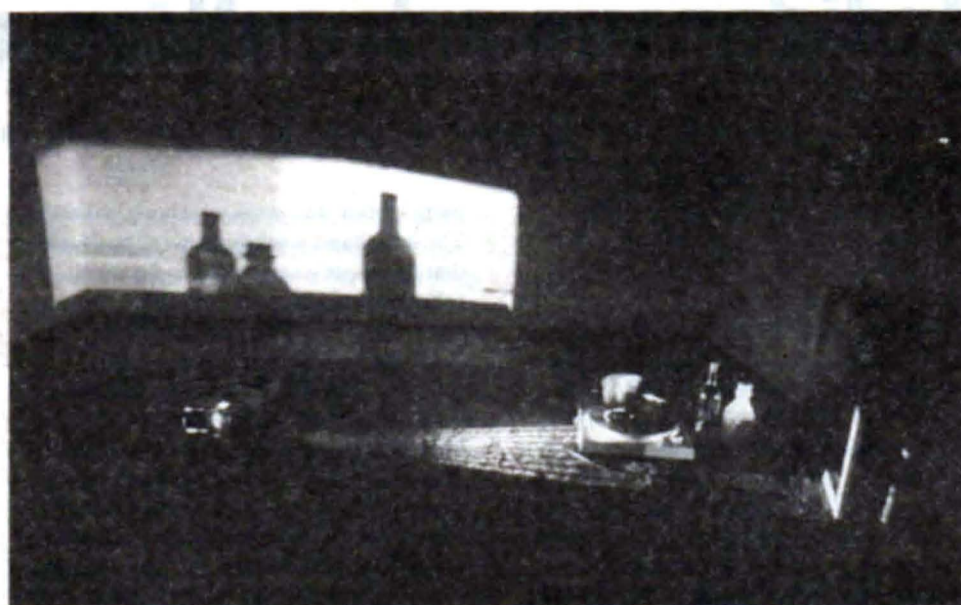


Tony Oursler, *The Three Faces of ...*
1996, video projection and acrylic on fibreglass sphere, 45.7cm diameter

what this disembodied presence craves, as if articulating a horror at the disembodiment which the ultimate technologies promise.

In *bearings*, Ann Hamilton brings together video—a grasping hand repeatedly reaching for a ring that forever evades its grip—and kinetic sculpture—a pair of monumental organza crinolines which swing and sweep about you in a pleasant rush of air and rustle of fine cloth. One wonders whether Hamilton intended to foreground the uneasy fit between these two media, perhaps to underline that it is immediacy and a confrontation with materiality that often go to create a memorable gallery experience, for the separate elements remain largely mute and resistant to one another. While the elegant skirts disorientate you with their scale and intrigue you with their evocation of secret, erotic places, the video reads like a somewhat too literal metaphor for the inevitability of imperfect understanding, irrespective of the 'perfection' of communications technology.

In describing the work of Nan Goldin, Elizabeth Sussman argues that such "straight-forward" works "now appear fresh and new because they seem part of the photographic tradition of representation, craft, and popular appeal



Eulalia Valldosera, *Love's Sweeter than Wine (Three Stages in a Relationship)*
1993-94, 5 slide projectors, record players, mirrors, carpets, glasses of red wine, and bottles of milk, water, trementine, and soap, dimensions variable

that has been questioned". The juxtaposition of image and popular song, *All By Myself*, produces a work of "brave sentimentality", which "honestly shows the artist in pain and despair". To me this kind

of work and accompanying justification most closely attain to the exhibition's title: truly Jurassic. Sussman's intimation that work of this kind can somehow evade the problematisation of straight biography and gestures made in the name of personal angst by postmodernist critiques seems to me rather curious. Indeed, Sussman's assertion of freshness cannot rescue this work from a tired over-familiarity and an embarrassing lack of self-criticism.

By contrast, Eulalia Valldosera's use of the slide projector, along with an unequivocally superseded piece of technology, the turntable, in her series of installations entitled *Love's Sweeter than Wine (Three Stages in a Relationship)*, is poignant and effective. These old machines read like the dregs of a broken affair. The turntable and the projector, together with a series of banal domestic and disposable objects such as a pair of plastic cups half-filled with red wine, play out a bathetic little interchange, evoked by the work's subtitles: *Play it again, Neither with you nor without you, and It's when we are alone that we can be together*. The installation is arranged on the floor, as if to draw attention to the diminutive nature of the drama being enacted. The cups twirl on the turntable, casting the shadows of a joyless dance on the wall, their repetitive movements performed without will but out of a tired compulsion. Unlike Goldin's, this work marries the awkward physical presence, nostalgic appeal and obsolescent overtones of the technology with its putative concern, namely the banality of romantic love.

The 10th Biennale of Sydney provided some opportunity to reflect upon the relationship between the artist, his or her tool or technology, and the resultant work. It is interesting, however, that participants in the Biennale forum, including American artist Glenn Ligon, Lynne Cooke and

visiting American academic David Joselit, all shared the view that new media simply provide more tools for the artist, and that, like any media, they can be used eloquently or to little effect depending on "what the artist has to say". This strikes me as surprisingly ingenuous given indications that the new media are qualitatively different in terms of the way they shape our sense of space and time, lending themselves more readily, ultimately, to simulation than representation. It also strikes me as a surprising disregard for the body of criticism which has sought to problematise the dichotomy between form and content. Certainly, the more successful works on offer here cannot but betray the inseparability of technological means and subject-matter.

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Indigenous art: culture or industry?

Suzanne Spinner reports on a success for culturally sensitive conferencing

What became *Kaltja Business* began as *Aboriginal Arts in Review* or *Interfaces: Aboriginal Arts in a Cross Cultural Context*. The convenor, Michiel Dolk, Lecturer in Art History at the Northern Territory University (NTU), obtained grants of \$75,000 from DEET and \$5000 from the Australia Foundation of Culture and Humanities. In its original incarnation, this conference may have been just another whitefella talkfest. However, in the lead up period it was realised that if the event was to be meaningful and of real benefit to Aboriginal artists, the focus and resource priorities had to radically shift.

Hilary Furlong was appointed coordinator. The name of the conference was changed and its scope widened to encompass an ambitious and exciting workshop program designed to expose artists from remote communities to print making, ceramics, photography and information technology, and set to culminate in a modular mural. The School of Fine Arts voted to suspend all classes for a week so that staff and students could participate and attend.

To fund these changes, including copyright and intellectual property forums, practical workshops and the mural project, additional funding was obtained from ATSIC, the Association of Northern and Kimberley Aboriginal Artists and the NT Education Department. Ultimately, of a total budget of close to \$125,000, more than 60 per cent went directly to support the

participation and work of Aboriginal artists. The mural and workshops were instigated so that the event would result in "symbolic and real returns for the Aboriginal artists whose work and lives are the whole reason for the conference in the first place".

Kaltja Business was scheduled to coincide with the announcement of the National Aboriginal Art Awards at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, an event which draws everybody who is anybody in the Aboriginal art scene to Darwin. The workshop program ran over the first three days, then the conference proper for the last three days, culminating with the sale of work produced in the workshops.

Artists from communities across the top end of the Northern Territory and the Kimberley region as well as from Central Australia were invited and a program was planned for 45 artists, although that number was to grow to 83 artists from ten communities. The vision of the event was grand and the attention to detail immense—bough shelters were constructed and tarps laid on the ground in an area alongside the Fine Arts Building; on the facing wall as a backdrop, grids were placed for the mural so that the artists could work outside on the ground, under shade, in community groups alongside but separate from each other.

Uniform pre-stretched canvasses were available as required and the artists got painting. And paint they did: the mural

grew daily, with varying arrangements and juxtapositions of the paintings. The atmosphere of quiet concentrated work was powerful; to see so many artists from so far afield painting in the one place was awe inspiring. When not painting, the artists came and went to and from the adjacent ceramics, print making and photography studios to learn about and work in media which many had never tried before.

On the fourth day, the conference began. A large shade cloth was erected in the middle between the bough shelters. Chairs and a microphone were brought in and the rest of us got on with serious talk about art. But the bough shelters remained and many people kept on painting, although just as often the artists sat in their groups talking to each other and keeping a watchful eye and ear on the talk. Thoughtful and culturally sensitive planning meant that the art making and the talking about were not exclusive but happened side by side in a way that enabled great overlap and cross fertilisation without compromising the integrity of either. What this structure preserved was flexible boundaries between the artists and the conferees and everyone was able to wander between activities. As well as more than 80 artists, 150 people were registered for the conference but the organisers fed no less than 300 people each day.

The spatial geography and sequencing of events contributed greatly to the success of the whole. The other galvanising factor was

the external politics—the conference happened to coincide with news of the pre-budget cuts to ATSIC, upon which these artist communities depend for their continued survival. Suddenly the event took on an unprecedented cultural/political imperative. *Kaltja Business* became the forum for discussions about these quite desperate issues and a rallying point for organised action and lobbying. The symbolism and clout of such a united show of the strength of Aboriginal art would not have been lost on anyone present, including politicians and arts bureaucrats.

The success of the event can be measured in many ways, from the quality of the speakers and the papers given, to the strength of the art work produced. The success of the business side is evident in the financial returns to the artists. Orders were taken for nearly \$13,000 worth of prints and \$3500 worth of painted ceramics were sold.

However, what best symbolises the conference's success was the mural comprising some 60 paintings by a range of senior painters from these far flung communities. Everyone had painted on the theme of *meeting place* and all the artists agreed it was important the works remain together. They decided to leave the paintings with the organisers while funds were sought for its purchase. Currently the chancellor of NTU has recommended that the University Foundation purchase it and major corporate sponsors have been contacted to provide the \$60,000 required. At this stage things look promising.

Copies of papers and transcripts of the discussions and forums may be ordered from: Kaltja Business, NTU School of Fine Arts, Darwin, NT 0909

Islands unwrapped

Neil Roberts interviews the co-curator of the National Gallery's latest "pushy" contemporary show

The exhibition is bleeding. *Islands: Contemporary Installations from Australia, Asia, Europe and America*, currently at the National Gallery in Canberra, doesn't respect the normally discrete spaces of the museum. Curators Michael Desmond and Kate Davidson have purposefully situated the installations throughout the various internal galleries, creating archipelagos of context and association. Similarly, the materials refuse to be contained—the smell of sump oil and herbs permeates the gallery; the muffled drone from Bill Viola's video work *Interval 1995* is felt as a bodily rumble long before you enter its darkened room; intermittently you hear the chitter of Lyndal Jones' finches. Viewer bleeds into audience, audience bleeds into participant. It is an exhibition that asks you how you are feeling.

In the catalogue, the curators describe installation as a way of making art that responds to the contemporary condition of loss of contact with the real. I asked Michael Desmond, *was this a factor in the decision to stage Islands?*

MD Yes it was, but equally that's a way of justifying our choice of works. There are plenty of installations you could choose that wouldn't deal with that issue. In the end this particular group of works has a strong feeling of life force about it, which is interesting in the sense that it is very much the antithesis of the Sydney Biennale. It is about the joy of different kinds of material, about the joys of engaging all the senses if possible. Someone said there is no irony in this show and in that sense it is very affirmative.

NR *There's a distance in irony but Islands is about being face to face with matter, about experiencing the installations through the body.*



Annette Messenger, *Penetration* 1994-94, stuffed fabric, angora yarn

MD Those are the basics of the exhibition. At first this seemed like a flimsy platform to build on but in the end you are driven by those very broad impulses that you can't always announce as the reason for doing something. You tend to throw up a more defensible position because the fact of something simply teasing the senses doesn't seem justification enough. You can't just talk about engaging the senses—in this show the thrill is in the seeing and you have to see the works because a reproduction is absolutely insufficient. Seeing photos of Richard Wilson's piece involving a vast area of black sump oil is not what the effect of being in it is like. It's like being on a diving board in the middle of nowhere and it's quite precipitous and thrilling. It's a work which epitomises the concerns of the show. It's transformative.

NR *Your notion of installations as displaced objects begs the question of whether the museum itself is just an installation on a grand scale. Do you think this is so? Are museums never able to join the 'real world', as you say of installations?*

MD It seems to me that only in the last twenty years have artists been making works just for museums. Before that, all of the objects in a collection were displaced from a domestic or other environment. *Blue Poles* for example wasn't made for a museum and in fact it probably looked its best when it was in Ben Heller's apartment in New York. But the museum itself also has the qualities of an installation: it excludes the outside world, it announces itself beforehand, it transforms space and it's experienced through walking and viewing.

NR *I'm interested in the way a show like Islands addresses the borders between institutional power and the civic authorities. I'm thinking of examples like the removal by police of the gun used in Chris Burden's piece in the Virtual Reality show and the problems you've mentioned in relation to the Fire Brigade and the thousands of litres of sump oil in Richard Wilson's work. Where is the boundary for you—where does your authority defer to an outside power?*

MD As you pointed out earlier, the museum as a whole offers an experience and each work operates both independently within that experience and also leans on other works around it. The museum as institution operates like that as well—we're autonomous in a lot of ways but equally we depend on our cooperation with other institutions, the city of Canberra, essential services and so on. We've had a number of issues to deal with. The Fire Department has a duty to be concerned about a large amount of a petroleum-based product in a confined space. Bill Viola's work has sound levels of over 100 decibels. We're not trying to be antisocial or to damage

people—we want to offer an experience but not one that's permanently debilitating!

NR *The gallery's promotion of Islands doesn't seem to be on a par with the significance and ambitiousness of the projects presented. These are major works. Is there a problem with support for contemporary practice here or is it the marginal nature of installation itself that makes it difficult?*

MD I think that in part it's driven by economics. Blockbusters like Turner or Rubens feed the other things we want to do beyond the operating budget and it's hard to make money from a contemporary art show. This is the second of our pushy contemporary shows. *Virtual Reality* was the first and there was the feeling at that time in the institution that it wasn't as appreciated as much as it might have been. In doing this show I'm trying to convince people that you can have an exhibition that is popular and still engage with contemporary practice. I don't have a problem with popularity but we had to work out a strategy for getting around that economic base—letting people know as cheaply as possible, distributing information through the Gallery's Education Department networks and so on. Anyway, in the end the success of a show is word of mouth, and no amount of publicity can salvage something that's a dog.

Islands at the National Gallery of Australia August 31 - October 27 includes work by Joseph Beuys, Christian Boltanski, Fiona Foley, Rosalie Gascoigne, Alfredo Jaar, Lyndal Jones, Annette Messenger, Montien Boonma, Ramingining artists, Bill Viola, Richard Wilson and Yukinori Yanagi

Neil Roberts is an artist who lives and works in Queanbeyan NSW. He also runs the intermittent Galerie Constantinople, one of the few alternative spaces around Canberra

Camouflage and forgery

Jim Moss muses on two recent exhibitions in Adelaide

Early this century Marcel Duchamp exhibited non-art objects, in 1959 Yves Klein exhibited an empty gallery, and in the following decade Robert Rauschenberg exhibited an erased drawing of de Kooning's. This dialectical interplay between presence and absence, visibility and invisibility, transparency and opacity has remained current in art since art's own disappearing act in the late 60s.

Conceptual or minimalist art constituted the endgame aesthetic of modernist art. This was art largely divested of its material body, often expressed via an absolute critique of materialist aesthetics and taste. Post-object art, as it became known, was an art form that fetishised and essentialised the concept, or the abstract value of art, and, in so doing, exhibited a sort of Buddhist or Duchampian indifference to the aesthetic process of "just filling in".

Within the current 'post' scheme of things, post-post-object art has abandoned its opposition to the mind/body dualism inherent in modernist art discourse, and has instead entered into negotiations for sites in between, not just in between the varieties of art process, but between varieties of cultural practice.

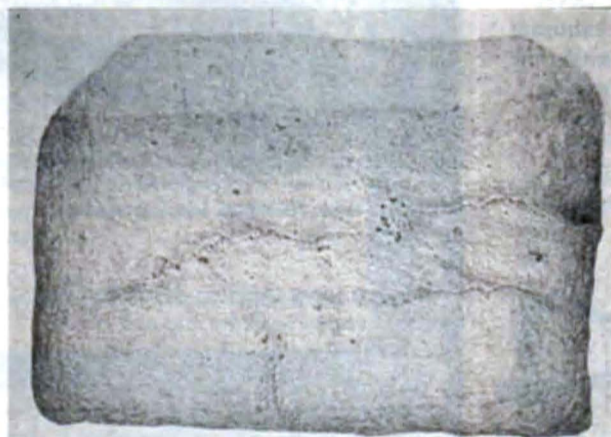
Facilities engages with this highly discursive and multi-layered enterprise, and, as is the nature of such engagements, does so at its own risk. A significant element of *Facilities* is the foregrounding of the 'white cube', that most dominant motif of the art institution. While this could be read as something of a cliché, a counter response may be that contemporary art spaces are pragmatic places and any residual ideology lies only in the mind of the viewer.

However, due to the nature of the "... sliding scale of materiality and transparency" (M. Desmond, *let it drift*, catalogue essay, Contemporary Art Centre), what is foregrounded in *Facilities* is not so much the white cube as site, but as a function of camouflage into which the work can melt and then re-emerge as minimalist quotations or murmurings about things past and present.

The simultaneous signification of transparency and opaqueness opens the work to a variety of responses. At one level *Facilities* can be read as a stylised recreation of minimalist aesthetics "... hang(ing) on

the edges of perception, imbued with a cerebral beauty" (J. Harris, *let it drift*). Further investigation will reveal numerous appropriations and "references to...sculpture, architectural details, functional objects, the screen, the photograph, negative spaces and fields" (C. Chapman, *let it drift*). Another level reveals that invisible in the work are the boundaries that previously delineated the variety of cultural forms and tendencies that are offered.

In his use of the iconic space of the gallery as a site, Breynard is far from complementing this space by 'filling it in'. Indeed, his is a post-aesthetic pleasure that is evident in the text of this work. *Facilities* haunts the gallery like an (anti)aesthetic poltergeist purging it of coherence and flinging contradiction about in one instance, and in the next, invoking an atmosphere in which everything is profound and multi-dimensional.



Aldo Iacobelli, *Graft, Drawing #44*

Whereas Shane Breynard's work shows a concern with surfaces and the spaces between surfaces as they interact with each other in architectural space, Aldo Iacobelli fixes exclusively on surface. Part of a larger body of minimalist figure and pattern drawing rendered through a faint embroidery of dots, a series of pencil rubbings of masonry blocks is particularly prominent in his recently exhibited work.

This artist has a light touch; the drawings are barely there, and yet they are perfectly

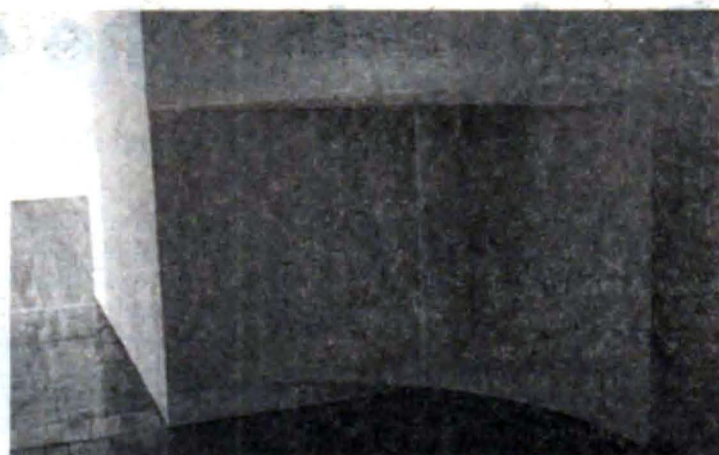
discernible. Not technically drawings, these images are rubbings, traces of a surface that is reproduced as image. But these images are other than just traces. Through some sleight of hand they appear as three-dimensional representations of the blocks rather than simply as a series of textured surfaces shown in relief.

Rubbings, while not actually employed by Duchamp, would have fitted his repertoire perfectly. As process, rubbings abolish the problematics of "just filling in". Rubbing negates aesthetic choice as an artistic option: the image appears spontaneously, its look corresponding to the nature of the rubbing tool and the

pressure applied. The emergent image is a perfect reproduction of the surface below the paper, although it is a mimetic reversal, a negative of the 'positive' underneath. No aesthetic skill is required to generate an uncannily realistic ghost-like surface that can appear as an expressionistic flourish or as a finely honed representation.

However, the illusion of an object in perspectival space cannot be generated from the process of rubbing. While the textured surface reproduces the appearance of that which lies beneath the paper, the form of the object cannot be circumscribed in three dimensional totality as the surface of the paper is always flat. Even if one was to bend the paper around four sides of the block for the purpose of rubbing, opened out again the image would only be of a flat continuous surface. To bend the paper over the top and bottom as well as the four sides of the block would result in the mathematically flattened plan of an image awaiting cutting-out and reconstruction into three-dimensional form.

And yet Iacobelli has achieved the



Shane Breynard, *Facilities*

technical impossibility of a three-dimensional representation on a flat surface ostensibly via the process of pencil rubbing. Pondering the anomaly, I was reminded of The Dauphin's Map, a 16th century Portuguese map of the east coast of Australia that depicts an unrecognisable topography. The distortion results not from sloppy cartographical skills but from the application of flat-earth mathematics to the spherical surface of the earth. If subjected to spherical earth mathematics, the antique map can be transformed into the modern coastline. One cannot however apply the 'flat-earth' process of rubbing to an object and get a 'spherical' representation: one gets only a distortion that requires the paper surface to be literally modelled from a flat surface to a three-dimensional shape.

On the nature of rubbings as images, I was reminded of the Borges fable about the cartographers who create a map the very same scale of the empire it represents. Rubbings reproduce exactly the surface underneath. Scale is not a consideration in this mode of reproduction, for the rubbed image is exactly the size and scale of the surface it acknowledges. It is this inherent exactitude of recording, the potential of the rubbing to become the blueprint of the surface that it covers, that evokes this reverie of mapping. Unlike Borges' fabulous cartographers in scale only, Iacobelli has woven the illusion of the original into the mechanical requirement of the rubbing process, while maintaining the surface appearance of perfect forgeries.

Facilities, Shane Breynard, Contemporary Art Centre of SA, Aug 2-25 1996
Graft, Aldo Iacobelli, Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide, Aug 14 - Sept 8 1996

Minor triumphs

Jyanni Steffensen on the conjunction of Adelaide art and the crumbling of empire

Triumph is a scaled-up re-presentation of a souvenir model—a 3cm high bronze paper weight—of Paris' Arc de Triomphe. Recreated using 1.6 tonnes of wet unfiltered terracotta clay over a supporting timber framework, this arch, at 4.5m x 4.5m x 1.7m, is monumentally larger than the original paper weight model and infinitesimally tinier than the actual thing. *Triumph*, which will clearly crack-up and crumble unless periodically re-wetted, evidences its makers' *modus operandi* (grubby fingerprints) all over it. With post-colonial insouciance, collaborators Richard Grayson and Stephen Wigg consent to the disintegration, the balkanization, of the sign of Empire. Their structure both testifies affectionately to a familiar 'world' and performs a process of demystification by stripping this timeless Parisian stone-and-dome of its monstrosity. More impressionistic than ornamented, and sans the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the Grayson/Wigg model falls negligently and swiftly into ruins.

The actual Arc de Triomphe offers Paris to the viewer (from its roof), and to the reader. According to Roland Barthes, Maupassant often ate in the restaurant in the Eiffel Tower although he didn't care for the food. Atop the Tower, at one with it, Maupassant observed that he occupied the only site in Paris where he didn't have to look at the metallic thing (Barthes, "The Eiffel Tower", in *A Roland Barthes Reader*). Barthes also concedes that from the Tower one cannot see the Arc (p. 243). Two of the most symbolically powerful signs in the signifying chain of 'Frenchness' are elided from Maupassant's lunch-time panorama.

To lovers of signification the Arc might be read as pure sign. Apart from its function as a signifier of 'Frenchness', it means everything (and perhaps nothing) given enough time. It might be said to belong, with the Tower, to a global language of travel. Unlike the tower or stairway which imaginarily sutures heaven and earth, the arch is a simple line joining



Richard Grayson and Steven Wigg, *Triumph*, 1996 Samuel Noonan

earth to earth/death. Disengaged from the Napoleonic considerations which authorised its construction, its miniaturised presentation as an art object in the gallery

reveals its profound uselessness as a mythic object—phallic or historical. Architecturally it is an image of an uninhabitable or imaginary object. Barthes, according to Susan Sontag, is one of the great modern refusers of history. In all his writings he never mentions the word 'war'.

The Grayson/Wigg arc of *Triumph* is ex-centric, displaced. In the University of South Australia Art Museum it lives on its own, outside its Parisian context (a famous roundabout; the largest triumphal arch in the world). For this spectator (artist, writer, theorist) there is the pleasure of instant gratification (recognition) of the Parisian object—symbol of the great adventure of desire, the life of the mind. There is also gleeful pleasure to be had witnessing the Symbol's crumbling away. Desire, like meaning, is not necessarily monogamous.

Triumph, University of South Australia Art Museum August 1-31 1996

Performing the darkened canvas

Colin Hood writes on theatre, painting and the erased drawings of Jacqueline Rose

Come at last to this point/look back on my passion/And realised that I have been like a blind man/Who is unafraid of the dark
Yosano Akiko

The illustrator-scribbler Constantine Guys collapses panic-stricken on his stool and begins to write. In a battle between the self who has not written and the future maker of marks on paper, other objects in the dank little room go ballistic. Water flies up from his glass. Both pencil and quill stab at the paper in sympathetic frustration. A day in the life of Baudelaire's *Painter of Modern Life*.

A century later, the American artist Robert Rauschenberg presents to the world a work entitled *Erased de Kooning*. He puns on the orthodoxies of post-war American abstraction. A wicked nod and a wink in the direction of Mallarmé, Malevich, Greenberg—and every painterly ego run amok in booze and bad libido. Barnett Newman was also getting fed up with the dogma and testosterone-excess of performative painting. "The New York School", he was to comment, "exists only in California".

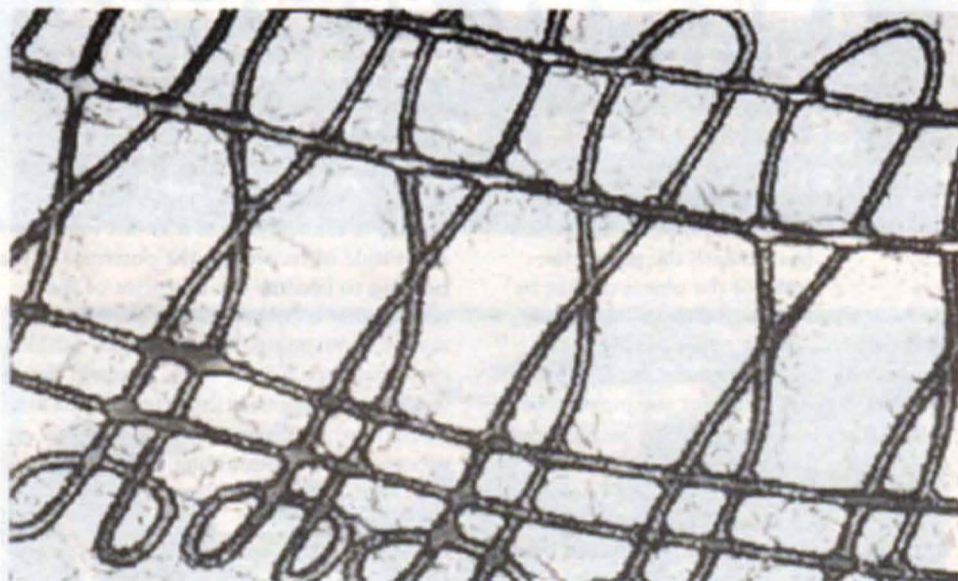
A glance in our direction exemplifies some familiar aspects of this over-driven masculine predicament (call it predilection). You see it in every twist and turn of Mike Parr's not so cleverly crafted career: a

time, time 'leisurely' devoured in marking, rubbing and, finally, installing her works.

Bois was somehow disposed—through the artist's 'failure' to articulate her intentions—to understand this activity, this theatre of mixed means, as "Following the Line". What is the name of this particular series?" he asks, desiring a name for the work as well as a name for the activity. *Following the Line* she responds. Bois appears confused—perhaps disappointed—that the activity and the work are 'burdened' with the same title.

A truly uncanny predicament, not in the abused post-Freudian sense of straying from, or contorting familial space, but one identified by Jacques Derrida in a reading of Kafka's short story *Before the Law*. *Before the Law* is both the title of the story but also the first three words of the narrative. We move from the frame of the title to the flow of the narrative 'proper'—but not in a neat, linear, recursive fashion.

There is an in-joke here for the clever reader. He or she experiences the exquisite variations of dead title living on within the area chartered for the activity of writing and also reading. The repetitions and, presumably, the alterations, drive these three words to unending and thrilling permutation of readings, writings, and choreographies.



Jacqueline Rose, detail [untitled-to be completed]

swarm of expressive voices and energies converging (in semiotic illusion) on the ONE who will not be denied, contradicted or frustrated.

A few months ago, visiting art historian Yve-Alain Bois was talking to artist Jacqueline Rose about a series of erased drawings executed with charcoal, blue eraser and clockfuls of unalienated labour

Jacqueline Rose is the chatty silent type. She quietly erases, while, at different times (sometimes even at the same time), articulating the problem of the work's destination. In her studio space, she forgets for a moment about what the work is for. It is a strange omission considering her commitment to the well-received (and seemingly ever-changing) *Palimpsest*



Jacqueline Rose, detail from *Following the Line*

exhibition (now showing in Melbourne), which features work by and is co-curated by Rose and Ruark Lewis.

In counterpoint to these social obligations (to curate, to represent and be represented by a group show), Rose is otherwise disposed to the activity of fabrication in a manner which appears to frustrate both herself and anyone who dares to enter this space of competition between producer and product. It is an activity performed without the theatrical baggage of the artist-as-damaged-goods or feminised chora—to pigeon-hole ambitions, skills, or desires.

Here lies a depth of potential reading rather than one of mere style. In the cramped space where the works appear to fall about—in various states of incompleteness—the outlook is alive with pragmatic rather than merely formal conductors. In order to decode these marks, the reader is obliged (for a reading to be 'true') to place oneself "within the pragmatic conditions of transmission" (Jean-François Lyotard).

Rose begins her work in a manner I can only describe as inverse Mallarméism. This shows itself at the very beginning of her studio operation. The paper she attacks has already been blackened (or greyed). Having already cancelled the ready-made drama of

the 'first mark on paper', her work proceeds, not in isolated abyssal fixity (Pollock, "When I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing"), but with an almost calculated disdain for this darkened theatre of the canvas.

I leaf through [the libretto] and find that they play a part; and the haughty, incoherent lack of significance that twinkles in the alphabet of the Night will consent to trace the word...

Stéphane Mallarmé, *Ballets*

The work appears to have finished itself in the company of mere objects, before the arrival of the artist. While the first finished object is flat and grey, the next operation—performed by the artist this time—creates knots, holes and flashes of light. The first operation takes the life and potential of the work (as in the performance of euthanasia). The second creates graphic/sculptural actants and vectors which, reversing the victory of the written page over the writer, sets the stage for a series of intense mini-dramas.

The paper is revived—so to speak—and the knots, the whorls, the lights and holes, an occasional paper chain of scissors, play out in a loop the energies and appearances that Rose has initiated.

For myself, this work marks a return to the *tableaux vivants* section of Roussel's 1914 novel, *Locus Solus*. "We learn that the actors are actually dead people whom Canterel has revived with 'resurrectine', a fluid of his invention which if injected into a fresh corpse causes it continually to act out the most important part of his life." (John Ashberry, introduction to Roussel's *How I Wrote Certain Of My Books*.)

There is a resonance as well with the scratch and paint technique of animators/filmmakers such as Norman McLaren:

Animation is not the art of drawings that move, but rather the art of movements that are drawn. What happens between each frame is more important than what happens on each frame.

Norman McLaren, quoted in Leslie Felperin, "A is for animation", *Sight and Sound*

But a third operation has yet to be undertaken for the work to proceed beyond the studio to a bigger stage. While artist and objects 'push the wood about' (Diderot's slang for chess in *Rameau's Nephew*), the works have still to be installed in a way that would satisfy the viewer's desire to place and curate—to join in the game that Rose has orchestrated. On the wall, on the ground, suspended from ceilings, employed as extras for the STC perhaps, one day these fragile yet remarkably robust works will install the reader in an increasing number of complex and public engagements.

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Wounded seductions

Adrian Montana on two of the major attractions of this year's Melbourne International Festival's visual arts program

In George Parkin and Rose Farrell's studio in Melbourne's South Yarra a wall-sized tableau built from chickenwire and plaster juts out several metres from one end of the room. A line drawing copied from a 17th century etching, depicting a landscape ravaged by the natural elements, covers its surface. This romantic vision is to form part of *The Thick Walled Room*, a photographic installation to be exhibited in the decaying vaults of the Old Treasury Building during the Melbourne International Festival. The remaining component of the installation will be photographs of male nudes, yet to be selected from a series of images, including one of a figure penetrating a decorative bandage around his waist in an oddly sexual manner. The artists claim that these photographs are not so much sexual as "image re-enactments" which mimic the didactic nature of the Renaissance conventions from which they are derived. Against a black background, the figures appear truncated, reduced to sculptural forms. Farrell and Parkin's prints will hang as large diptychs from the ceiling of the Melbourne vaults, where the artists expect they will be subject to 'alchemical transmutation' as a result of exposure to the effects of severe leaks in the ceiling.

This year's Melbourne Festival's emphasis on photography is underlined also by the

inclusion of the work of Bill Henson, to be seen at another damaged site, the old Spencer Street Power Station. Like his 1995 Venice Biennale installation, Henson's work depicts nude bodies emerging from menacing darkness, erotically charged and vulnerable. His images are seriously romantic, full of a sense of decay and decadence. His ploy is to seduce the viewer and at the same time present a sexuality contradicted by the quest for innocence. Reaction to Henson's work is often powerful. Some commentators believe his images continue the patriarchal convention of exploiting the female body, although Henson suggests that such an interpretation is "merely thinking about issues", rather than responding to the work of art as such. As Sebastian Smee has observed, Henson wants "the experience of the images to transcend the medium, for the medium to disappear into the greater experience of viewing the work".

By contrast, Farrell and Parkin's photographs do not aim to seduce. Images from their *Red Squares*, the *Film Noir* and the *Storms, Rain and Darkness* series draw upon the socialist realist aesthetics of the former Eastern bloc and the Chinese Cultural Revolution, as well as on alchemy and religious icons. They set out to mimic the signature stiff and contrived posturing and expose the social fabrication of the original.

The work is deliberately transparent and seemingly fake. As Farrell and Parkin explain:

Most of our work has a human element. Our photographs are like a page out of a book, but we don't give you the next page. It is up to the viewer to fill in the rest of the story. Our work is not ironic nor does it send up the content. We try to represent what has been. We stick with the intention of the historic image, we don't distort. We believe we have made real religious icons or socialist realist images. We are looking to preserve lost knowledge through photography.

Both Farrell/Parkin and Henson exploit the 'evidential authority' of photographic media but to different ends. Farrell and Parkin would hope their photographs read like performances, rather than as documentation of actual events:

We are interested in showing people who are acting like they are sick, not in showing sick people. We have had the opportunity to photograph people in the morgue but we declined. We avoid showing real misery. Once we asked a friend to pose for a religious image of Jesus with wounds. He contacted us and told us he had AIDS. He had lesions over his body, so we were confronted with a dilemma: do we photograph him and exploit



Farrell and Parkin, *Storms, Rain and Darkness, Untitled #7*, triptych, 1994-95

him, which we did not want to do, or do we say we don't want to photograph him and make him feel terrible? In the end he didn't do it but if he had posed for us we wouldn't have been able to show the pictures.

Their photographs, however, can still powerfully suspend disbelief, as evidenced by the response to a bandaged figure which confused the *mise en scene* with an actual injury, or the visceral reaction of a Russian viewer to the *Black Room* series depicting a psychiatric tranquillising chair.

Farrell and Parkin want the final prints to be luscious, reflective surfaces that give the viewer a deeper sense of space. Like Henson, they seek that 'push-pull' element where a viewer is attracted to the work and compelled to spend time with its content, but at the same time is unsettled. And, like Henson, they also disclaim a politics; the results of the interaction, they say, is up to you.

Farrell and Parkin, *The Thick Walled Room*, October 17 - November 2 at the Vaults, Old Treasury Building, Spring Street, Melbourne

The language to energise dance

Rachel Fensham talks with US dancer Deborah Hay about states, teaching and dying

Deborah Hay is a Texas-based dancer and teacher whose radical approach to movement has been distilled over many years in solo performance and large group workshops. Her book *Lamb at the Altar: The Story of a Dance* (Duke University Press, 1994) documents this unique creative process. In 1986, she taught a public workshop for 50 people in Melbourne which culminated in a small group and solo performance entitled *Milk of the Cipher*. Her return visit to Melbourne in September for a similar program included workshops and a performance concerned with 'statelessness'.

RF From your last workshops in Australia the idea of 'cellular consciousness' stays with me. Is it still important to you?

DH Very much so, although I don't talk about it as much. I talk about the whole body at once as your teacher. When I saw people working with cellular consciousness, there were no edges anywhere, and the imagining seemed to go on and on. So the language has changed a bit and definitely the work requires the reconfiguration of the three-dimensional body into the cellular body.

RF That reminds me also of the dance of 'ceaselessness and homecoming' which seems to suggest no limits.

DH 'Ceaselessness' is no boundaries but 'homecoming' is a place, a specific place in everybody's heart and soul. So I feel those two work together to make excitement for the dancer. In this workshop, I am talking about sets of paradoxes. 'Ceaselessness and homecoming' came from a hexagram of the *I Ching* but this year's hexagram is limitation—what are the limits of loyalty and disinterestedness? To be able to perform with both loyalty and disinterestedness at the same time is a paradox which sets the fire off.

RF Loyalty can be very binding for a performer...

DH Disinterestedness is detaching and so you have them both measuring each other. For me it never has been open-ended. There is always some containment that you bounce off in order to experience freedom.

RF Maybe the problem for workshop participants is a desire to let go rather than to work with the tensions.

DH I think that often happens, but I have been searching for a language which can excite people; to not blow it out but to keep the lid on. Trying to elicit a taste for discipline and how the freedom comes out of the discipline. I feel that as a teacher my language is improving and that the focus is improving.

RF I am fascinated by this question of how language communicates in dance workshops, because it is often not an instruction or to be taken literally. How do you see the relationship between language and dancing?

DH I too am very excited by language. I try to push people's buttons deliberately, because the charge you get is good energy that can be redirected instead of letting language confine or move you away from participation. For instance, one of the terms I use a lot is 'use each other'. We have been trained to think of 'using one another' as bad, but what if we turn that around? If I am not here for people to use, what am I here for? I want to find ways in which language can energise the dance as opposed to simply giving it colour.

RF What does the 'body as your teacher' mean for you?

DH I have been listening to my body devotedly for 56 years, and I haven't lost a moment of faith in the feedback I get from it continuously. It is not that my body says 'I have a sore back'; it isn't linear feedback. It isn't like listening to an instruction of thought. I am listening to the hum or the buzz of the whole body, it is a

song which isn't translatable. And yet it is so particular.

RF Is that where the poetics of your dancing comes from?

DH I think the poetry comes from wanting to articulate the range of experience that I have learnt from my body as my teacher. It is poetry.

RF You are also concerned with the idea of dying in the body, aren't you?

DH Well dying is much more interesting than death, because it brings us into the present. We are dying to the moment which is part of the present.

RF How does that inform one's dancing?

DH It allows us to enter into the next moment, and appreciate the next and taste the next. Death might be feared but dying doesn't have a value.

RF Although many AIDS sufferers have made the exploration of dying more publicly valued.

DH And those with an interest in Eastern philosophies.

RF Is the choreography of Performing Statelessness connected with this idea of dying?

DH In order to have fluidity, you need to be liberated as a performer. To use anyone from moment to moment you can't be fixed. And that is the truth of the matter, and that matter is not fixed even though we behave as if it is.

RF Even the matter of one's own body?

DH Right, we are constantly in flux. So performing statelessness is admitting that we are not fixed and isn't that liberating.

Review

The *Text* book of *Dance/Text/Film* neatly begins with a quote from Derrida's writing on choreographies; his flirtation with the imagined desires of dancing: "a glimpse...into the spaces between things". This *Dance* is itself a flirtation with the imagined desires of dancing. Trevor Patrick and Sandra Parker coyly fold over one another, the bare skin of a midriff not ruffling the surface stretches. Patrick circles the space with a sharpness of eye whilst Parker floats in an angelic halo of dissolving presence. When Patrick speaks, it is surprising: "I think I wanted to be a part of his world".

In this collaborative project co-ordinated by Jude Walton, it seems to me there is a tension between two poles of desire—enthrallment and abandonment. We are seated in the most compelling theatre—the antique ballroom of the George Hotel in St Kilda, lovingly restored with deeply tinged patina on every carved surface. Through long windows on either side are shadows and lightwells that slide one into the other, as inter-views, spaces-between. At any moment, we are being led into uncertainty. On the overhead *Film*, there is the artful framing of Jungian spaces—stairs and towers, windows and nightmare falling. Solid architecture is only another structure for ghosts, figures who couple and waltz, spasm and collapse. At points on the floor in front, another woman, the performer Jackie Dunn, speaks. She is brown and elusive. The man is played by the archetype, Mark Minchinton. He is solid, apparently impenetrable but of booming voice. There is no desire between them or between the boy/girl combination of the dancers. I feel abandoned by the precision of their attentions.

But desire looms when Patrick and Minchinton touch sweaty palms, play push-hands however briefly—man to man. I find this enthralling. It reminds me of Walton's image of ripening red-orange mangoes on the cover of the book, tangibly juicy but on the borders of decay. The promise of a work such as *Dance/Text/Film* seems to be in these precisely observed sensuous surfaces of contact rather than the theories of desire it attempts to embrace.

Rachel Fensham

Dance/Text/Film, the George Ballroom, St Kilda, July 16-21

Present and active flesh and blood

Eleanor Brickhill engages with three recent Sydney dance performances

Nikki Heywood, *Burn Sonata*

60s Australian suburbia: remember a kitchen, the intermittent whinge and slam of a fly-screen door, the paralysing drone of the Saturday afternoon race commentary; *Burn Sonata* brings back body memories this familiar. Physical expression and mobility are inseparable from thinking, from the condition



Dean Walsh, Claire Grant, Tony Osborne, *Burn Sonata*
Heidrun Löhr

of being human. It is inescapably central to telling the story, the tiniest inflections revealing, like poetry, a richness of meaning and nuance. So physically articulate were the performers, it was surprising not all of them would consider themselves dance trained.

The 'kids' took my attention: Dean Walsh was his father's boy, wanting to grow tough. His needs were eclipsed by a despairing physical adoration rejected by his father. Walsh's work was full-bodied, sensitive and resilient, with an open integrated facility and a strong sense of physical boundaries vigorously articulated to extremes. Benjamin Grieve almost became the family scapegoat, except that he shared some soft and unable-to-be-acknowledged visceral sibling bond. I felt his natural attenuate quality, but in this narrative we saw it sometimes rendered effete and incoherent, while at other times there was a quickened animal-like articulation and curiosity. Claire Hague's physicality was fragile, porcelain, with the delicate gaucheness of tentative and half-directed energy. She remained 'the girl' no matter what, a sort of blank page to be



Tony Osborne, Benjamin Grieve, Dean Walsh,
Claire Hague, *Burn Sonata*
Heidrun Löhr

pressed and inscribed on. Within the dynamics of this narrative, inchoate lives dangled like insects in the wind, their physical frames full of struggling reflexivity, expressing fragility and sentience, proclaiming no apparent alternative but to assimilate hot and searing psychic assaults—like brandings—in order to survive such a family's insidious defences.

Heywood describes her approach as having no formula to lead from idea to movement to performance, except a sense of mutual direction. It's interesting that such a linear story grew from a disparate group of individuals' personal experiences, feelings, atmospheres and specific incidents related to their own domestic trauma. Maybe it was a bit too slick. I like loose ends, because I can't believe that things so complex can be so thoroughly explained away. Rather than working directly with emotions, Heywood described how they recalled and physicalised dreams and sensations. Of the opening stamping sequence she said, "The dream was

Dean's. He was actually running from somebody along the top of a train—a fairly literal translation of the train's rhythm, of him sensing the wind on his face, speeding up, ducking through tunnels. It was about tantrum, about running away, about being chased, being haunted". It was quite abstract and unlike Claire and Ben's duet immediately following, which so well articulated emotional, even cognitive states. Their relationship spoke of hesitancy, unformed multi-directional ideas, polymorphous bodies, awkward, but growing, speaking to each other. Later, Ben's story about the man and the boy and the park, acutely physicalised incoherent confusion and an almost pre-psychotic despair and anxiety.

I remember the two women, mother (Claire Grant) and daughter, their faces close together, making horrible girly gestures; a slow stark sequence of mimicry, the plaintive account of a girl trying to be woman, learning her mother's ways, their slow shifts across the stage at points reminiscent of a catwalk. The father (Tony Osborne) was created as a monster. Can people be only demonic? Heywood commented on an important point: he came in naked and the family dressed him. "He might have been a normal bloke, put upon and made into the monster. But the truth is, people then do behave monstrously and get away with it, completely dominating a whole group for a very long time. After years of soul searching, I've decided some things are unforgivable."

Sydney Dance Company, *Free Radicals*

The trend these days has performers exploring their bodies and physical states not as instruments or vehicles through which to project the illusion of being something or someone else, but as present and active flesh and blood. In Sydney Dance Company's *Free Radicals* a more intimately collaborative approach with the musicians from Synergy finally had the dancers change their usual physical focus, bringing out interesting qualities normally brushed aside. The dancers' concentration seemed fully engaged in the first segment to deal with rhythmic complexities they might never have dreamed about left to their own devices. It was a pleasure to at last see the dancers stretch their minds, holding together the poly-rhythmic counting sequences as if there was no room left in their brains for extraneous posing.

A new sense of dynamic depth pervaded the work, eschewing the usual in-your-face movement work. With space to enter into the play of body and sound, it became more watchable. Weight as a dynamic tool was used more than usual. There is something so attractive about strong unison, and the closing section had a line of six couples worked in close parallel, their bodies ricocheting, springing, bouncing against each other, taut and resilient.

Strongly flexible lighting techniques produced quite novel effects: Wakako Asano's sweet solo with three moving hand held lights playing like fire flies over her body in a gently visceral game. A beautiful Spanish/tap quintet brought out a meticulous sense of body rhythm and ensemble. Not flamboyant in the usual sense, a raw metallic sound and rhythmic precision suggested that they were actually working, rather than simply posing. Finding a real medium of exchange between the two disciplines, a quartet of dancers and musicians shared their common kinaesthetic understanding with physically percussive body work, slapping, clapping, shifting and catching weight.

One Extra Dance Company, *Body of Evidence*

In the entrance to St George's Hall where One Extra's *Body of Evidence* has been witnessed by many, the stair rises show

descending lines of an intriguing text, but there were too many people in the way for me to read it, so I gave up trying, although it looked important—I'm not sure why. Then suddenly, with a slight change of mental focus on my part, an image of credits rolling up a screen leaped to mind. In this way, *Body of Evidence* was often full of unexplained portent. Such meticulous setting out of each scene, and the characters' larger than life melodramatic silent movie gestures seemed, even without reading the program notes, to point vehemently to something, an elaborately laid trail of clues needing to be decoded, working out from this performance 'evidence' of just what might have been going on with such a disparate collection of events and caricatures. You got the feeling that there must be a story there, even if you couldn't quite catch it.

Six cartoon-like characters, each with their own vividly stereotypical behaviours at first seem a bit too obvious, too easily recognisable to carry much weight. Each might have been a performer's particular favourite film stereotype: resentful machismo of street kids (Felice Burns and Peter Sears), smooth and sinister villain Patrick Harding-Irma, Michael Collins with his childish innocence screaming out to be throttled, Lisa Ffrench and her sleek suburban cleanliness, in cat suit and rubber gloves, and the inimitable Benjamin Grieve, bringing to life his tragic silent movie siren. All are under suspicion, like characters in the best thrillers.

Julie Anne Long has been playing with narrative, in particular film narrative, splicing together fragments of footage, as if she is using the medium of live performance to investigate film techniques. She may also have been doing the reverse, using frames of captured image and atmosphere to investigate the perception of live events. *Body of Evidence* might be best seen as if it has been made from tail-ends of film swept up off the editing room floor. Footage from oddly different narratives is thrown together—the frantic/comic action of early silent movie; the stop start frame by frame progression of images from some other sequence presented as if we are to investigate the spaces between the frames. Suddenly there's a real time segment of action, reminiscent of a particular kind of 'metropolis' genre, frenzied and isolated activity in busy city streets.

Rohan Wilson's set design is remarkable in its subtle staging of these potential stories. A high wall is cut with doorways of various sizes to provide particular viewpoints, windows on events. Most of the action is captured and enclosed in a small raised proscenium stage, a three-sided box, the back wall of which is filled with photographer Heidrun Löhr's huge projected settings. The audience, the traditional fourth side, provides a rich imaginative medium for the witnessed events to grow and mature, and our minds are flooded with so many images, captured and rendered epic in our imaginations. As if through the partly shuttered window of a neighbouring apartment block, we might see into an enclosed room. Perhaps something private is taking place, a series of mirrored doors open and close silently, revealing characters whose actions are fragmented, decontextualised. Their reflections might confuse and disorient our senses. Or we might imagine a TV screen showing an old black and white movie, or a vaudevilian stage. In the space below this stage is a large drawer, which slides opens to show where 'the body' is stored, a morgue, a cool room.

Perhaps linking these enclosed imagined realities with some other 'officially' investigated version of events, another set of Löhr slide images, projected to one side of these boxes, capture fragments of a different story, a picnic interrupted by cataclysmic events. But no matter how official the story is, it too is revealed as a product of the

imagination. A red chequered tablecloth on which are remnants of a meal, suddenly blurred as if the tablecloth has been whipped away. Perhaps the camera has been pushed over in an eruption of violence. There is a pool of red. Is it blood or tomato sauce? As witnesses, our imaginations provide the stories, the contexts and conclusions, the sense of completion.

The denouement, the final scene where 'all' is revealed, had much of the audience grinning foolishly. We're shown how all movement arises from the simple song *Delilah*, treated like a child's action song, *Run, Rabbit, Run*, each gesture given depth and personality by a performer's characteristic rendition. These simple actions stand for passionate and portentous phrases about murder and love and despair, each gesture part of some larger language, like letters of the alphabet which always remain the same, but put together by different people in different ways they become loaded with implication, unspoken meaning. Think of the clichéd warning note about imminent danger or death, composed of individual letters cut from a variety of types and stuck together to form the message. In this case, the real identity of the writer is hidden until, perhaps by some fatal error, it is revealed. But from a broader perspective, we all piece together our own selected fragments of evidence, powerfully augmented by imagination and viewpoint, with which we compose our personal realities.

Nikki Heywood, *Burn Sonata*, The Performance Space, July 25 - August 4
Sydney Dance Company, *Free Radicals*, Sydney, Brisbane July - August
One Extra Dance Company, *Body of Evidence*, directed by Julie Anne Long, St George's Hall, Newtown, September 12-29

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New Musique Australia gratefully acknowledges financial assistance from Arts Queensland and the Australia Council

Layering languages

Angela Rockell puts an ear to Tasdance's *New Life on the 2nd Floor*

As a writer interested in the musicality of language, I'm excited by the idea of combining text and dance and curious about how Tasdance will do it. Picking up a program on the way in, I see that as well as the usual information, there are poems by Richard James Allen and three essays: *Reading Dance*, *Making Dance* and *Text and Dance* by Karen Pearlman. I just have time to read the poems before the performance begins. Then music, noise, a poem spoken by one of the dancers, bodies moving in response to sounds falling like stark lighting on white faces and dark, torn clothes. The poem, *The Frightening of Angels*, seems like a formal statement of the preoccupations of the piece. Next, under a neon heart fixed on Simeon Nelson's marvellous, skewed, jungle-gym/scaffolding structuralist-joke set, a central figure dances *13 Acts of Unfulfilled Love*, duets that have a soundtrack of poetry and music. Finally, *The Hope Machine*: dancers moving over, under, around the set and each other in music and exhilarating light. The effect of the three pieces together is of seeing living beings choosing vibrancy and hope, having been exposed to a range of forces both life-giving and destructive.

Karen Pearlman's essays add a further dimension to the text-dance conversation. Her discussion of dance as language—its formulation and expression, and its combination with verbal forms—is an addition to the performance that I really value. The essays give insight into creative processes of dance and choreography in general, and these dances and poems in particular, so that the experience continues to unfold as I go home and read and think. The concept of dance as language adds another layer of wit to the interaction of dancers and set, too, as if they are intended to be understood as enacting a language with its own structure and system of signs.



Tasdance

Dance is a place where sound can be used as metaphor for the energies that haunt our movements. Tasdance locates language among these shock-waves that have power to literally move us, both in its physicality and for its capacity to re-present events and emotions. In *The Frightening of Angels*, noises of war machinery alternate and overlap with the music of Beethoven to indicate the ends of a kind of spectrum of motivation educating bodies in different ways: huddled terror and dislocation under the guns; something more fluid and resourceful inside the music. A poem set within the context of these sounds places language in a continuum of forces that change whatever is exposed to them. I love this idea. But...using sound as metaphor demands an acute ear. Careful, polite speech-and-drama

enunciation won't do where the poem must carry such a musical and symbolic weight. Strange miscalculation, like a sort of tone-deafness. The Beethoven too: after Monty Python, public display of an icon such as the *Moonlight Sonata* is a cue for absurdity.

Similarly, in the second piece, *13 Acts of Unfulfilled Love*, a man uses a series of poems to re-experience moments of intensity. Again, I love the idea of language as motivation, this time for bodily (e)motion of dance, and by extension for great music by Garry Greenwood, maker of leather instruments extraordinaire. But why, in a piece that's an enactment of desire—even if it is remembered desire—use a dry, slightly querulous voice whose warmest approach to the poems' passion is a sort of ruefulness?

13 Acts would be stronger for me, too, if the action was spread around more. The poems would have unified the piece sufficiently without the need for a single central dance character. Surely one of the legacies of postmodernity is that we're used to looking for a maker's hand prints on the work, and would have found them here, too, as an adequate stylistic link. As it is, one of the impressions I'm left with is that it's about one man getting *all* the girls and boys. And another thing. If the piece is about 'a journey through one man's memories, hopes and disappointments in looking for love', what are lines like "It fascinates her, her hand gliding up and down...It's so easy, she thinks..." doing here? I want to say, yes Tasdance, it's important, this conversation you're having: keep doing it, but *listen* to yourselves.

Tasdance, New Life on the 2nd Floor, Choreographed by Karen Pearlman and Richard James Allen, text by Richard James Allen, The Earl Arts Centre Launceston, July 25-27, Theatre Royale Hobart August 1-3

Angela Rockell is a writer living in Tasmania. Her collection of poetry, *Fire Changes Everything*, was published last year in the Penguin volume *Outskirts*



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Elena Kats Chernin *Clocks* (1992)
Matthew Hindson *Death Stench* (1996) - world premiere
Elena Kats Chernin *Concertino* (1994)

Tickets

\$18 full price
\$12 concession (student, pensioners and unemployed)

How to book

In person: At the Eugene Goossens Hall from 7.00pm on the day of the concert.
By phone: (02) 9956 7950



Sydney Alpha Ensemble is assisted by the New South Wales Government, Ministry for the Arts and Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.



Kate Champion, *Face Value*

Richard Hughes

Kate Champion never actually wanted to do a solo show. She wanted publicity shots not to show her face, but was told, "You've got such a pretty face". She said, "But that's what my piece is about. Whatever you do, it's judged on face value". In *Face Value*, facade is the theme. Champion is intrigued by our social skins and what's really going on in the more tender organs. Sometimes the difference between the two feels too great. Using text or voice along with the body represents that clash between the facade and the inner voice that's not social. Voice creates the body as a whole, it's a different canvas, with more choices to be made.

Champion is looking at the idea that many women live in the one person. Taking women of three different ages, 22 and 35 and 48, she has tried to work out what the energies are, their physicalities. "At 22, I was too full of energy. Looking back you realise you had it all, but no idea what to do with it. At 35 I feel more easy. Everything's arriving at a point, but there's something in me still fighting. What I've projected on to the older woman is that at 48 you don't give a stuff, no desperate need to prove anything. Maybe that's not menopausal, but post menopausal."

The set made by Russell Way is a facade too, and a playground. "To an outsider, it looks straightforward, but we know its history. It's got scars, and they make the skin more interesting. We've had those breakdowns and rebuilds, and arguments, and we've had to really test where each of us stands as far as where we're going. This is why what I'm doing isn't a solo show in any way."

She says, "I go into the studio and I dance and dance and dance, finding all the processes I've been witness to, part of. You can see how your body's owned by other people, you're a little piece of history, and you need to work out how to use that to your advantage. You can't get rid of it because it lives in you. What makes some aesthetics stay in your body more strongly than others? You go to Paris with a lover, and a few months later you say, just tell me five things that you remember about that week we spent in Paris, and his five things were not my five things. It's the intensity of interest which causes you to retain it. The body has such an interesting editing facility."

Kate Champion, *Face Value*, The Performance Space, Sydney, October 8 - 12

The Choreographic Centre

Gorman House Arts Centre • Ainslie Avenue Braddon ACT 2612
Ph (06) 247 3103 • Fax (06) 247 773

1997-98 FELLOWSHIPS AND RESIDENCIES PROGRAM

Australia's first Centre for choreographic research and development invites proposals for inclusion in its program. Fellowships are intended to provide Choreographers with a significant fully funded opportunity to create new material and the time and resources to develop their craft. The scope of a Fellowship could allow the Choreographer to work with up to five other artists for up to eight weeks. Residencies may take a variety of forms; the Centre is open to innovative proposals for the use of its resources.

Proposals for 1997 Fellowships and Residencies should be registered by 16 October and lodged by 1 November 1996
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Asked to listen, asked to interrogate

Zsuzsanna Soboslay sharpens her ears on new music in Sydney

In June-July, I flash from the white arched tiles of the Opera House to cold sandstone school halls, from Auntie's timber box to a grey campus sea-shell, trying to discern what contemporary music-making is about. From silk poverty to beaded riches, from the intimacy of a small audience to the grand whoop of libidinally charged competition-goers to the quiet squeak of a review tape winding in a private home, experiences of music vary from the heaving of bosoms, patrons falling in love with an Italian pianist's profile (radio commentator: "He looks like Liszt!!"), to curt, terse reviewer impatience with non-populist works.

The most lauded works of the Piano Competition are Mozarts, Liszts etc (nine special prizes) with most finalists choosing a 19th—not 20th—century concerto and restrictions to the Romantics or Classical works for the Chamber Music choice. Only one of the special prizes is specifically for anything Australian, and of the last ninety years. Is it my imagination, or is the first prize winner's repertoire (Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Brahms, one movement of a sonata by Carl Vine) calculated to accumulate prizes (of which he duly won six)? The extraordinary Yuki Takao (People's Choice, as opposed to judges' First Prize) chose a repertoire breathtaking in its scope, from Ginastera, to Balakirev, Scriabin, Vine, MacDowell, and the fiendish Prokofiev Concerto No 2. No other competitor took such accurate and passionate risks of texture, period, scope—an 18 year old naif with mature golden fingers who "plays like a child", said my mum, "as if the whole world is new".

What's new in old work? New York composer David Lang argues that anything you haven't heard before is contemporary—but that doesn't explain how old work can still feel new. Or new work old. When something's missing, what is it that misses the mark?

The Australian Chamber Orchestra gives a concert under the *Music Now!* banner, and for that we receive five works composed in the last two years and one Sculthorpe from 1977. Michael Smetanin's reductionist ["suprematist"] flute and string piece pegs and pinches texture and time in the most effective and least muscularly relentless of his pieces I've heard.

Liza Lim dives into a complex Gothic meditation on the nature of sound and its components that nonetheless also lets the players love their notes. A swarm of strings opens onto a breeze, the earth-turbing final pages slide up into angels' rafters. For others, *Now!* means almost forgetting the instruments themselves: Roger Dean pulling synth sounds out of bored strings, moving his clarinetist about the stage to "show" regroupings. Dressage can't hide a horse's gammy legs; attempts to physicalise show a grasping at a work's inherent shape, but can't replace, match, or compensate the strength (or weakness) of it.

This concert had a lot of movings: Smalley adding nothing to (perhaps, weakening) a solo work adapted for bassoon with orchestra standing in a "V" to illustrate what in the original contemplates a sequence in a film. A tender, bird-beaked requiem for Takemitsu by Peter Sculthorpe follows a "staging" of his earlier *Port Essington* where a colonial Trio drink tea as a preliminary to scraping court tunes against a downstage orchestra etching a stony desert landscape that cannot be appeased. The tension between two cultures is as pertinent now as when I first heard *Port Essington* on tape as a student in 1980. Unlike aficionados in the audience, I

thought it a fair attempt to illustrate an essentially programmatic work, "real choreography" not being the point.

The Sydney Contemporary Singers' claim to tackle repertoire "beyond the reach of any other choir in Australia" is not fair to choirs such as Astra in Melbourne. The Singers make a fair attempt at Peter Maxwell Davies' *Westerlings*, with text based on old Norse whaling sagas. The chordal textures are exquisite, full of hardship and strain; the final Amens hang in columns of yearning prayer. The piece relies on extremes of register and atonalities which capture two ropes chafing, two clouds prising grey fingers away from each other to cry rain. The choir, however, is not brave enough in the stretching of tones; voices attempt to fall in a choppy sea and don't quite make the coast. Moreover, members consistently sing (or hum) at the back of the throat and thus deaden tone, for which no amount of passionate arm-wave conducting can compensate. Even more troubling is that the same vocal tone is produced for all the works—Maxwell Davies, Atherton, Butterfly, and exactly as I remember for Stephen Adams' *Sydney Dreaming*, an almost pastoral work they performed four years ago. This homogenising of contemporary musics' as disparate as white steel to black sand is weird to experience, and highlighted as a problem in the coupling with percussion for Xenakis' *Idmen A + B*.

While Synergy on its own in Per Norgard's *Square and Round* achieves extraordinary compression and expansion of sonic space—a bowed vibraphone turns your outsides in to examine your own entrails—the choir feels strung in place by wires. This is not an issue of choreography; this is to do with where breath, and hence sound, reaches into a performer. As with a hologram, which reads all wave fronts, concentricities, absences, and interferences in all directions to reconstruct an image, a partial hologram is no hologram at all; a partially-sounded sound is no sound. *Idmen* is gargantuan, and also shatteringly intimate; its huge drums crack pavements and it wants voices to unzip a stratum of the underworld. The choir needs to be body-breathed committed enough to both match this, and in quieter moments, know when to recede through the cracks like worms.

In its ten years, Elision Ensemble has always grappled with some of the more difficult questions in music: the relation of sound to body to environment in concerts and concert-installations which included the seven-day, round the clock *Bardo Project* [Lim & de Clario, Lismore 1994, Perth 1995] based on a meditation from the Tibetan *Book of the Dead*. Their explorations feed into new works, their new works feed new conceptions of musician and repertoire. A star- and lung-bursting foyer sax improvisation by Tim O'Dwyer preceded a concert in which Chris Dench's possible-impossible *Driftglass* (which I first heard in Melbourne in 1991) seemed almost too easy this time round. The acoustics of the Clancy Auditorium did not serve it well, its enormous sound blurring into an undifferentiable balloon. This is notable in a concert in which, for all the densities and impacted effect of works by Yee, Finsterer, Young, and Barrett, each instrument remained astonishingly crisp, its timbre and tone-quality distinct within and against the ensemble. This is about the nature of listening itself. I wonder why Sound Art groupies don't come to this concert in droves. [Does the category "concert" preclude this kind of listening?]

Adam Yee's numerologically-divined Zephania spirals and stretches from its gorgeous cor anglais opening into a third-

movement Kandinsky burst. This is a sustained space-colour exploration, although its over-stretched last movement perhaps lacks a little tact in not knowing when to stop. Richard Barrett's clarinet, guitar and double-bass "chase each other to extinction" in a trio which interrogates stamina as much as sound. Scored for ataxis and instability, this work plays out the unpredictable, anticipating overblowing, accident and elision, and results which can't be controlled. This contrasts nicely with the Stockhausen solo cello wherein silence is as meaningful as is sound. Prolonged spaces between notes are scored to be filled with breath's gesture, the cellist's body as much the instrument as the one between his knees.

The virtuosity and musicianship of these pieces seem to me to be about how finely one is asked to listen and interrogate sound and its structures. Musicians on a stage are not so much figures in a painted, vaguely-mobile landscape as homunculi themselves of the points from which emanate vibration into form, rendering audible the patterns of the microphysical world. Interferences with those patterns (via restrictions in voice, inappropriate movement, or in structural flaws) prevent the transmission of a work. As a microscope discloses the rhythmic pattern in a cell-weft, performers and productions enlarge a weave that can play the surface edge or serve as emanation from a profoundly architectonic ground-plan.

Sydney International Piano Competition, Sydney Opera House/Sydney Conservatorium of Music, July 4-20; Australian Chamber Orchestra Music Now! Concert, SCEGGS Hall, June 20; Elision Ensemble Tenth Anniversary Concert, Sir John Clancy Auditorium, June 26; Contemporary Singers Tenth Anniversary Concert, with Synergy Percussion, Eugene Goossens Hall, July 21



Ten New Music Works

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Paul Healy
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Phil South
Ion Pierce
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Julian Knowles
Michael Sheridan
Rodney Berry &
Rick Bellinger
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Shannon O'Neill
Antony Partos

ten works x ten minutes

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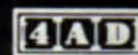
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CD reviews

Ros Bandt
Glass & Clay
Move MD 3045

The glass and clay of this CD's title are the flagong, a glass sound sculpture built by the composer, and a variety of ceramic bowls and bells. The overall effect is shimmering and delicate. Three of the pieces, *Ocean Bells*, *Shifts* and *Annapurna* are re-issued from an LP released in 1982, which is one of the blessings of CD technology. The crystalline tones explore subtle rhythmic shifts, drawing in the listener through the sheer beauty of the sounds.

The three more recent works, *Alchemy*, *Gulf Song 1991* and *Night On the Indian Ocean* use digital technologies (sampler and Pro Tools) to augment the softly brittle clay and glass. More ambitious in their undertaking, they are less successful than the earlier pieces. The melding of ceramic bells with sampling technology may be a modern-day alchemy, but the digital output has an arid quality that is difficult to transcend. The blending of flagong and ocean sounds in the final piece avoids this shortcoming, but struggles to distinguish itself from New Age relaxation tapes.

At least half of the works on this CD, however, succeed admirably as "music intended for respite". Bandt's modest ambition for them. They open up enough breathing space for listeners to stretch out their sense of time, while being surrounded by some exquisite timbres. JP

Michael Whitticker
Redror
Move MD 3183

Michael Whitticker distils an enormous range of influences into these compositions: European avant-garde, electronics, Korean classical music, jazz, improvisation, rock. He manages to fuse them all into a successful compress he can call his own—but this doesn't mean that every work is a success.

When the various elements do coalesce, the result is some startling sonorities and engaging play of tension. This is the case with *In Prison Air*, for re-tuned guitar and computer-realised tape. Incorporating traditional Korean forms intended for a zither-like instrument, this cross-roads of East, West, medieval and digital is full of interest. *Redror*, however, for alto saxophone and percussion, suffers for its reliance on free jazz-type sax cries. While this piece may move in the direction, as Whitticker hopes, of "unexplored timbres and emotional expression", decades of unrestrained blowing in

improv-type circles have reduced such techniques to hollow clichés.

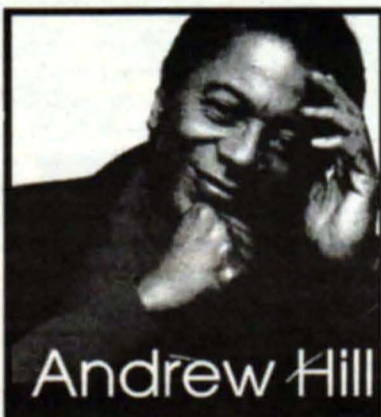
Ad Parnassum is the most complex piece, full of fascinating lines and combinations. All six works collected on *Redror* display the work of a fervent musical imagination, even if the end result does not always match Whitticker's restless ambition. JP

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Ten new music works

On November 9, in the airy space of Toast II Gallery, ten Sydney composers will each present a ten minute work. A compressed chunk of the Sydney music/sound scene will cast an aural net from two sound stages—from subtle asides to "The Stick" to a guitar 'sound thrashing'. © is presented by The Public Address System, a group of composers who want to create a space both intense and diverse in which to present work they want to hear. It's a unique opportunity to experience, in one cross-sectional slash, some of Sydney's best practitioners in this field, and all new works to boot.

The works presented will include: *Snapshots*, by Andrée Greenwell, a piece for two or more musicians and tape built from audio snapshots of various famous and not so famous sites in this big city; *Sound Installation* by Paul Healy; work by composer/sound artist/musician Ion Pearce, recipient of the ABC Radio Fellowship 1996 attached to *The Listening Room*; *Atmospheres of Metal*, with Michael Sheridan on guitars and spatial mix by Kevin Davidson—programmed and real time manipulations in the Industrial

Ambient genre; Rodney Berry's composition *65°T*, with Berry on 10 string standard ironwood Stick, and Rick Bellinger (from 'The Stick's' home of San Diego) on a 12 string rosewood Grand Stick; Sandy Evans, one of Australia's leading performers and composers, will create an acoustic improvisation with percussionist Philip South; Medievalist Stevie Wishart will create a sound world; Shannon O'Neill along with Rik Rue, will present O'Neill's *Good Evening News*; Antony Partos, a composer working mainly in film, TV and dance will present a new live work; and Jo Truman, vocal performer will present a piece with Julian Knowles. Tapes and CDs of these artists' work will be available on the night.

Tickets are \$10/\$6 and showtime is 7.30pm. For more information contact Lisa Herbert on (02) 9331 2593

radio eye

Radio Eye is ABC Radio National's feature and documentary program presented by Brent Clough. We prepare two time slots for your audio pleasure!

Radio-Eye Sunday Nights from twenty past eight.

Radio Hörtext 16

by Ferdinand Kriwet

OCT 6 8.20PM
Radio-Eye regularly runs classic works of radiophony. This piece is constructed from piecing together over 3,400 cuts of tape containing largely unintelligible fragments of voice, sound and music from all over the world. Originally broadcast in sections over a two year period - this time NO WAITING!

Quilting Bee

OCT 13 8.20PM
by Judy Kampfner
Quilts have chronicled the major events of US history: from Gettysburg, the Lincoln-Douglas debate, the civil rights movement and much more recently the social impact of the AIDS virus. Freelance producer Judy Kampfner brings the patchwork together across the Amish, Appalachian and African-American communities that continue this tradition.

Your Place or Mine: Fellow Travellers

OCT 20 8.20PM
In this documentary from the BBC, reporter Phillipa Budgen revisits 25 Cromwell Street, Gloucester - the home of Fred and Rosemary West - an innocuous dwelling known forever as 'The House Of Horrors'. Rather than rehashing the gruesome events, this piece tracks a writer who is building his career on producing the definitive popular book about the 'star-crossed lovers' Fred and Rose. Produced by Chris Paling.

HO! HO! The Clown Is Dead

Fans of Krusty the Clown will enjoy this mockumentary based on the life and death of a circus clown. It's narrated by the Clown himself from beyond the grave! At his funeral and afterwards, old friends, former colleagues and forgotten acquaintances recall this rather bitter and twisted clown, while the deceased heaps scorn upon them and their capricious memories of his life. Produced by Noiseless Blackboard Eraser.

OCT 27 8.20PM

Saturday-Eye Saturday afternoons at half past three.

Soccer Legends Never Die

OCT 5 3.30PM
The culture of the round ball has a particular significance in South Africa's black townships. The Afrikaner government privileged the code of rugby over soccer throughout the years of the Apartheid regime and yet it survived. This program, recorded on location recently, celebrates the great black players with nicknames like 'Heel Extension', 'Masterpieces' and 'Teenage'.

5ft 4, Flabby and Unfit, Portrait of a Supermodel?

Katrina and Mizpah run a fledgling model agency in Melbourne they inherited from the wily American, Terry. Producer Jessica Nicholas, by her own account, an unlikely prospect for modelling, follows her class of young hopefuls all set on careers in Paris and Milan. But it wouldn't be very interesting if it all went right, now would it?

OCT 12 3.30PM

The Demise

OCT 19 3.30PM
by Matthew Leonard

Anthony Mannix is an artist and writer who has spent nearly four of the last twenty years inside Sydney's Rozelle Hospital. Anthony doesn't see himself as a schizophrenic, but as an explorer of altered states of consciousness. Anthony tours the institution in the company of producer Matthew Leonard, illuminating the way with his acerbic observations and acute and beautiful poetry.

Your Place or Mine: Fellow Travellers

OCT 26 3.30PM
Another opportunity to hear this piece from Fred and Rosemary's 'House Of Horrors'

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Shorts

experimenta media arts festival is powering up for 12 days of the latest national and international developments in interactive media, film, video, installation, performance and sound in no less a venue than the **Lonsdale Street Power Station**. As experimenta puts it: "a disused power station, the industrial detritus of the nineteenth century meets the great white hope of the twenty-first!" The twelve day festival features "the legendary Stan Brakhage, maverick Canadian filmmaker Guy Maddin and the abrasive New York Super 8 filmmaker and photographer Richard Kern". **Contemporary Music Events Company** is contributing the **Reflective Space**—nine days of concerts and installations "exploring the influence of electronic technologies on music". **Domestic Disturbances** at the **National Gallery of Victoria** is profiling "13 leading Australian women artists working with new technologies" working at the concept of home. New media artist **Jill Scott** gets her first major retrospective at **ACCA**. CD-ROM show **Burning the Interface** will entertain and seduce at the **Centre for Contemporary Photography**, Melbourne. November 6-17

Brisbane's **Street Arts** aims to give voice to diverse cultural groups and to marginalised communities through participation in the arts by providing a range of activities and services: multidisciplinary workshop programs, multimedia based workshops for 8 to 12 year olds and youth; development and management of community projects and festivals; provision of training and access to resources for art workers; and professional video documentation for performance and community projects. Until Oct 13 **Street Arts** is delivering **Youfest** in association with the **LIVID Festival** and featuring the recycled theatre troupe **ERTH** and **A.C.R.O.B.A.T.** at the first Logan Youth Arts Festival. Numerous Filipino groups will present **Ati Atihan**, a centuries old indigenous festival involving "continuous percussion and music which send people into a frenzy of dance, trance and spontaneity". (Nov 9, Murrarie Park). **Street Arts** and the **Kabalikat** community are running workshops in preparation for the festival with percussionist **Moto Niwa**, local artist **Elva Albacite** and artist **Santiago Bose** who will be in Brisbane to take part in the **Asia Pacific Triennial**. **Street Arts**, 07 387 66177, e-mail: starts@odyssey.com.au

Choreographers, put those dancing in your head into words!

The Choreographic Centre is brand new and it's in Canberra and it's inviting proposals for inclusion in its 1997 and 1998 programs. You can go for a fellowship or a residency. **Fellowships** may be resident for six to eight weeks with up to five other artists to work with plus use of the centre's facilities. **Residencies** can vary in format: special projects for which funding is sought separately; secondments from professional dance companies; free access to the centre's studios. Application will be in the form of project proposal and will be assessed by the Centre's Director, **Mark Gordon** (to be interviewed in *RT#16*) and the Artistic Advisory Panel. For further information and copy of selection criteria call Mark or Administrator **Gavin Findlay** on 06 247 3103. See page 37 for the Centre's initial program of events. **The Choreographic Centre**, Gorman House Arts Centre, Ainslie Avenue, Braddon, ACT 2601.

experimenta's **the Reflective Space** concerts (presented by Contemporary Music Events Company) explore "the influence of electronic technologies on music" and include scrap disco from Mixmaster **Andrew Yencken** and guest composer-DJs; Cinema for the ears—**The Listening Room** at the Kino Cinema with works by the **Ulmans**, **Pearce**, **Adam**, **Yencken**; **Desire and Utopia**, a celebration of **Luigi Nono's**

search for a "mobile sound" (a central event of this festival); electroacoustic works by **Xenakis** in **Bohor**; the **Xenakis Tapes**; a **Les Gilbert** retrospective sound installation—sounds triggered by your moves; pianist **Michael Kieran-Harvey** and friends do **Stockhausen's Kontakte** in concert and live-to-air; and the program includes works by **Bos**, **Linz**, **Burt**, **Carey**, **Whiticker**, **Adam**, **Smalley** and others. Young electro-acoustic composers are not excluded from this venerable list. If under 30 (how come novelists are young until 35?), they have until October 4 to get in their tape/score to be in the running for a concert by the newish guard. Enquiries to Contemporary Music Events Company, 03 9417 7702; e-mail: cmevents@ozemail.co.au

Adelaide's not too **Safe Chamber** strikes again with **Building a City#2**. How utterly timely...and the gig is financially supported by the (about to be sacked) City of Adelaide! Unbelievable. Curator **Jason Sweeney** has constructed a three block program about a recreation zone paradise, a city of lies and the technologically-betrayed, as presented by **Queenbitcherry**, **Hideous Roads** and **Zita Weelius/Clifford Darling**. All part of "a series of monthly contemporary performance events examining a subterranean aspect of life in the city of Adelaide". **Nexus Cabaret**, **Lion Arts Centre**, October 6, 7pm. Bookings 08 231 0730

CLUB BENT is once again offering a performance event for the sexually fluid. To be run in conjunction with **Mardi Gras**, the 10 day season will draw together talent and tack from the diversity of queer performance culture. For those desiring to add their own flavour to the blend of queer performance outpourings, send proposals to the Curatorial Committee, **CLUB BENT**, **The Performance Space**, PO Box 419, Strawberry Hills, 2012; Fax: 02 9699 1503; email: tps@merlin.com.au. Proposal deadline: November 11

On performances **BENT**, diva **Moir Finucane** will perform *Glow in the Dark*, directed by Jackie Smith. **Finucane's** complex, camp and clever (also, very funny) performance has chartered much attention both here and overseas. Upstairs at **Cafe Rumour**, Fitzroy, every Friday in October. For bookings Tel: 03 9482 1064



Splinters' *Faust*, Black Poodle Club

Faust—The Heat of Knowledge. **Splinters Theatre of Spectacle** will perform their version of Goethe's *Faust* in October at the ANU in Canberra, transforming University House into an outdoor mediaeval market place. **Larry Sitsky** will compose and perform the score, and the performance will introduce the harpies of the **Black Poodle Club**—a fetish girl dance troupe. **Sidewinder** will contribute opera/rock, and a pyrotechnic finale is promised. **Splinters** tradition of calculated audience assault looks set for a new chapter. **Australian National University**, Canberra. October 9-12. For more information Tel: 06 257 1077.

Sydney Intermedia Network (SIN) in conjunction with the **Art Gallery of NSW**, presents the world premiere screening of **STELARC/PSYCHO/CYBER**, **Mic Gruchy's** definitive video documentary on internationally renowned techno-mutant **Stelarc**. The session will be introduced by **Stelarc** and **Jane Goodall**. **Domain Theatre**, level 1, AGNSW, 2.30pm, Saturday October 26, \$7/\$5.

Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA): **Peter Tyndall**, *Death and the Viewer*, Sept 20 - Nov 3. **Jill Scott**, *Frontiers of Utopia*, Nov 7 - Dec 15. **Ex De Medici**, *Sixty Heads*, from Jan 24. **Dallas Brooks Drive**, **South Yarra**. 03 9654 6422.

Sport

TEE OFF

with Vivienne Inch

This month's call for entries for the Nissan National Corporate Cup produced some unseemly behaviour from the artistic directors of our MOF companies as they jostled for points on the corporate calculator in a flurry of program launches. QTC's **Robin Nevin** teed off with the announcement of the new **Williamson, Money & More Money** in which **Dave** (never one to let a trend slip by) wittily rails against post-structural bean counting as taught in TAFE accountancy courses. MTC's **Roger Hodgeman** lined up *Life* a searing new political drama by **Stephen Sewell** on the giant leap forecast for the Life Insurance sector, and **Wayne Harrison** followed through with **Nick Enright's Flutter**, a modern morality play about stress management set in the Sydney Futures Exchange. **Aubrey Mellor** showed good grip in selecting **Hannie Rayson's Small Business**, in which an independent female grocer sips merlot while pursuing a strategy of organic growth both domestically and throughout Asia. **Belvoir Street's** scoutmaster **Neil Armfield** played a topshot in announcing **Katherine Thomson's A Bit on the Side**, in which three working class dabblers in the money market anxiously await an expected increase in US interest rates. My personal tip for the national final at **Twin Waters** on the Gold Coast would have to be for **Richard Tognetti** with his announcement that the Australian Chamber Orchestra

will merge with the Australian Chamber of Manufacturers for a series of concerts to celebrate the Arvo Paart-ian spiritual serenity experienced by business now that the uncertainty of the pre- and post-election period is over.

TOOTH AND CLAW

with Jack Rufus

The future of professional Australian sport is taking shape: amalgamation. Already in Melbourne, **Essendon AFL club** is talking of joining forces with a soccer team, and maybe a basketball franchise as well. In Sydney, **Eastern Suburbs Rugby League** and **Rugby Union** may well team up, drawing in a soccer club, basketball team, water polo outfit, and clay pigeon shooting association. This is undoubtedly the way of the future. The only question is: how far can it go?

The advantages of massive amalgamation are obvious. Tall players could undergo multi-skilling, to perform as Rugby Union lineout specialists, Aussie Rules full forwards, soccer goalkeepers, basketballers and highjumpers come Olympics time. The day of the specialist would be over, and not before time. The more useless sportsperson, once under contract, would be compelled to do clean-up duties or commentary work, anything to keep the organisation ticking over.

As soon as the new super-clubs put up walled perimeters, the whole social landscape would be re-drawn. Apprentices would do sentry-duty, to keep out undesirables. The underperformers and has-beens would form private militia, guarding the riches of the newly-formed polis. It is almost upon us, in this age of wealthy super-sports: the re-birth of the city state, glory of the ancient world!

An education for the environment

"Every artist I ever met had strong opinions about the state of the world, social justice, politics, community, environmental health and the mysterious sides of life", says Professor **Stuart Hill** of the School of Social Ecology at University of Western Sydney's Hawkesbury campus, the first (and only) such school in the Southern Hemisphere. Professor Hill comes to Australia from Canada's McGill University.

Hill believes that Social Ecology, through its integration of the personal, social and environmental, and its drawing on the arts, social sciences and ecology, provides a framework for reflecting more deeply on the context of change and how to work with it in collaborative and creative ways. Many students make extensive use of the arts and performance to facilitate such change. The school offers Bachelors, Graduate Diploma, Course Work, Masters and Research Masters and Doctorate programs as well as undertaking curriculum development, research and consultancy activities. Most of the 300 students are part-time off-campus, coming together at week-long residencies and in small groups for workshops. Most are engaged in projects involving others in their workplace or community. Most of the learning is experiential, trans-disciplinary and experimental. "We think of ourselves as a learning community that integrates the passions of people with backgrounds in the arts, psychology, health, sociology, community development, organisational change, education and science", says Professor Hill. "We are motivated to collaborate across these differences because together we want to make a difference and be part of an evolving process together. We live out on the edge of possibilities." Information: School of Social Ecology, Locked Bag No. 1, PO Richmond NSW 2753 Ph 045 701288 or Fax 045 701531 e-mail k.adam@uws.edu.au

A world-wide resurgence of interest in the music of jazz pianist **Andrew Hill** has seen him leave his Portland State University post to return to full-time performing. Thanks to adventurous and timely programming by **SIMA** (Sydney Improvised Music Association), Hill tours Australia in October. He is variously and enthusiastically described by *Village Voice* and *The New Yorker* as "elusive and idiosyncratic", "a School unto himself", composer of "some of the thorniest, most fiendishly constructed, uncategorizable jazz of an era", creator of "angular tunes twisted in uncategorizable ways". His works have been described as "music of the head", "the emotional power lift(ing) off from the mathematical precision that grounds every piece" (*Garry Giddins, Village Voice*, February 6, 1996). He is best known for his brilliant series of Blue Note albums of 1963-66 (reissued on Mosaic as a 7 CD set) which featured the likes of **Joe Henderson**, **Eric Dolphy**, **Bobby Hutcherson**, **Kenny Dorham**, **Tony Williams**, **Woody Shaw** and **Richard Davis**. *The New Yorker* locates him "somewhere between **Herbie Hancock** and **Cecil Taylor**, which is to say that Hill's arpeggiated runs fit loosely into the period's stretched hard-bop rhythms, while his fills and note choices seemed to come from infinity" (*K. Leander Williams, The New Yorker*, January 10-17, 1996). Hill is performing with Australian players **Sandy Evans** (saxes), **Lloyd Swanton** (bass) and **John Pochee** (drums). In a bonus performance for Sydney-siders Hill will be appearing solo at the Eastside Parish Uniting Church, Paddington, Monday October 4. October tour: **Strawberry Hills Hotel**, Sydney, Thurs 3; **Bennets Lane**, Melbourne, Fri 4, 5; **Hyde Park Hotel**, Perth, Mon 7; **Strawberry Hills Hotel**, Sydney, Tues 8, 9; **Integrales Festival**, Brisbane, Fri 11; **The Colours of Jazz Festival**, Armidale, Sunday 13; **Eastside Parish Uniting Church**, Paddington, Sydney, Mon 14

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