

RealTime

onScreen

Performance and the national arts
December–January 1996–97

THE MAP

Sydney Festival & Cultural Precinct Guide

16

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THE MAP

Sydney Festival & Cultural Precinct Guide

Let's take a walk, walk a new map of big and little discoveries in a part of Sydney city that is transforming, and let's walk that walk during the Sydney Festival. Too often you hear, the city is dead, the city is full of holes. Well, it has been but it's changing. In a clever act of compensation for the fact that it's difficult for a big city to provide the intimate spatial focus for a festival, Anthony Steel's three successive Sydney Festivals have moved steadily in on the Rocks, Circular Quay and the Opera House on Bennelong Point. This is predictable tourist territory, but it's also a terrain that Sydney City Council have long wanted to be a cosmopolitan space for Sydney-siders. Upmarket developments in the Argyle Centre, the increasingly felt presence of the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Australian Music Centre, Craftspace, the opening to the public of Government House above the Botanic Gardens, and the forthcoming renovation of the Customs House confirm an intensification of cultural activity at a major rail, bus and water transport junction.

A walk from Circular Quay to the centre of the city offers a growing number of enticements, diversions and surprises as you festival your way from Melissa Fenley and Keith Haring at the MCA through the visual surprises of Quayworks to Laurie Anderson at the ornate State Theatre and the Town Hall in the city's centre, eating and browsing as you go.



Royal de Luxe Le Peplum

The Rocks

Starting at the far end of George Street in the Rocks, a stroll through **Craftspace Centre for Contemporary Craft** will take longer than you think. In this little gallery you will be diverted by everyday objects—found objects dangle from gold threads, headlights become handbags. In December-January, allow even longer to explore the physical and metaphorical properties of weight in **A Matter of Weight**, an exhibition of crafted objects by Julie Bartholomew, Susan Cohn, B. Jane Cowie, Wendy Dodd, Sue Lorraine, Justine McKnight, Ian Mowbray, Andrew Osborne and Megan Wilford curated by Daniel Brine and Ivana Jirasek, 88 George Street.



Bobby Previte

Heading towards the Quay, look for the yellow sign that reads **The Canteen**. Here where old sailors once dined on oyster soup, you will these days be greeted by a Thai dely and ushered to a long narrow room. There at the long single metal table you will be delivered up to the kitchen gods dispensing wisdom in the form of aromatic noodles in white bowls. Downstairs in the Sailors Thai the waiters are witty, the atmosphere silky and the food beyond words. The Sailors Home, also site of The Rocks Visitors Centre, 106 George St.

Closer to the Quay, turn right into Argyle St and you could see the **Argyle Department Store** as another place in transition. At the other end of town, some publicist has projected a huge stiletto threatening to walk all over this heritage area. Thankfully, the Australian designers are making a more discrete entrance. **Aero Plus** tastefully displays its minimalist design accessories including rows of test-tube vases and black leather briefcases. **Dinosaur Design's** resin splendours radiate behind glass. **Artpark** restrains its flamboyant napery in neat shelves. In a corner **Helen Kaminski's** Madagascar raffia hats rustle. Even **Mambo** seems introspective. Nobody seems quite at home in this ephemeral space of the tourist precinct. But give them time. The wooden beams of the Argyle Centre creak and **Paradiso** offers a rare opportunity for civilised food and coffee. 12-24 Argyle Street.

But if you're on the move and it's quality French bread and cakes (including especially, and curiously, the house tiramisu) that you're after, then drop across Argyle street to **La Renaissance Patisserie**. Or if you want a doughnut bun stuffed with azuki beans (a bizarre but refreshing hybrid), or you're ready for a sake or Kirin beer, or some pink pickled ginger to take home, then the tiny Ichiban Kan (35 Nurses Walk) is a tiny Japanese treasure chest. A small sign begs "No Groups".

Walk into a world of Australian sounds in the **Sounds Australian Shop** (Shop 33, 16-23 Playfair Street) which combines enterprise with the highest ambitions for art, the needs of tourists with those of the urban dweller. This commercial arm of the Australian Music Centre offers recordings, scores, teacher resource materials and publications. All kinds of Australian music are available: classical, jazz, pop, traditional and contemporary Aboriginal, folk and country, world and fusion styles, and brilliantly experimental. Put your feet up and put the earphones on. Want it in writing? You can purchase unpublished scores from the centre's library (the Australian Music Centre is located with appropriate stylishness in the adjacent Argyle Centre and caters for members with 10,000 works by more than 260 Australian composers). There is no other source for most of this music. This is it. Under one roof you'll find recordings of Machine for Making Sense, Carl Vine, Synergy, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, the Australia Ensemble, Liza Lim, Mike Nock and more and more from across this musical nation.

Back on to George Street drawing closer to the Quay and you're at the **Museum of Contemporary Art**, a haven for the adventurous in art, good eating, fine coffee and, for members, a vigorous social life—events, movies, shopping nights (!), openings and, recently, Barrie Kosky laying into the unimaginative aspects of Australian theatre and festival culture with the flair of a many-voiced stand-up comic. The food, eaten open air looking to the Opera House across a Quay turbulent with ferries, is by Neil Perry's Rockpool. Rockpool proper is across George Street and is now celebrated in a fine book. Take a break for coffee or a meal, and then walk through the MCA galleries, absorbing **Spirit and Place** a contribution "to the present process of convergence and partnership between the cultures of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians" ranging over 100 years of art, mostly Australian, but including visitors like Anselm Kiefer, Richard Long and Joseph Beuys (until March 2, 1997). The Sydney Festival exhibition is a major celebration of a distinctive American artist **Keith Haring** (see back cover) with his roots in graffiti and street culture. Dancer **Melissa Fenley** will perform her tribute to Haring over two nights and on the third show their 1978 video collaboration. Festivals are at their very best, at their most intense, other worldly and relevant when you can move through a string of thematically and performatively related events. See the dance tribute, see the video and hear the talk of another city, another culture, another time. Also at the MCA for the festival, shakuhachi virtuoso Riley Lee, January 13 & 19 at 3pm, a nice one to combine with **Spirit and Place**, making for a contemplative afternoon.

If it's up you want, the cocktail bar in the **ANA Building**, 176 Cumberland St comes highly recommended—an astonishing view of the Festival harbour enjoyed through a cocktail glass and, if you want, costly but well worth it, some of Sydney's best sushi to follow. The well-to-do suited classes mingle with artists and it wouldn't work otherwise.

Circular Quay

Speaking of the transformation of The Rocks, the old Lea and Perrin sauce factory at Lilyfield makes its way to the city in **Geoff Kleem's** 3M photo mural, part of the **Quayworks** exhibition curated by arts producer (and founder of The Performance Space) **Mike Mullins** at the Overseas Passenger Terminal, Circular Quay throughout January. An impressive line up of artists: **Judy Watson, Brook Andrews, Geoff Kleem, Elizabeth Pulie, Frances Joseph, Hanna Kay,**

Ian Bettison, Maria Cruz, Mattys Gerber and Paul Saint. Kleem takes a white spraygun to the factory he once called home, filters it, photographs it, picks out its details like pieces of a landscape, alters its record. And a small slice of it is on the cover of this issue of *RealTime*. Hold it up and imagine it 1.8 x 9.6 metres. Along the facade of Circular Quay Railway Station, **Robyn Stacey** is creating a 45 metre "illusion at the gateway to the city" and **Richard Goodwin's** light sculpture *mine* will sit atop the MCA: a neon sculpture attached to a 35 metre umbilical cord of cloth. If that's not enough, visitor Xavier Juillot will add his *InFlux*, "tubes of brightly coloured silk, some up to 150 metres long", to Sydney landmarks and



Rishile Gumboot Dancers

foreshores. Adding weight is David Mach's *It Takes Two* (see back cover) outside the Overseas Passenger Terminal. Contemplate in the humid aftershow harbour glow Mach's massive Sumo wrestlers. So, after the Fenley, or one of the Opera House shows, don't rush off. Wander and take in **Quayworks** and *InFlux*. Last year it was a joy to see that big flowering self-watering Jeff Koons Puppy, so cute and making so many people so angry or so happy. Do I hear laughter? Could be a Sydney crazy or could be a professional laughter—Parisian **Julie Hette**. "Julie Hette (pronounced Juliette) laughs at dinner parties, film premiers and has even been hired to laugh at a fashion show of Paco Rabanne". No schedule. You'll just have to listen out for a "laugh (that) has been compared to a car that won't start, a truck braking suddenly on a wet road and a chicken".

Take those few extra steps along George Street to **225 Grosvenor Place**, about as svelte a Harry Seidler construction as you can get, and enjoy the three giant **Frank Stella** sculptures in the front foyer, three of 39 in the *Cones and Pillars* series.

If you want post-contemplation action, it's a very short walk to 29 Reiby Place and **The Basement**, home to contemporary jazz and blues in Sydney, for US jazz greats guitarist **John Schofield** (an acclaimed '95 festival guest), drummer **Roy Haynes** and percussionist **Bobby Previte's** inexpensive *late night 'second set'* shows (\$18-25). They've each got their own season and do two shows a night in the New York manner, so you can go early or late;



Denise Stokios, Mary Stuart

go early and you can book to eat or not. Cradle a nourishing Cooper's Ale and grab your standing-room-only spot and bop on-the-spot. Also in the program is **Mike Nock** with his quartet and the Harbour String Quartet. The overall season is titled *Listen Up*. Innovative programmers SIMA have managed to attract **Roy Haynes**, a master drummer who has played for Armstrong, Parker, Coltrane, Young, Monk, Gillespie, Rollins and Davis, Billie Holiday and Sarah Vaughan, as well as with many contemporary artists including Pat Metheny, Chick Corea and tenor saxophonists Ralph Moore and Craig Handy (he was here recently with Herbie Hancock). **Bobby Previte** is also a SIMA coup, and also a drummer, but a composer as well, including electronic works, a ballet commission and adventurous material for his circus band (*Music of the Moscow Circus*, Gramavision CD, comes from a commission from that circus). The Basement and the festival have also scheduled a return visit of one of the world's very best jazz guitarists, **John Schofield**. This is a jazz feast. Haynes Quartet, Jan 7, 8, 9, 12; Schofield Quintet, Jan 13, 14, 15, 16; Nock, Jan 19; Bobby Previte's Latin for Travellers, Jan 20, 21, 22, 23.

It's not far for a brisk walk from The Basement to **Birdland Records** (Barrack St. off York), Sydney's stylish, serious, quietly-spoken, informative and ever-helpful jazz CD shop (with more than a fair sampling of world music, blues and contemporary classical plus magazines, videos and key books). That's where you're guaranteed to find your Haynes, Schofield, Previte and Nock on CD. Go no further. Meanwhile, back at the Quay...

Once upon a time, there was a big old **Opera House** with its big old predictable program and there was a predictable little festival for summer shoppers—and never the twain did meet. Get the people into the shops by holding a festival, an arts festival, said the city fathers, and in how many cities have they said that? But the Opera House was not festive. It was above such things. But all that's changing. Ningali Lawford was charismatic in the Playhouse last year and the Opera House forecourt was awash with humanity for El Comediant's night after night. This year it's **Royal de Luxe's** parody of epic movies in **Le Peplum** and **Nigel Jameson's Kelly's Republic** (what a concept), big Sidney Nolan Kellys chasing us up and down the stairs with fireworks, foul language and republican rhetoric? Vote with your feet. More walking? Both shows are free. At the Playhouse another chance for festival immersion, two shows by the much anticipated **Denise Stokios**. In *Mary Stuart* (Jan 8-19) she plays both Mary and her executor Elizabeth I, in *Casa* (Jan 20-25) she turns the

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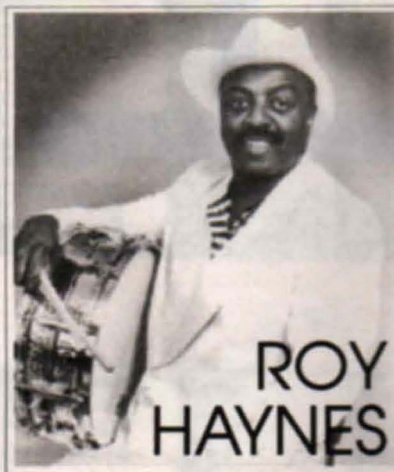
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Dancing Keith Haring

From New York Molissa Fenley describes her Sydney Festival program to Keith Gallasch

Molissa Fenley, a leading US dancer and choreographer, has made a number of significant visits to Australia. She has worked with many prominent composers including Laurie Anderson, Pauline Oliveros, Alvin Lucier and Phillip Glass and has performed in the US to works by Australian Robert Lloyd. She has collaborated with visual artists including Richard Serra, Richard Long and Tatsuo Miyajima. Her vision of dance as sculpture and dance as ritual has heightened the contemplative and spiritual dimension of her work over the last decade.

KG The significance of this visit is tied to the Keith Haring exhibition at The Museum of Contemporary Art. You were a close friend of his and a collaborator?

MF When we were very young we did a piece together in 1977 or 1978 called *Video Clone* and it was actually done as a video and as a dance performance. It premiered at the School of Visual Arts. It was only done once but the tape exists and I'm bringing it with me to show and talk about it.

KG So we'll see the tape but not the dance performance?

MF I was all of 22 or 23 or something. It was a long time ago. I'll speak about our relationship, how the piece came about and probably a little bit about Keith's continued interest in dance and how I feel about...you know, when you first start working. I think I came to New York when I was 21 and started working right away. So it was just at the beginning of what it is to be a professional artist in New York and we were both forging our way. He at the time was affiliated with the School of Visual Arts and I was a floating choreographer. So it was interesting to be able to support each other. Our main interaction was back in those early days but when he died I was asked to perform at his memorial and I made a dance specifically for him, which I will be performing in Sydney.

KG You mentioned that Keith Haring had a continuing interest in dance. How did that manifest itself?

MF He was very interested in street dance, particularly, and capoeira and break dance. He had a place called The Paradise Garage which was basically a dance place where people would go and dance till the wee hours. He worked with Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane with set design. I think basically his interest was in street culture

and whatever that meant.

KG You performed this piece, *Bardo* on the same program as your solo version of the *The Rite of Spring* at the Joyce Theatre in 1990.

MF I'd been asked to do something for the memorial service that took place at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine here in New York. The *Bardo* is a Tibetan concept. It's a forty-nine day

I mean they're recognisable to me and probably to anyone who knows his work well.

KG So do you embody these concretely?

MF An occasional gesture. An implication, I would say.

KG For close to a decade, a number of writers have described your work as spiritual, ritualistic, contemplative.



Molissa Fenley

Torn Brazil

period in which, upon a person's death, they travel through their own personal *Bardo*, meeting their karma, and in that time decisions about their rebirth are made. So it's supposedly a seven week period of walking through an intermediate state. So I thought it would be interesting to make something that had to do with that feeling that he had died but he was still very much a part of us. Still is. He's very important for the continuance of art for a lot of people. He was very influential. In the dance there are lots of references to his funny little shapes.

MF *Bardo* is quite the epitome of all those things.

KG That's an ongoing part of your work?

MF I'd say so. I think the range of my work is quite large. There are still pieces in my repertoire that are very spatial and dance oriented and then there are pieces that are more sculptural, which I think *Bardo* is. I like to keep shifting back and forth between them. So for the performances in Sydney I'll be doing three different pieces: one that's quite sculptural, and a piece that moves

through space quite largely, and then *Bardo*.

KG So as well as the contemplative, sculptural work there is still some of that particular kind of energy I would have seen years ago when you performed *Hemispheres* at the Adelaide Festival?

MF Well that was 1983. So things change and shift around. But I would say that the energy of that early work is present in a changed way and I'm not sure exactly what that change is—I don't think the work is as fast as it used to be.

KG With the Peter Garland and the Lou Harrison pieces in the MCA-Festival program, did you commission these or did you work from extant music?

MF Both of them are existing pieces. But when I work with composers I always ask them what they think I should use and establish a real relationship with them. I don't just pick up the CD.

KG How would you describe these two pieces?

MF *Savannah* is a work to Peter Garland's composition and it has the feeling of taking a walk through the savannah which is a geological area of grassland with an tree here or there. There's a calmness to it but a lot of dance motifs within. It's quite an abstract work. *Pola'a* is the piece to the Lou Harrison music. 'Pola'a' is an Hawaiian word for a quality pertaining to the ocean. It's a quiet ocean, not a huge raging sea. It deals with ideas of ebb and flow, tides, surgings and swellings. It's a very large piece moving through space, very much inspired by the idea of the ocean and different types of tides...and the idea of the music itself, which is very inspiring. I work very differently with each piece but I would say that with the Lou Harrison I work very much hand in hand with the music, and with *Savannah* I worked on the dance first and then the music seemed to be appropriate for the work...and the same with *Bardo*—I found Somei Satoh's music after I'd started working on it.

Molissa Fenley has recently created her own web page: www.diacenter.org/fenley. She describes it as a dance piece for the web working on the dance and sculpture relationship that intrigues her. It was created with the assistance of the Dia Center for the Arts in New York.

Molissa Fenley, American Express Foundation Hall, Museum of Contemporary Art, January 14 and 15, 9.00pm; Video Clones screening and talk, January 16, 6.00pm.

the arts & culture issue

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Survival '97



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Welcome to the holiday issue of *RealTime*, plenty of reading, many reminders that the survival of the arts under a Coalition government is worth fighting for in 1997 as bigger funding cuts loom (see Sandy George's *OnScreen* lead article on Coalition film policy page 17). However, now that the government is past its honeymoon period, cogent opposition is beginning to emerge. Thanks to government provocation, speech-making has become a significant sport even in recent weeks (see *Tee Off* page 38). On the arts front, Barrie Kosky (the MCA Birthday Speech) and John Romeril (the Rex Cramphorn Memorial Address) have spoken passionately for the imagination with humour and force, and some belligerence ("Rack off!" and "Fuck off!" respectively) directed against the propagators of conservatism, national self-aggrandisement and insularity in the arts and theatre in particular (and on the race issue for Romeril as he describes the impact on him of life in Japan). The response to Kosky was brisk and predictably misleading (as he equally briskly retorted in *The Australian*). Of course, as P.P. Cranney did in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, we can take exception to Kosky's indifference to the funding crisis (Romeril grapples more ably with the dollars issue), but there are real issues to be dealt with about how we see ourselves, what we celebrate, what kind of imagination we possess. Whether or not they reach the level of debate Kosky hopes for is another matter as arts coverage in the media declines. We'll do our bit and in *RealTime* 17 (February-March) outline both speeches and have a go at explaining the emerging responses and ask what these two have left out.

Also in need of some explaining is the role of the Performing Arts Market vis a vis the Australia Council's new Audience Development and Advocacy Division, and we'll do that in *RealTime* 17 in an interview with division manager Philip Rolfe. While the promotion of Australian art across the globe appears utterly worthwhile, some of us are noting that this operation is now far removed from artist advice and we're curious about the impact on the direct funding of artists' creative work.

RealTime 16 is in many ways a celebration of a rich, diverse, but cohesive and tolerant artistic culture ranging across the Pacific Arts Festival in Samoa, Pacific Wave in Sydney, ARTBACK arts touring in the Northern Territory, the Asia-Pacific Triennial in Brisbane, the Sugarman project in Alice Springs, the *Danger* CD from Sydney's western suburbs, filmmakers Darlene Johnson and Monica Pellizzari, designer Margie Medlin in Malaysia, and the political dilemmas of being gay and an artist in WA. There are issues here, and imagination enriched by an unprecedented volume of intercultural exchange and the insistent emergence of artists from many cultural backgrounds. It's enough to make you want to make a speech...and you might have to if you want that imagination to succeed. Merry Xmas. KG

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Sydney Festival and Cultural Precinct Guide

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Geoff Kleem, *Untitled* (detail), 3M photo-mural from *Quayworks*, 1997 Sydney Festival

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Not done with the judgment of Artaud

RealTime asked Jane Goodall and Ed Scheer, two members of the co-ordinating committee of *100 Years of Cruelty*, to give their assessment of the Artaud event

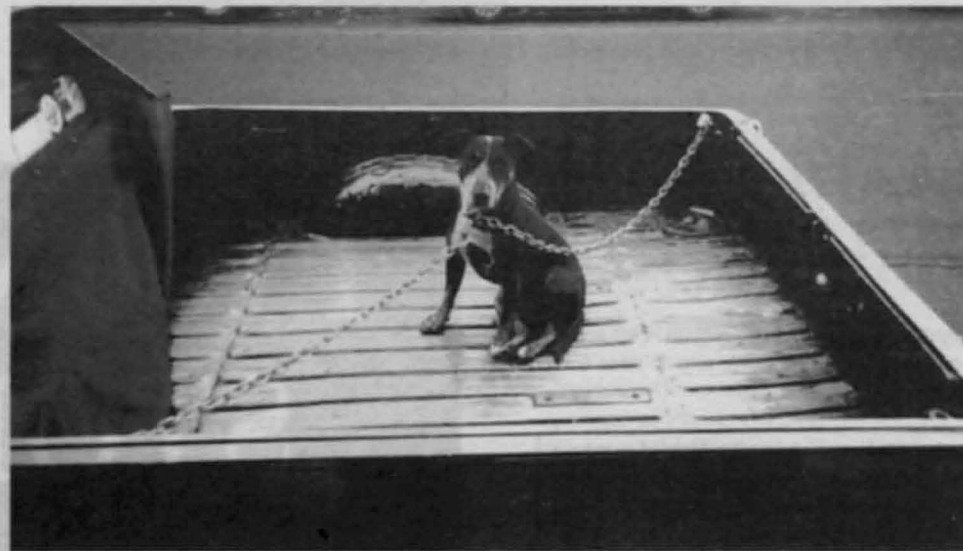
Jane Goodall

The Artaud centenary has prompted events at the ICA in London, MoMA in New York, in the Czech and Slovak Republics, in Wales, in Saint Malo in France and in Sydney. This surge of interest follows a period of relative neglect through the 1980s. The last time an Artaud wave hit was the late 60s, when he and Bataille were accorded parallel status by the Tel Quel group (the nascent post-structuralist movement) as revolutionaries in the domain of thought. Where Bataille's standing continued strong through the 1980s, Artaud hung on in the theory agenda by a thread—one phrase, to be explicit—"the body without organs", which became a leitmotif in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. Perhaps the Artaud of the late 60s was too faddish to be a sustainable element in critical debate or artistic practice, torn as he was between two sets of camp followers. The first of these embraced him as a guru of theatrical extremism, virtuoso of the scream and supreme exemplar of the triumph of passion over reason. The second characterised him as the poet of the void and the impossible, who demonstrated the absolute incommensurability of madness and the work. Can the centenary re-engagement get us away from these two overblown prototypes? Not too easily, I'd suggest. The equation of Artaud with theatre remains, in the English speaking world, instantaneous—even though less than 10% of his oeuvre is explicitly engaged with theatre. The notion of the oeuvre-free zone remains current, even though the *Oeuvres Complètes* runs to some 28 volumes.

From the outset, one of the objectives for the *100 Years* event was to acknowledge Artaud as an artist who worked across almost every medium of his time: literature, cinema, stage, radio, drawing and painting, and various arts of movement. Another concern was to promote an engagement with the energies of the work and the ideas, rather than to pay homage to some kind of cultural icon. Hence the choice of conference themes: cruelty, reverberation, cacophony, connectivity, electricity, agon. Sylvère Lotringer's view of Artaud as the gambler, always raising the stakes and with a gamester's instinct for assessing the tactics of the other stakeholders, opens a way to think of Artaud's project as always catalytic and destabilising. It also encourages us to pay attention to the strategic nature of the work of someone who was a perpetual provocateur.

There is surely something perverse about celebrating the centenary of Artaud. A centenary affirms installation in a pantheon, and it should be remembered that Artaud wanted to burn the pantheon. On the other hand, a centenary can be the occasion for shifting some of the evaluative ground rules. For me, it's time to get rid of the suffocating mixture of awe and patronage that has surrounded Artaud: awe of the prophet and counter-cultural guru, and patronage of the madman who can never speak anything but impossibility and the void and must therefore somehow be spoken for. If the event has been effective, I believe this will tell less in the nature of the "feedback" it has received than in the extent to which it has helped to set off a re-engagement with some ideas whose time may well and truly have come again. Artaud wrote for a culture in crisis. The latest surge of economic rationalism that hit during the time we were planning the conference was for me thrown into sharp relief as I started to re-read the work. Artaud is, amongst other things, a bizarre logician, whose thought is so fertile and diverse it challenges most of the ground rules of meaning making but in doing so opens up other ways of seeing. Set against the kinds of fertile logical manoeuvres found in Artaud, and the impassioned provocation

they offer, economic logics seem to demonstrate some kind of intellectual collapse—a collapse of dimensionality. The effect is to bring out a corresponding collapse in cultural life. The monetarist rationale discovers dependencies everywhere and starts acting like some kind of rampant immune system, determined to reject them from the body politic. (The true body without organs, perhaps?) I'm reminded of the image in Artaud's *Jet of Blood* of an inflated body dropping to the ground and collapsing flat against it, with the irretrievable two dimensionality of an overcooked omelette. Listening to Artaud railing against abusive cultural practices in *To Have Done with the Judgement of God* (meticulously edited and translated by Virginia Madsen in a version for *The Listening Room* which actually makes you listen to the words) and wildly lampooning the polite voices of the keepers of abusive cultural values, I'm struck by the perverse mixture of abusiveness and politeness that we're seeing now. The imperative to sustain a surface decorum is very strong (witness the succession of overstated condemnations and disclaimers that followed the so-called riots that broke out during the pre-budget demonstration at Parliament House). The moderation imperative does not, of course, prevent views being expressed and measures being taken that are deeply damaging to large sectors of the population. Artaud, virtuoso of the insult as well as the scream, may be one of the voices we need most right now, to remind us what moral fury sounds like.



Arunas

Ed Scheer

Standing in a paddock late at night trying to get a decent signal on a mobile phone call to Columbia University in New York...This was a couple of months before the commencement of *100 Years of Cruelty*. I wanted to speak with the impossibly nomadic Sylvère Lotringer to confirm his travel arrangements, that is, that he would still be coming. I knew I could catch him in his office at exactly 9am New York time or not at all. Apart from his status as the guy who brought so much contemporary French critical writing to the anglophonic world (through the legendary publishing house Semiotext(e)), Lotringer has met and interviewed just about everyone who ever knew Artaud. Though we had contributions from two of the most widely read intellectuals of their generation, Derrida (via satellite) and Kristeva (a video interview) for the event, it seemed crucial to me to have someone like Lotringer who could talk intimately about Artaud. Like the time Artaud was out walking with a friend (Anie Bernard), complaining about the pains in his hands and feet from being nailed up on the cross all those years ago in Palestine. She turned to him and said "Will you cut it out Antonin, I'm not in the mood!" to which he responded with a shrug and promptly changed the subject.

The value of this type of observation suggests something about Artaud which has been obscured through the decades of obsessive biographical treatments of the madman and guru. This is the man who never stopped throwing the dice with his own subjectivity. Every extant thing, object, position, experience was, for him, up for grabs and could be re-invented, with a little madness, yes, but also with anger, energy, imagination and a bit of intellectual brio. This was the Artaud we got to hear about in Lotringer's paper on the opening morning of the weekend conference at the Powerhouse Museum. It's the inspirational Artaud, the one who makes you want to take more risks in your life, to accept less protocol and more inventiveness, but also less peace and more fury. Not a raving loony, but maybe just ecstatically miffed.

The middle of the night in the paddock on a property on the Central Coast where I sometimes stay when I'm working late...I noticed the dog which guarded the homestead had spotted me. It was sitting bolt upright on the verandah under the floodlights. I could hear the switch operators gossiping while I shouted "can you put me through to the French department please?" "Just hold on, won't be a minute..." Conference organiser mauled by doberman flashed through my mind as the dog suddenly leaped off the verandah and began sprinting towards me across the 50 metres or so of paddock. Frozen to the spot bellowing into the mobile seemed just too theatrical, too

Artaudian even for a drama lecturer who had recently finished a PhD on Artaud. This was a moment of cruelty, of surreal but necessary actions with real consequences. I was the torture victim signalling through the flames and trying to hang on to my mobile. Pure theatre, my only audience thousands of miles away and utterly unaware of the situation.

There has been some criticism of the event in terms of the lack of attention to Artaud's ideas on theatre. Such discussion seemed superfluous after my encounter with the doberman, quite apart from the fact that Artaud's theatre writings comprise a comparatively minor part of his oeuvre which treats cinema, fine arts, literature and other media with equal doses of contempt and crusading intensity. We wanted the conference to reflect this diversity of interests. Allen S. Weiss talked about the poetics of the *ictus*, a term which identifies a uniquely Artaudian strategy regarding language as it refers to both rhythmic regularity and the sudden attack or seizure, the attention to form and the launch of something unexpected. Frances Dyson re-broadcast some Artaudian radiophonic resonances in a way which reflected Artaud's practice of digging out concepts by the roots...never content to simply record a reading, his radiophonic experiments explore the thresholds of sense

and obscenity, the thresholds of the intelligible and the listenable. Lesley Stern gave us the *mise en scène* of the obscene. Lisabeth During revealed the anguish of Artaud not in the way we know so well, of the pathological *poète maudit*, but of one who, like the metaphysical philosophers, was unable to resist the 'ontological contagion' in which inauthentic selves abjectly examine the open wounds left on the world after the departure of Being.

But before any of this could happen there was another, more immediate and threatening anguish requiring some urgent resolution. "GINA!" (That was the doberman's name). "GINA. It's me, Edward. It's me. GINA!" "I'm sorry" (this was the switch cutting in), "we have no Gina here." "No it's not...Don't hang up...GINA!" The dog skidded and stopped the way they do in cartoons, just a few feet away. "Put me through to the French department", I said.

Around 1,000 people came to the event, most of these for the Derrida lecture at the Clancy auditorium at UNSW. The first part of this lecture was entitled 'Artaud at the MoMA' (anticipating its delivery at the Museum of Modern Art in New York on October 11), and inquired into the unforeseen outcomes of an institution like MoMA thinking that it is holding an exhibition of art works by Artaud when those works 'interject' into this very possibility, disturbing the logic of the exhibition, of the museum. The second text was a fragment from an earlier piece, not yet available in translation, about Artaud's critique of the system of fine arts.

But despite the density and eloquence of these texts, the two images that I retain of Derrida on that evening are only of indirect significance to what he was saying. The first was his recitation of some of Artaud's glossolalia (invented language) in a loud declamatory voice: the philosopher become actor, reversing Artaud's own trajectory. It was the clearest his voice had sounded all evening and it occurred at the exact moment in his reading in which he was attempting to amplify Artaud's alternative plans for language. The physicality of the utterance overwhelmed the sense in Derrida's performance, disrupted the flow of scarcely audible explication, and presented the audience with a perverse flash of presence (via satellite). The other image was the response he made to a question that he evidently found particularly irksome. He simply lowered his head so that all the audience could see was a circular shock of white hair. The physical move made the spoken text seem excessive. Wasn't this precisely Artaud's argument in the theatre texts...?

Meanwhile back in the paddock I had managed to speak with Lotringer. In due course he came for the two days at the Powerhouse and then flew back to New York to organise things at MoMA. Curious how these institutions—Powerhouse, MoMA, not to mention the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris which has housed several exhibitions of Artaud's work since the mid 80s—have moved to embrace the 'outsider' art work of Artaud. It's especially curious because his work struggles at every moment to evade such an embrace, encoding its protest against the principle of containment (the logic of the museum) within every image. In a text written just before his death, Artaud used the image of the kennel to describe this domesticating and constraining logic of the museum. He dreamed of an event which would unleash the "bitches of impossibility". I'm just glad the bitch didn't bite me.

100 Years of Cruelty, Artspace and the Powerhouse Museum, September 12-15, 1996.

To market, to market to buy a fat gig

Boris Kelly talks trade at the second Performing Arts Market

In 1994 the Australia Council hosted the inaugural Australian Performing Arts Market (APAM). Held in Canberra, in conjunction with the National Festival of Australian Theatre, the event provided a much needed opportunity for performers to showcase ready-to-tour work before an audience of producers, promoters and agents operating within Australia and internationally. The idea has precedents in the MARS event held in Paris and the Canadian CINARS market. Quite a bit of business was generated in 1994, as many as 25 national and international tours ensued by, among others, the Meryl Tankard Company, Bangarra, Strange Fruit and Leigh Warren. What emerged from the event was a predilection amongst international delegates for circus and physical theatre. Subsequently, the 1996 event—bigger and better than the last—attempted to give the market what it wanted by showcasing "Australia's five leading contemporary circuses". Needless to say there was quite a bit of rope and underwear on the stage. The standard of the work was uniformly high, both in the physical performances and in other genres, proving beyond doubt that Australian artists have met the requirement to produce work of 'excellence'. Clearly, the Performing Arts Market, now an initiative of the Audience Development and Advocacy Division of the Australia Council, is evidence that the federal government is committed to

advancing Australian culture in the international arena.

The keynote speaker for the event was Professor Graeme Snooks, an economic historian from the Australian National University, who in a brief but instructional presentation, provided the philosophical underpinnings of this year's Market. His central thesis revolved around the assertion that culture—including the performing arts—provides the 'vital spirit' in Australia's development as a 'dynamic' society in the current age of technology. As a representation of the nation abroad Australian cultural 'product' plays an increasingly important role in diplomatic, trade and business relations and contributes to international perceptions of our country. How accurate these perceptions are is another matter. One wonders whether projects dealing with issues of immigration, East Timor or the reconciliation process, for example, would ever find a privileged position in our international cultural extravaganzas, despite being profoundly important in domestic public discourse. Professor Snooks skilfully placed the Performing Arts Market in the broader context of Australian economic and social priorities as they now stand, and it was clear both from his address and from the language used by representatives of the Australia Council, that the event was about the *business* of culture first and foremost.

To say there was a palpable buzz throughout the Market would be to underestimate the enthusiasm and staying power of the hundreds of delegates (60 of them international representatives) who attended over the four days of the event. Eighteen works were showcased in 30-minute slots; many more companies, publishers, distributors, agents and producers were represented in the On Display section where delegates could view promotional materials and talk business with artists, bureaucrats and the rest. Prominent amongst these was the presence of Arts Victoria representing the increasing appetite of that state's Premier to do business in the cultural sector. Talk was cheap, contacts were made, lunch was eaten and in the evening delegates attended performances at the National Festival of Australian Theatre held in venues throughout the city. In addition, meetings of peak bodies of Australian performing arts centres, touring agencies and producers were held during the Market, adding to the cut-and-thrust climate of serious deal doing.

The notable absences in the programming of the Market were music, text-based theatre (both in English and other languages) and what I will call experimental performance. Evidently, there is some talk of a push to include music in the next event, but to do so could run the risk of overloading the already substantial program. The demand for Wordy Realism may increase in areas of the Asian market but we are unlikely to attract much interest in non-English speaking European countries nor, it seems, in North America. As for experimental work, at least three prominent international producers specialising in this field told me that they could see nothing of interest at the Market despite the high quality of the work on show. Philip Rolfe, the Australia Council's 'vital force' behind the Market, points out that programming will vary according to demand and that the predominance of physical theatre may not

be repeated, although it is likely that such work will become increasingly popular both at home and abroad.

There was something exhilarating yet chilling about this event. In one sense it had all the atmosphere of a site where serious business was being done in a fun way. It really was a market—a place of buying and selling—and the work on show was undoubtedly worthy of being seen around the world. This discourse, one of trade and exchange, was the predominant language used during the event and, although delegates engaged variously and informally in broader, deeper discussion it would have been a welcome addition to the program to have heard something about Australian culture that was not framed in economic terms. However, there was a strange sense of diplomacy in the words of Australia Council representatives at the Market. It was as if the siege mentality which pervades the Council at this time of precarious futures was compelling its spokespeople to address the question of culture exclusively in the terms required of them by the political situation. The commercial orientation of the event, therefore, remained paramount and understandably so.

According to Australia Council figures the inaugural market generated more than \$2 million in export earnings but did these factor in the total development and production costs invested prior to the projects being brought to market? This second Australian Performing Arts Market appears to have been a screaming success, but we will have to wait for the sales figures to come in before it can be finally decided as such.

Philip Rolfe will be interviewed in RealTime 17.

The Australia Council's Australian Performing Arts Market 1996, Canberra, October 13-17.

AAAR! AAAR! AUSTRALIAN ARTISTS AGAINST RACISM!

AAAR! is a group of volunteers raising funds for a program of action against racism. This series of events will call attention to the impact of racism on contemporary art. We aim to raise funds towards a large advertisement in Saturday's *Australian*:

- AAAR! is a group of artists, art historians and friends-of-artists in Australia formed to take a stand against the recent wave of racism and to support artworkers subjected to racist attacks. We do not want to live in a society divided by fear, contempt and ignorance. We want to live in a society which values every individual, including their culture and language. We strongly believe that no one person or culture should gain through putting others down. Quite the reverse.
- The arts community is an alliance of people from a unique range of cultures and languages. The diversity of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and the varied settler cultures are the source of great richness for the arts community as well as for the wider society. Our Australian culture is developing from our heritage of cultural diversity and from a range of tradition-based, contemporary, rural and urban arts practices.
- Moreover, we support the fight to maintain funding, independence and autonomy for existing Indigenous arts and organisations. Contemporary Indigenous arts have a particular significance in Australia, being based on a complex history extending back thousands of generations, predating the two hundred years of non-Indigenous culture.
- Art is international in its orientation. Cross-cultural links are vital to collaboration and cultural development. Considerable goodwill has been developed by cultural dialogue with other countries, particularly in Asia and the Pacific. This communication is in grave danger of erosion.
- Each of the artists listed in this advertisement has contributed to its cost. We recognise that freedom of speech in a democracy implies a responsibility to be informed and respectful of others. Recent assertions and actions of racial intolerance, bigotry and prejudice show no fairness or good faith. Racism and forms of discrimination based on such things as race, sex, colour, creed or origin are fundamentally wrong.

CAN YOU HELP?

- AAAR! fundraising events will include *Postcards for Everyone* a travelling postcard exhibition
- To have your name listed as supporting this statement:
- Post cheque or money order made out to *Australian Artists Against Racism!*
- Add name, address, phone number, fax etc, for receipt & to be on the AAAR! mailing list
- Should our *Australian* target not be reached then other relevant adverts will be taken out

Send to: *Australian Artists Against Racism!* attention Kym Hann
Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA), 245 Chalmers Street Redfern 2016

Sydney: Margaret Roberts, Jo Holder, Frances Joseph, Liz Coats, Barbara Campbell, Fiona MacDonald, Joan Kerr & Hetti Perkins; Michele Hryce, NSW State Secretary MEAA
Wollongong: Ali Smith & Sandy Indlekofer-O'Sullivan

Contact galleries or public artspaces for details of AAAR! events

FRONTIER STORIES

side TRACK PERFORMANCE GROUP

21 Nov – Dec 15 \$16/10
Wed – Sat 8pm Sun 6.30pm
@ Sidetrack Studio Theatre
142 Addison Rd Marrickville
Bookings 9560 1255

"Frontier Stories makes its audience laugh uproariously"

S.M.H. Jill Sykes 25.11.96



Criminally gay and lesbian

Barbara Bolt writes on the implications of the Western Australian Law Reform Act

10% is not enough
Recruit!
Recruit!
Recruit!

Paula Shewchuck's incitement to recruit, in the *Queer in the West* exhibition currently at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), has broken the law. It contravenes the Law Reform (Decriminalisation of Sodomy) Act (1989) by promoting and encouraging homosexual behaviour. Jo Darbyshire's trilogy *Promote, Recruit and Enjoy* also contravenes this law. Further, her 'bent' reworking of E.R. Boyce's kids' reader 'The Gay Way Series', in *Promote*, could arguably be seized by the police under the Censorship Act (1996). According to this law, Darbyshire could be required to prove that her work was in the public good and not obscene. Had the exhibition *Queer in the West* retained its original title *Queering the West*, the Attorney General



promote or encourage homosexual behaviour.

The Law Reform Act has also provided the justification for the WA State Parliament's decision not to pass Yvonne Henderson's amendment to extend Equal Opportunity Legislation to include discrimination on the grounds of sexuality. Peter Foss has been quoted as saying that the government would never legislate to end discrimination on the grounds of sexuality: "To give homosexuals equal rights would encourage homosexuality, which should be tolerated rather than encouraged". Kevin Prince, Minister for Health, supported Foss, saying "the bill is an attempt to change attitudes and beliefs". The rhetoric of the Foss amendment is clearly stated. Put simply, to extend anti-discrimination legislation to include gays and lesbians would have breached the criminal code.

Ironies, of course, abound. ArtsWA and Healthway (the WA Health

I sometimes forget that my acceptance in the broader community may be provisional, dependent on my not 'flaunting' my sexuality or only flaunting it in the 'safety' of the spectacular (Mardi Gras and Pride). As Chris Crouch pointed out in the forum (*Ac/Culturating the Queer*, queer culture is permitted or tolerated provided it operates within limits, and discreetly at the discretion of the dominant. More often than not, he noted, tolerance is inextricably linked to the dollar and to economic agendas. Thus Jeff Kennett's quest to make Victoria the gay capital of Australia is not about legitimating the position of gays. Once the pink dollar stops flowing, so do the privileges. Tolerance has a dollar value.

In the broader debate around democratic rights and freedom of speech, rights and economics keep getting tangled up. As Zoltan Kovacs observed, "Australia's political establishment eventually was moved to denounce (Pauline Hanson's) views, not because they contain factual inaccuracies, or are morally repugnant, but only after it became evident that they could damage trade" (*West Australian* November 2, 1996).

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Peter Foss could have justifiably called for its closure since it is "contrary to public policy to promote or encourage homosexual behaviour" (Law Reform [Decriminalisation of Sodomy] Act). And what of PICA's role in staging such an exhibition?

We have been hearing a great deal about our democratic right to free speech and expression over the past few months. John Howard has been keen to warn against those "self-appointed dietitians of political correctness who would dare to limit that democratic right". However, I don't think Howard was referring to the Western Australian government's efforts to act in the public good to protect WA citizens from the dangers of proselytising homosexuals and obscene artists (though the two are by no means mutually exclusive). In his dual role as Attorney General and Arts Minister, Peter Foss is well placed to determine and defend what artistic productions are seen to be in the public good.

Despite the rhetoric, free speech is never absolute. Clearly, some Australians are more equal than others when it comes to exercising their democratic rights, including freedom of speech. In Western Australia, at least, freedom of speech for artists and queers is at best conditional. Nor can gays and lesbians take the other 'assumed' democratic rights for granted. The Law Reform Act and the exclusion of gays and lesbians from the Equal Opportunity Act underline the provisional and contradictory nature of living in a Western Australian democracy.

10% is
NOT enough
recruit!
recruit!
recruit!

The Law Reform Act, otherwise known as the Foss Amendment (due to the role played by Peter Foss in its passage), ostensibly sought to deregulate sexual acts between consenting adults in private, but at the same time explicitly set out to regulate homosexuality in the public sphere. It signalled clearly that the State Parliament disapproved of sexual relations between persons of the same sex, stated that it did not wish to create a change in community attitudes to homosexual behaviour (the presumption being that the community is homophobic), and made it illegal to

Promotion Foundation), through their funding of PICA, enabled the staging of *Queer in the West* (ArtsWA in fact provided direct funding for the exhibition) and the programs and the debate surrounding the anti-discrimination legislation unwittingly provided the best publicity that the promoters of the exhibition could have hoped for. Yet, there's the rub. In 1995, an application to Healthway to sponsor the Mapplethorpe exhibition was refused, on the grounds that the request failed to demonstrate how the exhibition would promote good health (the issue of public good in another guise). *Queer in the West's* application to Healthway to stage a public forum around this exhibition was also refused. In both cases, there could be no appeal against the decision on the grounds of discrimination, since the Equal Opportunities legislation does not cover sexuality.

I guess I have a personal stake in all of this. It could be that I apply for a position (a job, a house, a business deal, a grant) and don't get it even though my credentials may be impeccable. I can't appeal since my rights and freedoms are not the same as others in this state. When the Young Liberals can argue that "Australians have a right not to associate and do business with people whose lifestyle they find repugnant", when John Barich from the Australian Family Association writes "If homosexuals behaved in a way that clearly showed their sexual preference...people had every right to show them the door" (*West Australian* September 21, 1996), I know they have the force of the law behind them.

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Sticks and stones may (not) break your bones, but in this world, words can definitely hurt you. In the performance *The Seven Stages of Grieving*, Deborah Mailman articulated what is at stake, at least for Aboriginal people. Reconciliation has become 'Wreck-con-silly-nation'.

Queer in the West, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, October 24-November 24, 1996.

New dance dramas?

Eleanor Brickhill discusses new dance company strategies with Janet Robertson and Mark Gordon

Looking at developments at the One Extra Dance Company and the emergence of The Choreographic Centre in Canberra, Eleanor Brickhill interviews the new non-choreographing directors and queries each company's new structure.

Comparison of comments in the Dance Committee Assessment Reports on funding and policy in the last few years reveals that in 1994, particular interest was given to "developments involving dance and other media"; in 1995, the aim was "to maintain its commitment to independent artists and a range of work practices"; in 1996, the newly named Fund focused on "innovation, artistic vision, and a diversity of cultures and artistic practices, more than on the maintenance of particular structures or forms".

Symptomatic of changing emphases, small company artistic directors being compelled to reconsider basic organisational structures, may well have felt unable to continue working without support for what they believed essential to maintaining artistic standards. The resulting resignations (for instance, Sue Healey, Graeme Watson, Julie-Anne Long, Chrissie Parrott, Cheryl Stock, Jenny Kinder) seemed to demonstrate extreme protest.

No doubt company boards began tearing their hair trying to construct new answers to the small company 'problem', of late perceived as economically non-viable, not pulling in big enough audiences to warrant maintenance of full-time financial support or to attract sufficient sponsorship. Janet Robertson, the new executive producer of One Extra Dance Company, acknowledges that for the next two years at least, there is a bottom line which requires an increase in audiences if that company is to continue to exist at all.

Meanwhile the boards of both Dance Works in Melbourne and One Extra remain committed to a 'company' structure, although having an artistic director who's committed to creating their own work is the choice only of Dance Works.

Both Janet Robertson and Mark Gordon (director of TCC) are deeply aware of the histories of the institutions into which they are entering, wanting to assure people that their new enterprises stand on the shoulders of the old. Both are also aware of the streams of opposition to the loss of existing small company structures within the dance community, and while they have been profoundly concerned about not dismantling the "good bits", what they are actually building continues to be debated.

Can their assurances assuage fears that losing artistic directors will mean a terminal loss in the development of dance as an independent art form; that the potential depths for dance innovation and development will be confined to the role of theatrical adjunct? Might not the means of developing independent dance aesthetics be simply negated in a drive towards a different set of performative notions, in which language based ideas set the ground rules?

What does a choreographer as artistic director do? It sounds bland to say one loses vital links with a unique body of work once a preferred means of support disappears. But at best, dance artists as collaborators share a deep physical relationship, a profound personal culture, an ethical, even spiritual stance on their bodies, as the basis of their aesthetics, which flourishes in that hothouse. Dancers within this culture literally embody work, and copies made outside that culture are to its detriment. Development of that culture needs more intense hands-on effort than is ever available in a stop/start environment such as freelancing requires. Time is required not so much to 'make steps' but to enter that intimacy.

**Janet Robertson, executive producer,
One Extra Dance Company**

Janet Robertson has modelled her role of executive producer more on film tradition, as someone who puts people together, listens to ideas, responds to them, negotiates, and also has a very strong creative role. For her, while

the clarity of her vision needs to be maintained, holding fast to specific ideas can muddy the artistic waters. As she understands it, "executive producer" is not just a fancy name for an artistic director, a person single-minded in their commitment to making their own steps, but is someone who makes decisions about what is seen.

Janet spoke about an evident lack of 'performative notions' expressed within dance works, separate from the technique, about a need for getting past the dance 'show'. Her job as executive producer is to demand that a choreographer's ideas become cohesive, and her talent as company dramaturg, in which capacity she will work on the floor with choreographers, is to be able to get choreographers and dancers to ask themselves just what it is they are doing.

Way back in 1960, Susan Sontag said, "The best criticism dissolves considerations of content into those of form". Remember Balanchine's maddening ideas which insist that "the movement is the meaning". If these ideas still hold true, it is by means of the movement itself, the physical ideas that a dance conveys, that some "secret truth" (Acocella, 1990) of a dance is found. Separating the content of a dance from something called "technique" seems to me highly problematic. If a dance work suffers from a lack of performative skill, perhaps the lack is the technique, not separate from it. Without relevant things to say, technique can make dancing grossly inappropriate and banal, and needs to be dealt with head on, rather than being treated as separate from notions of 'performance'.

Another perceived problem is that within the current economic climate, dancers and choreographers are forced to work independently, required to continue to produce new work constantly in six-week rehearsal blocks. Artistic directors of a company develop a body of work, perhaps a repertoire. Independents are forced to throw out work and be constantly making new material, rather than redeveloping it. Janet's concern is with the difficulty of questioning one's artistic motives when box office is always of prime consideration.

The idea that independent artists are people who throw out their work is problematic too, and an important distinction made between freelance and independent artists still seems valid. Capable of making work in almost any structure, freelance artists tend to work within a kind of generic aesthetic. But independence inherently involves an individual artistic need to work outside of established artistic structures, and doesn't usually centre on financial necessity. Ideally, evolving one's own structure in which to work seems a logical and necessary career move for independent choreographers.

The legacy of Kai Tai Chan's One Extra, working as a huge melting pot for ideas, where people could come and work, while still responding to his central vision, provides an important basis for the new company. There needs to be a core aim to produce work with a particular kind of production value, a 'house style', and independents will be asked to respond to that vision when producing work for One Extra. Meanwhile, there is potential for the natural development of teams over time, or an artistic director to take over, to redevelop and reshape the company vision.

The first aspect of the company program for 1997 is the development of relationships with an audience via three seasons of work by proven and established choreographers. Sue Healey has been invited to re-develop an older work, to take the opportunity to have it really critically pulled apart and re-examined. Importantly, an ongoing two-year commitment to any commissioned program provides the means by which independent artists need no longer throw away work just to maintain box office success.

The second program, a double bill with Lucy Guerin and Garry Stewart, with their

vastly different profiles, may invite complaints of eclecticism, and begs questions about the constituents of identity and 'house style'. Neither a dancer nor choreographer on the floor "making steps", Janet is still a practicing artist, and remains committed to the idea that a cohesive philosophical base forms a strong company identity.

An affiliate artists program starts in January, and the six artists invited to participate include choreographers, designers, dancers, musicians and technicians. There is no fixed ensemble, but several dancers have been invited to become affiliate artists. While entirely free to choose their preferred dancers, choreographers will be encouraged to consider working with the affiliate artists. One Extra will provide a place to discuss work, office facilities, rehearsal and forum space. To a certain extent the work evolving under this scheme will be motivated by the artists themselves, and is not expected to be produced within the company context or vision, although they will receive acknowledgment as working artists in all One Extra publicity.

A third aspect of the company structure concerns creative development through a mentor program. One Extra hopes to provide a strong context in which established artists might work with dancers of their choice, simply exploring their working processes. With no performance outcome necessarily expected, a serious kind of play becomes much more central than usual.

Fourthly, direct educational and community activity will further promote the company's ongoing relationship with the University of Western Sydney, Nepean, by setting up performance workshops for people whose interest is in physical performance, but who might want to explore text based material.

**Mark Gordon, director,
The Choreographic Centre**

The Choreographic Centre is the most recent incarnation in organising the development of professional dance practice in Canberra, and like One Extra, its history contains the seeds of this current manifestation. By almost a series of accidents Don Asker took up an ANU fellowship in 1980, resulting in the formation of Human Veins Dance Company, and it is important for Mark Gordon, as the new director, that this history is known. Between the old and the new lies Meryl Tankard's Dance Company, and more recently Sue Healey's Vis-a-Vis, but the board itself and its long-term commitment to professional dance practice in the ACT, has remained fairly stable. The studios too, in Gorman House, are the same ones that Don Asker used, but now, 16 years later, that whole complex is a rich, busy environment.

The board's response to Sue Healey's resignation was to engage widely in consultation with local practising dance artists, arts organisations, the ACT Cultural Development Unit and the Australia Council, as to appropriate action, and the notion of a centre for choreographic research and development emerged. The idea of that first fellowship, along with residency opportunities, became an important part of this vision. But the crucial aspect is that of mentorship, where a variety of experienced artists are available to work in creative partnership with a choreographer, to solve problems, to talk through ideas about what is or is not happening within the process of exploration.

Choreographic partnership shapes Mark Gordon's role as a director whose talents lie in nurturing new ideas, bringing out the best in people. His role is not curatorial in the sense that artists are directly promoted. But the protection of archives, the previous companies' histories, and continuing documentation of the life of the Centre, what happens, what succeeds and what doesn't, carries an important curatorial obligation.

The Armidale Conferences of the 1960s remain for many Australian artists a high point in their creative lives, having provided a nurturing and empowering environment, where no special demands for 'success' and no sense of value judgement impinged on work done. The Centre's patron, Shirley McKechnie described such an environment as a creative broth. This idea has provided a formative model for TCC, and one measure of its success will be whether or not

choreographers are attracted to Gorman House as a place for exploration.

Fellowships are variously budgeted between \$40,000 and \$50,000. But needs may vary tremendously and structuring can be as flexible as imagination and practicality allow. Artists are invited to make proposals for the fellowship program, rather than applications, so that the criteria for success is more about project feasibility than popular appeal.

The fellowships essentially buy time, and like One Extra, the Centre is working towards freeing choreographers from the misery of the six weeks production schedule. Funnily enough, unlike Janet Robertson, Mark describes it as a luxury and a freedom for choreographers to discard work. But then the issue is not really whether a simple move needs to be discarded or retained, but where the actual dance work lies. Moving is never simple, being fraught with meaning, and it is deciphering the many guises of human embodied meaning which really provides the work.

Fellowships are targeted at 'emerging' choreographers, not necessarily the young. Essentially they can provide special opportunities for people with vision and potential, but estimating potential is difficult. Submissions therefore need to include references attesting to the artist's capacity to use the experience to best advantage.

Crucial to the 1997 TCC structure is the advisory panel, and a glance at the personnel (Don Asker, Nanette Hassall, Jennifer Barry Knox, Wesley Enoch, Annie Greig, Garry Lester, Sue Street and Graeme Watson) suggests a wide-ranging understanding of dance making and arts practice will be brought to bear on the ranking of submissions for the three fellowships envisaged for 1997.

The residency program, with a lighter financial commitment, offers access to the Centre's facilities and resources for choreographers to develop work. A highly flexible program allows an almost infinite range of innovative proposals. Matters of duration, financial assistance and personnel are discussed within the partnership, with advice from the advisory panel.

The flipside to both fellowship and residency programs is public outcome. With exploration and research as the primary focus, outcome will be measured not by performance, but a different kind of public access. The local community needs to feel a benefit from the Centre, and opposition can arise when choreographers makes the space so private that no-one can enter, either metaphorically or literally. Fellowship recipients will need to integrate some degree of public access into their schedule, although there are no rules about what form this might take.

By way of sharing ideas and to gently open up dialogue, Mark Gordon envisages choreographic luncheons, where local people might meet choreographers, perhaps see videos, ask questions, to develop perspectives on dance practice. He also wants to set up a writers' group whose charter is to develop writing about dance outside of criticism. If genuine dialogue between writer and choreographer is just an ideal, the results may still benefit archival documentation.

These activities seem so closely interwoven as to create of a kind of performance 'safety net', and engender confidence in those afraid of falling. But for others whose artistic footing is surer, and who crave danger and isolation, a source of joy may seem stopped. Both Mark and Janet's undoubted strengths will be welcome and liberating for some, performers and audience alike, even if the singleminded and uncompromising among us find such stimulation more of an irritant.

In many ways, Mark Gordon and Janet Robertson's visions dove-tail well. Their enterprises seem built for survival, and between the two of them, they may flourish.

Cold moon and wolf's breath

The visit of the Shanghai Ballet performing *The White-Haired Girl* prompts Trevor Hay to consider Jiang Qing's curious tolerance for this model ballet

When the man behind me in the stalls at Melbourne's State Theatre asked his Chinese companion if *The White-Haired Girl* was a well-known story in China, I was praying she'd at least ask him if *Swan Lake* was a well-known story in Australia. But, of course, she gave him a very courteous Chinese reply. At the risk of being misunderstood I tried to turn round and get a peek at how old she was—perhaps she didn't know much about the work either. They used to say, in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, that 800 million people had seen only eight plays for eight years and the 'revolutionary modern ballet' (now styled 'classic modern ballet'), *The White-Haired Girl*, was one of them. Yet it would be quite wrong to think everyone got to see a live performance, since it was extremely difficult to get tickets, and most Chinese I have spoken to saw only the film version—which they loved. The problem was never that the work was propaganda only that it was part of a very limited repertoire of propaganda. So, for me, who saw some of these works in the 70s as a privileged foreign visitor, and my Chinese friend who saw films of them, this was a very exciting occasion, although there is little in the Shanghai Ballet's promotion that would prepare you for it.

In fact, this is one of two ballets in the famous repertoire, the other being *Red Detachment of Women*, which is regarded as a technically superior work. The great thing about *The White-Haired Girl* however is its folkloric power, the fact that it had already taken its place in Chinese culture as a legend, factual story and opera (and black-and-white film of the opera) before becoming a model opera in the 1960s.

This is the work Jiang Qing (Madame Mao) must surely have felt most ambivalent about, since it was a kind of ghost story, and she was always determined superstition would be rooted out of the Chinese theatre, which had long been a haven for fox-fairies, snake goddesses and erotically inclined transmigratory souls. She may also have had strong feelings about the storyline, which is reminiscent of her own life. She hinted to her biographer, Roxane Witke, that her mother was forced into prostitution—that she became accustomed from an early age to 'walking in the dark' in search of her mother. Her

fear and loathing of dogs is also suggested both in official biography and in the roman-à-clef novel *Red Azalea*, in which the body of a fallen woman, being unsuitable for burial with her ancestors, is interred outside the city gate where her bones are gnawed by wolves. All this fits with *The White-Haired Girl*, which is based on the Chinese legend of hungry ghosts, the vagabond undead who plague the living unless they are offered sacrifices like other respectable spirits with decent filial descendants.

Jiang Qing actually played a starring role in a 1936 film called *Blood on Wolf Mountain* based on a novel, *Cold Moon and Wolf's Breath*, in which a community of human beings triumphs over marauding wolves—the Japanese. *The White-Haired Girl* is set in northern China before the organisation of resistance to the Japanese invasion. In the 1940s opera which preceded the ballet (and won the 1951 Stalin Prize for Literature), the peasant girl Xi'er is sold to a landlord against the will of her father, abused by the landlord's mother, made pregnant and then thrown out of the house to be remaindered as a prostitute. She flees into the mountains and becomes a white-haired, cave dwelling spirit, frightening local peasants who take her for a hungry ghost to be offered food sacrifices. In her wild outcast state, she is constantly threatened by the elements, and in the ballet version we see this luminous, ragged-maned creature darting eerily through rain and lightning, always a step away from howling wolves and their human incarnation—rapacious landlords and their feudal lackeys.

Finally she is discovered and redeemed by members of the Communist Eighth Route Army, who do not believe in ghosts. As Marxists and materialists they appreciate that her white hair is simply the result of a lack of salt and sunshine. She emerges from her cave into the brilliant sunlight—also the symbol for Mao Zedong—and stands with her comrades in a famous last act tableau celebrating her unmasking and metamorphosis from mysterious renegade 'animal' outcast to member of the new proletarian, human family. In the ballet version there are a number of changes but the major one is her repulsion of the landlord's attacks—this heroine cannot be sullied, which is not good news for real rape victims.

In the 1950s, before the ballet was

created, there was considerable theoretical discussion about realism in literature, and Xi'er—the white-haired girl—was seen by some as a character who demonstrated the 'typical' qualities required of a proletarian hero without sacrificing distinct individuality. At this point she was still real enough to be raped, become pregnant and have a child—and her father was real enough to commit suicide. She was described by one critic and writer—soon to be denounced as a rightist during the Hundred Flowers Movement—as "an ordinary girl with an unusual destiny".

That she managed to live down her association with rightist theoreticians is an indication Xi'er may well have had genuine supernatural abilities. In fact, during the Cultural Revolution she became a pin-up girl, and her picture was pressed lovingly into boys' wallets; but, in spite of this dangerous habit, she remained an untouchable symbol of proletarian purity. Curiously, in the ballet, more than in the opera, there is a strong hint of that kind of U.R.S.T ('Un-Resolved Sexual Tension') beloved of modern television scriptwriters, although, it must be said, this ghost does get laid. Revolutionary Romanticism steers perilously close to *True Romance* at times and there is a lovely sensuality about this moonlit apparition in her paper-cut, Peter Pan-ish costume—the garment of the tale gapes, as Roland Barthes would have said. On top of it all there is a suggestion of primitivism and even 'Fauvism' which Jiang Qing specifically denounced in one of her key speeches on the arts. Yet this is the model work which suffered the least interference from Jiang Qing, the relentless censor and inquisitor.

There is a good deal of the world's folklore, ancient and modern, about *The White-Haired Girl*; lupine themes have been appropriated from peasant storytellers for use as moral education for bourgeois audiences (a similar thing happened to *Little Red Riding Hood*); familiar motifs of starvation, rape (the Neapolitan version of *Sleeping Beauty*), child-selling (*Rumpelstiltskin*), and banishment to the wilderness (*Rapunzel*), are apparent. Perhaps, with European ballet and music wedded to Peking Opera movement, with traditional folk storyline and the use of modern peasant protagonists, Jiang Qing succeeded, in spite of the ideological difficulties presented by this story, in creating the international proletarian fairytale.

The German Marxist Walter Benjamin said fairytales told us of "the earliest arrangements that mankind made to shake off the nightmare which the myth had placed upon its chest". The wicked witch is dead, but in *The White-Haired Girl* we may still see Jiang Qing's attempt to get the nightmare of truth off her chest and transform it into the power of fairytale.

Trevor Hay is currently researching Peking Opera, especially the works of the cultural revolution. His next book, *Black Ice*, a novel co-authored with Fang Xiang Shu, is due to be published in early 1997.

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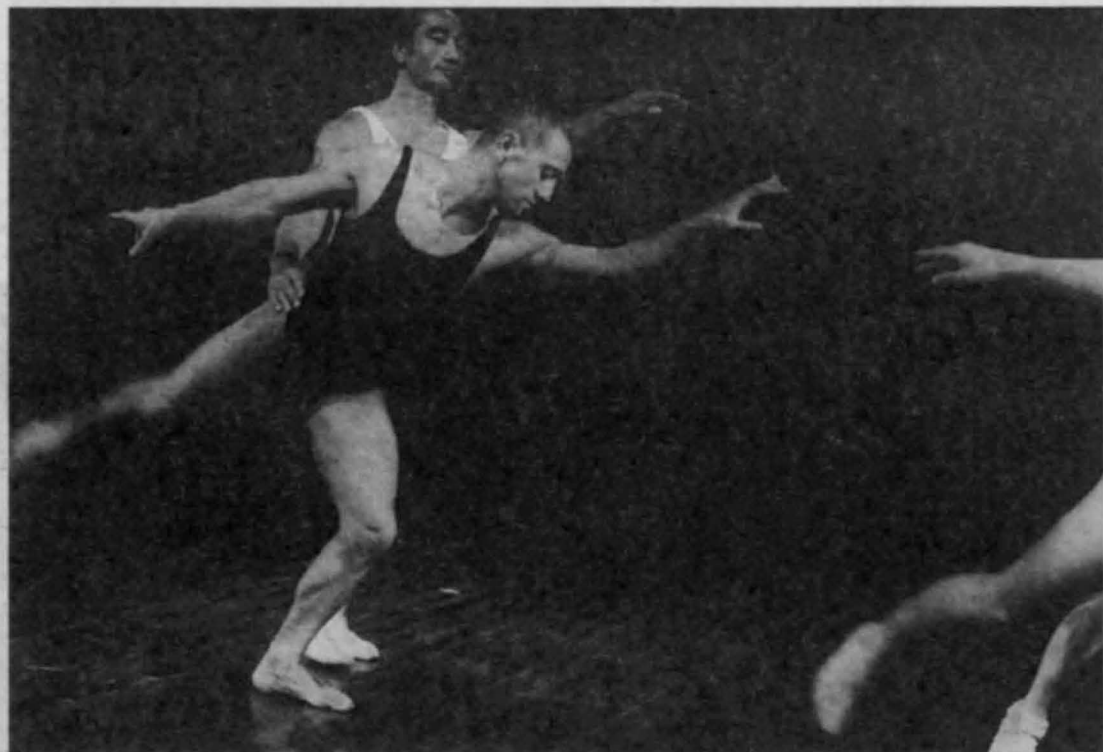
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Journeys through frames, across dance floors

Eleanor Brickhill sees Kate Champion, *Bodies*, Dean Walsh, Jeff Stein, Black Grace in Sydney



Black Grace

Heidrun Löhr

In describing what a dance might mean, people often refer to frames of reference, something which might indicate how to look at a dance so that it makes sense. These days, dancing is also about frames, demonstrating shifting perspectives, requiring the viewer to slide around multiple trains of thought as if over teflon.

In *Face Value*, we see Kate Champion through windows in a monstrous facade, tiny framed views of her various relationships with the world and more particularly with men, over the years. Another world far behind sends galvanic warnings of storm and stress. Lights flare and briefly illuminate a profound and scary desolation, a vast, empty space with rotting beams, about to collapse. Sometimes we also notice images that seem transparent in their invitation to see past her daily skin. Soon, however, we become aware that these images of her as uncomfortable yet willing model, anorexic, a woman slowly being crushed as she sleeps, are opaque. The blinds are down.

Frames also reveal secret *non sequiturs*. Kate Champion tells us about the profound relationship between a person's social skin and their inner life, assured that it is remarkable, a source of both strength and destruction. But the secret in *Face Value* is that we never get to see the hidden passage from one to the other. No artist's insight illuminates the way, and we are left stranded in unwilling collusion and vapid inference. Kate's gorgeous 34-year-old 'facade', in several costumes, remains the primary source of insight, and any talk we hear about menopausal decline and resurrection seems frankly spurious.

What did the six separate *Bodies* programs (Newtown Theatre) show us? Simply that the frames of reference for most young dispossessed dancers are so tight-arsed as to be suffocating. We are asked to find sustenance in a narrow and ill-fitting series of classroom steps, which for the most part, arising from ancient techniques engendered in the 70s, have lost any power they might once have had.

But here's an interesting example of censorship! Dean Walsh with his riveting comments on male physicality, in *Hardware Part II* and *Testos/Terrain*, was obliged by the management to warn the audience to leave if they might be offended by his "male nudity" which included the riotous sight of his anus. It's

a pity we weren't warned about another piece, *Duet 4/4*, in which two pre-pubescent girls were obliged to adopt sequences of 'pout, waggle and smile' as their preferred if naive style, closely accompanied by two older girls, no doubt demonstrating the condition they might be lucky enough to grow up into, if only they can smile for long enough. The idea of child pornography sprang immediately to mind.

But Dean Walsh's *Testos/Terrain* is not about homosexuality or even being male, but about being human. His insights seem hard-won, and profoundly embodied. His ghastly singled 'male', who at first seems to have forgotten his opposable thumb, eventually shows us a place where instinct, animal curiosity, intelligence, and physical nature meet, way below daily manifestations of

gender. At this junction, there is a well of polymorphous sensibility. For building a human home of whatever kind, boys' toys may just as well be lipstick here; the creative playing is the same, and it's only the tools of implementation that are different.

Jeff Stein's performance in *Lard*, at October's Eventspace at The Performance Space, showed another kind of physicality altogether. Unlike Dean, his is not defined by muscular and emotional depth, but by skittering skin-deep neural patterns, visible thoughts which tie up his frame in a kind of dance of simultaneous and conflicting directions. His being is expressed as if merely a series of whims, a collection of certainly more than two minds;

he spars with spectres; he is ingenuous, just there, and sometimes he seems afraid of just taking up space.

Watching Black Grace, an all-male New Zealand based group, as part of Pacific Wave at The Performance Space, was an unexpectedly moving experience. New company, first work, raging success: a terribly hard act to follow. Ex-football players, professional drag queens, nine dancers highly trained in western techniques among more traditional ones, brought a sophisticated humour, and a mix of lissom and weighty vitality to Neil Jeremia's personal statement. What to say about wanting to be a dancer ("Not a 'dancer', a *dancer!*") in a virulently hetero black Maori culture? Where do dreams of wanting to be weightless go? Is being a florist really unthinkable weird? The threads of these and other hard questions are unravelled as Black Grace's stories of personal experience are retold.

If their most conspicuous physicality has grown out of contemporary European dance lineage (Douglas Wright via DV8 and Batsheva perhaps), it frames glimpses of black traditions: urban rap and Maori haka for instance. Black Grace itself, in a literal sense, is about journeys across the world's dance floors, and about risking familial and peer group isolation in the attempt to comfortably embody simultaneous and divergent cultures.

There is very little gratuitous material in the choreography of Black Grace, not many extraneous gestures. It is straightforward and often poignant. And there is real joy in the visceral charge, the resilience of unabated competence, the smudged unconfined edges of movement made emotionally resonant, the streams of sensuality, and the heavy, moist thwack of muscle and sinew thankfully audible when the other music stops.

Face Value, Kate Champion, The Performance Space November 8-12; *Bodies*, The Newtown Theatre October 23-November 10; Eventspace, The Performance Space, October 30; Black Grace, The Performance Space, November 15.



Dean Walsh, *Hardware Pt I*

Heidrun Löhr



Black Grace

Heidrun Löhr

Moments and movements

Wendy Lasica compares choreographers Lucy Guerin and Sue Healey at work in Melbourne



Lucy Guerin and Rebecca Hilton in *Incarnadine*

Manuella Cifra

Melbourne audiences have had a memorable combination of dance performances over the past few months. One of the highlights was the return to Melbourne by choreographers Lucy Guerin and Sue Healey. Both presenting concerts in September, they gave us an opportunity to look at how differently their choreographies have developed.

Both were part of Danceworks during the 1980s. Since then Lucy Guerin has been in New York, and Sue Healey spent part of that time as the Artistic Director of Vis-a-Vis Dance Company in Canberra.

We have seen glimpses of Healey's work in Melbourne over that time, but nothing of Guerin. Healey's *Suite Slipp'd*, comprised four pieces: two by her, one from Phillip Adams (Australian dancer, based in New York) and a short work from Irene Hultman, New York-based Swedish choreographer, with whom Adams performs.

Suite Slipp'd, Healey's opening dance, describes exactly what happens in the piece. A collection of short solos, twosomes and threesomes that dip into and borrow from social and historical dance forms. These fragments are picked and pasted, and re-presented as a dense work, almost over-filled with movement. Healey, Adams and Michelle Heaven wind decoratively and decorously through the space with taut, restrained bodies. Sometimes they are twisting like corkscrews. At other times there are bent, angled knees, and half diamond shapes in the arms, by the side of the body, or above the head. Tight spatial patterning is enhanced by direction changes that cut through the air. The performers are close but rarely touch. One can feel the connection between them. There is a magnetism that keep these bodies together.

The tension in *Suite Slipp'd* is in and between the performers' bodies, while in Guerin's *Incarnadine*, a tension is set up between the performers and the audience. At times, it was as if one was watching this work through a transparent barrier. Guerin sets up a scenario that demands our empathy, but denies us the emotional access

to it. Guerin and Rebecca Hilton perform a tireless unison boundary-marking pattern on matching white spirals painted onto the floor. The sound by James Lo crashes and crackles around the dancers, while the stark white light dramatically changes direction, striking the dancers at odd angles. They are exposed by the light. They rarely leave their spirals, perhaps only to extend a movement onto the floor; but they retreat, eager it seems, to maintain their space.

They are approached by a trio (Ros Warby, Nicole Bishop and Jennifer Weaver). The relationship between the two groups is unclear. The trio seem keen to be acknowledged, initially without response. In the final resolve, an uneasy one, we see all five dancers spaced across the stage, their torsos writhing and reaching in unison, stretching towards us, just out of our emotional reach.

Healey's second work *Hark Back* is an expedition through an intimate personal

history. It feels loose and inviting, like memories that flutter and tease. It is easy to find a way in. There are moments of lucidity, of intimacy, of insight and of sadness. It is engagingly performed by five dancers (Adams, Heaven, Shona Erskine, Sally Smith, David Tyndall) in episodes that create a layered understanding rather than a sequential pattern.

Guerin's second work, *Courtabie 1966*, is also, I suspect, a reflection on times past. She presents three young girls (herself, Hilton and Warby), inexperience exposed at every gawky elbow and hip. We journey with them through time and their changing relationships. The use of repeated spatial motifs in this work, unnecessarily exposes the structure. However, Guerin uses subtle changes in rhythmic structure and syncopation which create some playful movement dialogues aptly describing her intention. She also has a way of drawing us to where the movement is in the body, even if it's just in the fingers of one hand.

There are more differences than similarities between the two choreographers' work. Healey's time seems thick with movement. She creates worlds that meander through the short sections of both her works. Guerin is more direct, her stories unfold along a linear path. There is a deliberateness about every movement, a spareness infused with emotional undercurrents.

The inspired performances by the dancers in both Guerin and Healey's work ably showed the two as strong and distinctive choreographers in Melbourne's multifarious dance community.

Incarnadine choreographed by Lucy Guerin, Gasworks Theatre, September 4; *Suite Slipp'd* by Sue Healey and Dancers, Beckett Theatre, September 18.

Wendy Lasica is the manager of Astra Chamber Music Society and an independent producer and manager of dance and new music events in Melbourne.

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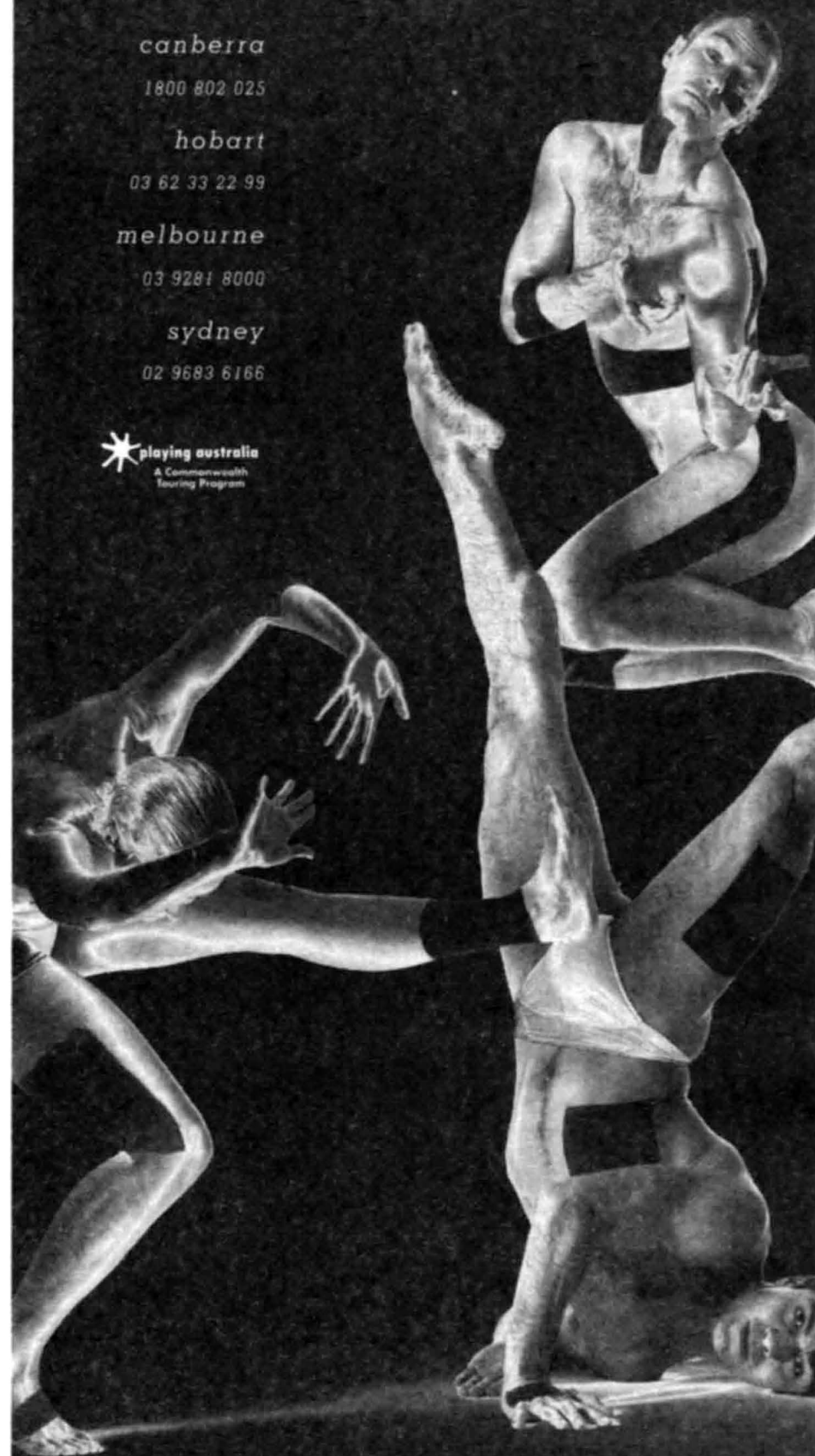
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Huge beauty

Zsuzsanna Soboslay wonders at Nederlands Dance Theatre at the Melbourne Festival

The curtain is up as we enter. Two figures hang in perspex cubes: specimens, a sacrifice; naked but preserved, elevated, ready for dissection. Below, dancers stretch, flex, finalise, in a casual yet definite rhythmic pattern. This backstage is already on show.

This is the pause before the dream; the curtain falls, slicing the space between watcher and dance. A colonnade opens, a male body revealed in yogic contortion, his outside turning in. His hand gestures like Dylan Thomas' green fuse up through an impossible space between his limbs.

To his side, a woman dances within the curtain—embraced and writhing. They dance the edge between out and in, the membrane between past, present and dream. And as if the membrane, the question of the border, becomes another person, another single figure appears...

Jiri Kylian's *Bella Figura* is a neo-Renaissance work with a Mannerist questioning of the givens in classical repertoire. If we associate Renaissance with man-centredness, stone colonnades, chiaroscuro lighting, and the ambivalent relationship between full skirts and the nakedness of Da Vinci's anatomies, then Kylian's work is not so much about partnering (that on which classical dance technically relies) as about the duality of performing and being. One partners, is partnered, and yet one is technically quite alone. Such dualism is achingly apparent in the music (Pergolesi, Torelli, Marcello, Foss—a pair of ears takes in a macrocosm of sound), in yoga (where postures and sensations consolidate and expand the body's references), and in dance, where the dichotomies of gravity and defiance, muscle and lightness are taken further into a questioning of how contemporary bodies can dance old themes.

The choreography continually toys with these aspects: partners dance whilst the presence of a third questions from the side, in pyramids of light merging or emerging from a dark Roman corridor.

Even the most classically-oriented lifts are re-coloured mid-air by a crossing of knees, or thighs registering a contrapuntal trill. Body positions encompass classical, Renaissance court dance, occasionally something like flamenco, as well as animal, insect and dream.

Against the hilariously human (a dancer sliding cross-stage to land beneath his lover's knees), a man "walks" a woman like a greyhound beside him; he, huge, falls to amble beside her like a Great Dane. Their passage cross-stage is a slipping-off of human covering. Costumes, too, play with this slippage: a woman's upper torso is bare, below she is full-skirted with red. She is a rose: powerful, vulnerable, scented with knowledge beyond the billowing and seams.

This aspect of framing, clothing, and revealing becomes astonishing when six half-naked courtiers downstage cradle the long curtain, the sky itself ruched in their arms. Their skirts dance, embracing the collusion of the spheres; and then the sky itself begins to fall, the curtain bar falling into their velvet dreams.

Is this the beginning or the end? Two hug a curtain to each side; is this the start or finish of the dream?

A pair come in for curtain-call amidst a line of braziers aflame. Their bodies lean towards the heat. Their duet is almost classical; his lift (her legs paddling like a swan's) ends with her lowering leg sliding over his ankle like a swan's neck's embrace.

He masks and stops her mouth as he supports her turn. It is their last illicit meeting: each soothes the other's shoulder hitching with sadness. A silent, clandestine

pas de deux, they exit, leaving the unspeakable behind.

Whilst *Bella Figura* (an Italian term meaning "don't let on that anything is wrong") shows trouble drumming beneath the skirt-swept courtyard face of an era, *No More Play* is a restless if brief dance of pressing contemporary alienation. The costumes and stage are dark and bare. Long black pants, short leotards, Webern's atonal score giving no hook of comfort tunes. Pyramids of light pick out trio versus duo in a chequerboard of ambiguous relationship and uncertainty.

A woman is held aloft by the legs between two men, taking great strides across the sky. She is gargantuan, but totally reliant on her supporters.

There is an edge of trepidation: confounding borders, dancers roll and hang over the front edge of the stage. Dancers rock as if blindfolded, smack themselves; limbs form geometries which wrap into themselves, bodies twitch like speared deer.

Kylian, inspired by a Giacometti sculpture, says "one might feel as if one has been invited to a game, the rules of which are being kept secret, or have never been determined". This short, disturbing piece about the semi-conscious is epilogued by a long, low rumble which leads directly into a surprising, white, corseted dance where rapiers and partners swap roles.

Petite Morte is a dance of ritualised lust that is both fearful homage to and proud demonstration of the game of love. It expands the scene from *Bella Figura* where a duet play bow-and-arrow, stretching and arching at antelope in a delicate hunt of ordered passion.

Six women's bare necks and arms are picked out by the opening light, their folded hands white diamonds/chastity belts against black velvet bellies. Before them, six men perform a dance with rapiers that swish and prod and fall; they drop them, also slap their own bodies; rehearse the missionary position and lower themselves over prone rapiers to the floor.

In the chiaroscuro light, their white boned corsets and women's bodices contrast with the spilt-blood black of velvet abandoned in the colonnades. This is a *petite mort* of sex and teasing death, swapping rapiers for women then deftly passing the weapon through the women's legs, an elaborate mating game.

They draw spears through their own bodies like floss through teeth; they enter tipping their skirts, slide cross-stage like soccer players in a toy parlour game.

The humour is timely and unsettling; in the final image, life dances back in black cloak: six empty skirts enter, spinning and rotating on their own, red on the inside like the blood that has left the dancers' bodies and dared itself to dance alone.

Kylian's choreography is a relief from the usual sexing of dancer's bodies to either the crass, the pristine, or machismo. Men join a chorus of skirts, a woman partners a man as if she's a boy; whilst women's hips swerve and curve like sliding gazelles, men refrain from piercing leaps but hold the horizontal with the level swaying power of poppy blooms.

This is a huge beauty that doesn't need to boast muscle or brawn but plays the edge of doubt, mask and intrigue that performance has long known but doesn't always dare to show.

Bella Figura, *No More Play*, *Petite Mort*, choreographed by Jiri Kylian, Melbourne International Festival of the Arts, State Theatre, October 29. (The program also included *Fantasia* choreographed by Hans van Manen—not reviewed here.)

Appropriation and beyond

Alison Kubler interviews Brisbane academic and art writer Rex Butler about his recent publications on Australian contemporary art

What is Appropriation? IMA & Power Publications, 1996, is an edited selection of essays which, as its title suggests, takes up one of the key issues in Australian art in the 80s and 90s. An Uncertain Smile, Artspace, 1996, a transcript of lectures Butler delivered while artist-in-residence at Artspace, Sydney, proposes a certain 'realist' art and critical practice to circumvent the kitsch and camp which marked the 80s, and much of the 90s to date. I asked Butler how he views the relationship between the two books.

RB Well, although *An Uncertain Smile* came out before it, *What is Appropriation?* is really the one people should consider first. It is a collection of many of the well-known pieces concerning appropriation in the 80s and 90s, from Paul Taylor's articles about Popism to Jeff Gibson's championing of 'grunge' in *Art & Text* in the early 90s. In the introduction, I try to speak of a certain logic of representation that underpins the various debates that go on throughout the period and divide appropriation up into three moments: Popism, which I associate with Paul Taylor, Iconicism, which I associate with Edward Colless, and Banality, which marks the 'end' of appropriation as a stylistic tool or device. In the second book, *An Uncertain Smile*, I try to think what might come 'beyond' or 'after' appropriation. I put forward a number of artists and critics whose work I think successfully escapes the pervasive irony that characterises the art world today: the artists A.D.S. Donaldson, Hany Armanious and Anne Wallace, and the critics Meaghan Morris, Adrian Martin and Edward Colless. So you can see that if I speak of it as a form of 'realism', it is certainly not a simple mimetic fidelity to appearances (only one of the artists, for instance, is figurative), or stylistically or intellectually coherent movement (I'm not sure all the writers I chose would agree with each other).

AK This turn towards 'realism' is perhaps surprising, given that a while ago in this magazine (*Textual Manoeuvres*, RealTime 6, April-May 1995) you spoke of art criticism as a kind of game with the various rhetorics of art, in which the art critic is no longer to judge art but only to somehow double or extrapolate its logic.

RB Yes, it might appear strange, and my argument was criticised heavily at the time. However, in my defence I would say that

one of my obsessions as an art critic is how to make art criticism meaningful, how to make it work, how to make it 'make a difference'. It seems to me that, in response to 80s style art which deliberately eschews aesthetic evaluation and is actually about the history and rhetoric of art (the colour you see is not blue but about the various ways of using blue throughout the history of art), all the art critic can do is speak in terms of this rhetoric. To do otherwise, as so many of the 'commonsense' newspaper critics do, is simply to beg the question, to address the art in terms which it would not recognise. This is not necessarily wrong—and the difficulty of approaching contemporary art would be worth a discussion in itself—but it very rarely produces anything interesting. I have preferred to work within art's own understanding of itself and to produce my effects that way. And, besides, the 'realism' I argue for in *An Uncertain Smile* is not simply extratextual and unrhetorical. It also is to be seen only within the writing of art, it is a problem within the languages of art making and art criticism. In other words, this 'realism' is itself a certain fiction, a way of contesting appropriation in its own terms, of doubling it. To that extent, it can only be itself kitsch, camp and ironic.

AK Given your Brisbane base, there is very little direct reference to Queensland in your work.

RB Perhaps true, but I think it is significant that a fairly canonical, textbook history of the 80s, which hopefully will enter tertiary curricula, comes from Queensland. If Queensland artists do not feature over-prominently in either of my books, it still says a lot that a Queenslander produced them and that a Queensland institution took the risk to put out a large anthology. The arts scene up here is very healthy. It seems obvious to me, for example, that the Asia-Pacific Triennial is the most significant regular Australian art exhibition and not the Sydney Biennale.

An Uncertain Smile is available from Artspace, Sydney, for \$15 and *What is Appropriation?* is available from the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane and bookshops for \$29.

Alison Kubler has worked at Griffith Artworks and the David Pestorius Gallery. She has just completed an MA in art history in London.



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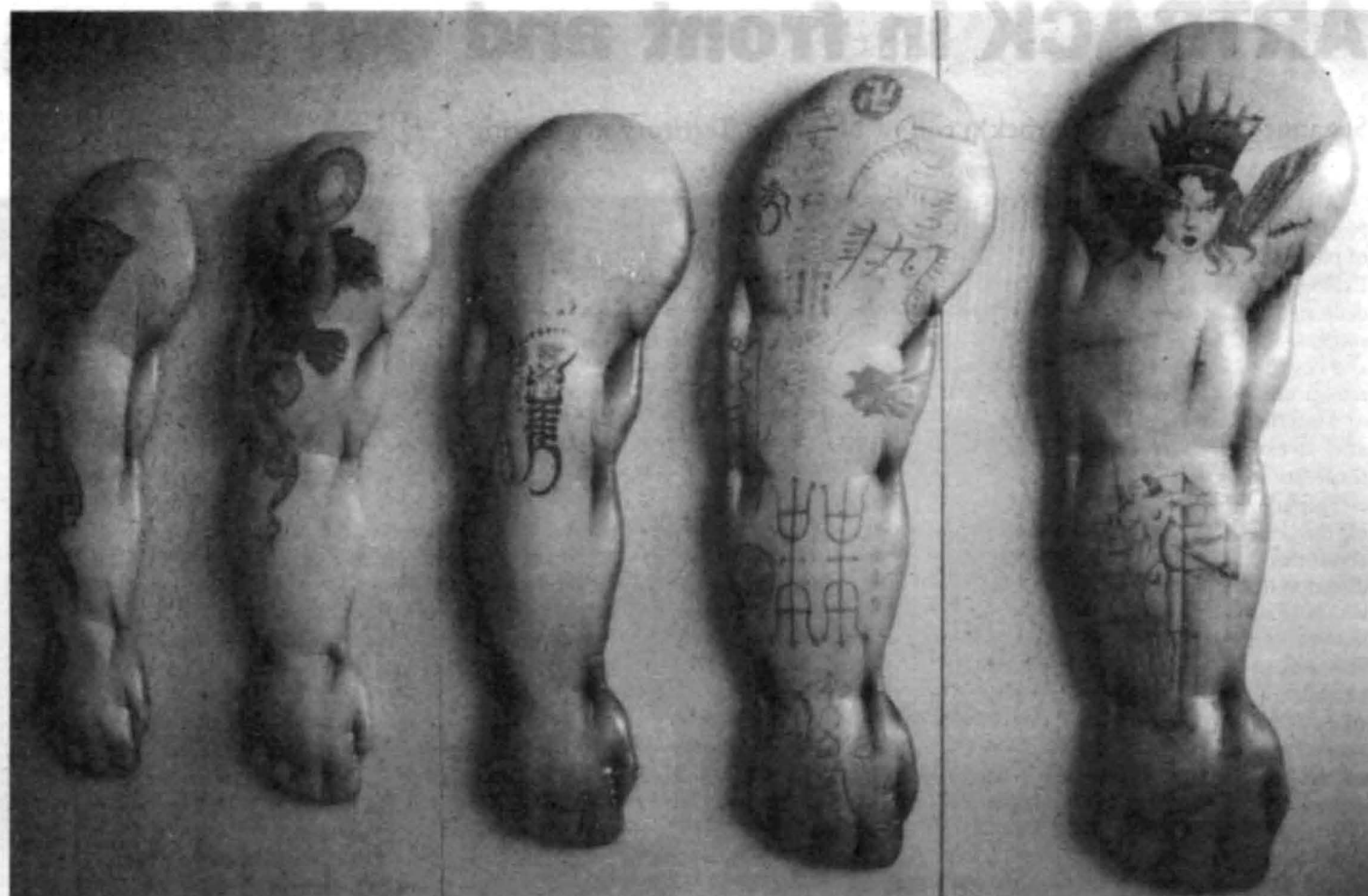
An uncertain place

Peter Anderson upside-down at the Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art

For a long time, at least from a European perspective, Australia was seen as a void, an empty space, perhaps with a few scratchy lines to indicate a coastline, but essentially a mysterious vagueness at the bottom of the world. The idea that Australia was an empty continent—the empty continent—is only now being reconsidered with the overturning of the doctrine of *terra nullius*. But of course, despite the assumption that the land was free to be settled, it was also obvious that the continent was not in fact empty, it was peopled by many cultures, and contained many wonders—reversed, upside-down, mixed up—nothing was as it should be. It was understood as uncivilised and disordered, because what was found there did not fit the patterns of the European mind. In a strange way, while we may still consider Asia and the Pacific to be repositories of an exotic otherness, this is only because so many of our practices are still so European, so English.

While the Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art is very much concerned with building a space for understanding the contemporary art of the region, it seems inevitable that we will misunderstand it as well. We will look and not clearly see what is in front of us, and things will get mixed up. So to find a way into some of the issues that emerge in and between the works selected for the exhibition—there are around 150 pieces—I find myself beginning with something that seems familiar, and yet is all about unfamiliarity, misunderstanding, and our response to alien culture.

The work I am interested in here is Luke Roberts' installation *Mu Consulate and Margaret Mead memorial sandpit*. This installation creates a diplomatic and geographical fiction. Essentially, the foyer of the building is occupied by the consulate of the lost continent of Mu, presenting us with a slick fit-out dominated by the large



Kim Joon, *Tattoo-Guys*, 1996, mixed media by needle, 40 x 120cm

lime green 'MU', pushed up in the middle of the memorial sandpit by some Hollywood-style special effects earthquake. In display cases along one side we confront a small museum of wonders and perversities, a set of artefacts of such doubtful provenance that they stretch our capacity to believe any future museum label—or didactic panel. Near the lift doors—trimmed in purple—we read the building's directory which culminates with a number of floors dedicated to the shoe collection of Pope Alice, and nearby we see the map that shows us the impossible mid-Pacific location of Mu (too far east to be included on the map at the back of the exhibition catalogue). But we don't believe any of it for a second—despite the fact that all the references here seem so deeply embedded in our (museum) culture.

Why does this work so quickly take my attention? Is it the fact that of all the artists in this Triennial it is Luke Roberts who is the most familiar, the least puzzling or alien—I mean, until he left for New York last month, he lived just a few blocks away from me. And, well, I've never been to Asia—not even Bali. Actually, I think geography has little to do with it—I

haven't been to Europe either. What interests me with this work is its ability to be a parody of the process it partakes in, and yet be so much a part of the process as well, to be so much a familiar part of a large art museum exhibition. This is a serious work, but one that refuses to let us take it seriously.

And yet so much of the Triennial takes itself so very seriously—or perhaps I just fail to get most of the jokes. Like the first Triennial we are still caught in the complexities of international diplomacy, and there remains an air of underlying fragility to the links that hold the whole thing together. This is not at all surprising, as the Triennial is not so much a survey as a sample. It is not what the exhibition is about that is important, but what the project does. At a simple level it presents us with a wide range of works that might stand in as illustrations of what is going on in particular places. But it isn't about different national trends, or even the specifics of cultural origin. In a way, it is as if contemporary art necessarily turns every artist into an individual.

Clearly, one of the really important aspects of the Triennial is the way it brings

so many artists and other art world figures together. But it is also an exhibition that is seen by a very large local audience—it has actually been breaking attendance records. I sometimes think that we forget this aspect of the Triennial (we spend all our time talking to jet-setting curators and artists who have just flown in from another international exhibition, or a residency somewhere a long way from home). For the local audience, the Triennial has become something like a contemporary blockbuster, probably introducing more people to the issues and methods of contemporary art (in general) than any other exhibition could hope to do. And what is it that draws the viewers? It is not the great traditions—of either east or west—it is not the familiar, the over-reproduced, the valuable. If anything it is the lure of the unknown.

For many of us, contemporary art still offers that possibility of a great uncharted continent. But in this place we will have much difficulty classifying what we find. Like the ants in Yukinori Yanagi's ant farm, we will wander between flags, but all we will see are different bits of coloured sand. In Navin Rawanchaikul's installation we will confront each day a different object—a broken egg, an electric fan—and in the solitude of the viewing chamber (a gallery within a gallery) we will have to find our own meaning.

But it isn't just about meaning. Outside the museum is the unpredictability of the market, and representing the market is the Campfire Group's *All Stock Must Go*. Here the visitor is confronted not by classification, but by the souvenir, the trophy, the collectable, the original, ownable artwork. In a complex way the Campfire Group have merchandised themselves by constructing a space for negotiating that gap between the cultural and market value of Aboriginal art—work is sold off the back of a truck. With this work, the very idea of a "performance" or "installation" is parodied, and the complex position of Aboriginal art within the contemporary art world is foregrounded by its conscious exclusion from the gallery (although, of course, it is also included via the work of a number of other individual artists). There's something going on here—but it is reversed, mixed up, upside-down.

The Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, September 27, 1996 - January 19, 1997.

Book review

Rex Butler ed., *What is Appropriation? An anthology of critical writing on Australian art in the 80s and 90s*, Power Publications and Institute of Modern Art, 1996;

Rex Butler, *An Uncertain Smile: Australian art in the 90s*, ArtSpace Publications, 1996.

At last, the definitive statement on the 80s (excuse any outmoded and unintended irony, Rex) with the 90s thrown in as a special deal, given that Butler argues that much of the work of the current decade properly belongs to the prior. Both the first text—a collection of influential essays from the 80s contextualised by some (presumably more recent although irritatingly undated) commissioned pieces—and the second, comprising a series of lectures delivered by Butler while critic-in-residence at ArtSpace, are important contributions to the tasks of historicising recent currents in contemporary art and attempting to negotiate paths out of certain *cults-de-sac*.

The anthology is framed by Butler's introduction, which harbours elements of the argument he goes on to elaborate in *An Uncertain Smile*—more on this later. As Butler himself has noted (see interview page 12), the volume has a distinct text-book feel to

it, a self-proclaimed canonical status, which I concede is rightly merited, as it provides a very useful companion to scholarly analyses of this prolific period in Australian contemporary practice. Sitting adjacent we have, among others, Paul Taylor, Paul Foss, Terry Smith, Edward Colless, Catriona Moore and Adrian Martin. However, given their unprecedented influence on the theoretics of art in this decade, artists' writings themselves are under-represented, a problem compounded by the somewhat depleted gallery of plates.

In *An Uncertain Smile*, Butler is able to give full voice to his argument out of the 80s conundrum of camp and kitsch. After convincingly building up a picture of the dilemmas which characterised the 'art of the 80s', where the frame became the only content and the once virulent strategy of irony became entirely routine, Butler attempts to "mark a break" and "consider what might be implied by a form of realism in both art and criticism. Perhaps surprisingly", he admits, "I end up arguing for a sincere, expressive art".

Butler sets up his argument with urgent and compelling rhetoric. Yes, we are in dire need of alternative tools of criticism. We cannot keep deploying the same, tired "camp logic", as he terms it, of undecidability, whereby "the work is at first understood to be about what it criticises, then to be complicit with what it criticises and then finally, in realising this, to be once again critical". Not only is

this ambivalence now entirely pedestrian, but it also allows us to withdraw from the decision-making process of criticism by merely citing it.

And yet, while Butler's call for change is irresistible, his alternative is elusive, ephemeral, not quite there. At times, his proposal for "a sincere, expressive art" and criticism reads like nostalgia, at times like flattening simplification, no more than a desire for "long, detailed description", a more "material" engagement with the "specificities" of individual works, a "serious" intent in art-making. Is that all there is? Moreover, the artists and critics he chooses to illustrate his notions are somewhat recalcitrant subjects. Certainly, his treatment of Anne Wallace is far more convincing than his handling of A.D.S. Donaldson or Hany Armanious.

These criticisms no doubt are entirely consistent with Butler's aims. Employing a little camp logic of his own, Butler prefaces his book with a disclaimer: what he proposes is, after all, impossible. This is not to deny either the importance or the bravura of Butler's project, or for that matter the general exigency of concerted attempts to think beyond the comfortable confines of the camp criticism we've come to live with. If Butler's overall argument falls short, his lucid justification of this exigency is a challenging provocation for practitioners of art and criticism to craft their own rejoinders. JM

ARTBACK in front and out there

Suzanne Spinner on the rock'n'roll of Northern Territory art touring

ARTBACK is the Northern Territory chapter of NETS, the National Exhibition Touring Service dedicated to bringing contemporary art, craft and design to audiences in remote and regional areas of Australia. Two years after an extensive feasibility study was completed, ARTBACK got off the ground and out and about this year under the direction of Denise Officer who was appointed mid last year. Officer's background would seem to be ideal for the job. She studied Fine Arts in Melbourne and worked in the music industry (for eight years with Midnight Oil) as a graphic artist and designer before coming to the NT in 1990 where she was manager of The Sunrize Band, an Aboriginal band from Maningrida. Touring art to remote communities might have its problems but they are small compared to touring bands—"Art", she says, "doesn't talk back, argue with you or get drunk and even the crates are smaller".

Officer immediately began a major review of potential bush venues. This involved liaising with community councils and art and craft centres in remote towns and Aboriginal communities to discover



ARTBACK trainee Jason Weetra at Pine Creek Museum, Northern Territory

and document any capable of adaptation into an artspace: anything from a shed in Oenpelli, a cyclone fence at the football club at Nguiu on Bathurst Island, civic halls in Tennant Creek and Jabiru, a veranda at Brunette Downs cattle station, the old health clinic at Papunya, to the purpose built exhibition spaces at Maningrida and Yirrkala Cultural Centres and in Katherine. All had to be measured, photographed and their detailed features annotated.

To date Officer has located more than thirty possible venues in fifteen communities but she adds, "None are ideal—most spaces need serious work from a good paint job, to blocking out the light, kicking out the dogs and some way of controlling the temperature and minimising dust and the incursion of wildlife and vermin".

The next stage involves installing a very basic NT wide uniform display/hanging system in as many places as possible and along with that, training people in communities to receive, install and dismantle shows. As much as people want to see and partake in travelling shows, the ground work has to be done first. Already aluminium tracking suitable for hanging two dimensional work has been installed at Jabiru, Tennant Creek, Pi Creek, Brunette Downs and Barunga, adding to existing venues in Katherine, Maningrida and Yirrkala. Once a community has a ready

venue, Officer comes and installs the first exhibition and runs a workshop to pass on exhibition handling skills to the locals so that next time the community may be able to do it all themselves.

ARTBACK is jointly funded by the Australia Council through the Visual Arts and Crafts Fund and the NT Office of the Arts and Cultural Affairs. The brief from the NT Government emphasises touring local art and craft to other parts of the Territory. VACF funding encourages product from outside being brought into the NT, and both encourage venue and exhibition development as well as training. ARTBACK has its headquarters at the Museum Art Gallery of the NT (MAGNT) in Darwin, which means there is additional curatorial and exhibitions expertise on site. Although MAGNT does not directly fund it, a lot of useful information and ideas are exchanged casually or can be obtained as payment for services. ARTBACK also complements the MAGNT Regional Museums program. There are obvious advantages in the cross fertilisation.

Early this year while completing the venue audit south of Alice Springs, Officer and her board chairman Steve Fox, director of 24 HR ART, created the first unofficial ARTBACK touring exhibition on the hop as it were. At Yuendumu they were told they couldn't leave without taking some art on tour, and twenty four small paintings

were put in the back of their Toyota and so *Two Doors Open* and *One Brown Box* developed—they set them up at the foot of Mt Wedge outside the Desert Oak Motel in red sand between the spinifex clumps. Later on, after they showed the Yuendumu paintings at Hermannsburg, they were offered a selection of painted clay pot lids, which were shown on the window ledge around the bar at Glen Helen Lodge to an interested audience of overseas tourists.

This was soon followed by the opening in Darwin of the first official full scale ARTBACK exhibition, *Printabout*, which comprised prints from four Aboriginal communities (Ernabella, Bathurst Island, Injalak Arts at Oenpelli, and

Warringarri Arts from the East Kimberley), printed in Darwin at the Northern Territory University's print studio.

Printabout features work by Nyukana Baker, Rover Thomas, Paddy Carlton and Ma Josette Orsto. It has already toured extensively—Pi Creek, Tennant Creek, and Jabiru—and will tour Western Australia until July 1997. It then will come home to the NT via Kuneneurra to show on the Tiwi Islands and Oenpelli and then will travel south via Ernabella to Adelaide where it will be shown at the Festival Centre Artspace and various venues around the state before going on to Queensland.

Officer expects that as the program develops, the communities will become more critical and demanding about what they want to see, but at this early stage the mood is one of pure hunger to see anything and everything. Aboriginal people want to see work from other communities around the NT and they are very interested in work by or about other indigenous people. So the exhibition at The Australian Museum, *Frank Hurley in Papua 1921-23*, has been a real winner especially amongst older people who have pored over the rich detail of village life in Hurley's extraordinary photographs—saying of them "same like us but similar". More and more communities are signing up for the exhibition and Officer has applied for an extension of the tour.

Touring art to remote communities is a two way education process. The other end involves encouraging artists and institutions to think creatively and flexibly within existing constraints. For example, work needs to be durable to cope with the climate and environment, and there are size restrictions—because it has to fit into light planes, it must be less than one metre long and 60 centimetres wide when crated, and "two-man liftable". However there are artists like George Gittoes who are willing to offer original drawings for exhibition because they have a strong desire to show their work in communities with which they have formed strong personal connections.

Does art have anything to learn from rock 'n' roll? Officer thinks so. At the recent Museums Australia Conference she attended in Sydney, she saw in the trade section an old mate from her music industry days who was displaying art crates made from light-weight metal and lined with ether foam, adapted from instrument and amplifier cases.

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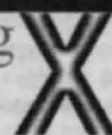
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Austral/Asian interactions

Toni Ross is impressed by *Above and Beyond* at Brisbane's IMA



Simryn Gill, from *Wonderlust*

Above and Beyond, at the Institute of Modern Art, brings together contemporary work that demonstrates cultural exchanges, both overt and tenuous, between Australia and various cultures of the Asia-Pacific region. Curated by Michael Snelling and Clare Williamson, the show includes fourteen artists: Simryn Gill, Joan Grounds, Sherrie DeLys, Pat Hoffie, Kevin Todd, Kate Beynon, Guan Wei, John Young, Judy Watson, Alwin Reamillo, Kate Beynon, Neil Emmerson, Emil Goh, and Ah Xian. The catalogue contains a co-authored essay by the curators, a study of Jackie Chan, the star and director of Hong Kong martial arts films, by Laleen Jayamanne and a speculation on pilgrimage and cross-cultural travel by Julie Ewington.

The commodious rationale for this show is that it "brings together artists with varying degrees of involvement with Asia". This brief allows for the inclusion of two works by Joan Grounds (one in collaboration with DeLys) with no discernible inflection by cultures of the Asia-Pacific, unless we are privy to the knowledge that the artist has previously enacted site specific installations in Thailand. This is not a criticism, since it is precisely by making good the curators' claim that *Above and Beyond* reshuffles our expectations of befitting appearances or contents in a show about Australian and Asian interactions, that the exhibition is undoubtedly successful.

Australian artist Neil Emmerson extends previous motifs and themes: gay politics and a fascination with the Chinese Cultural

Revolution and its state sponsored boy hero, Lei Feng—a symbol of altruism perfected. *The Rape of the Lock* comprises fifteen lithographic prints on various papers where multiple layers, colours, textures and recycled images inhabit the same surface. Here what might be judged as two quite incompatible cultural "revolutions"—the Chinese and *fin de siècle* decadence—meet. Mao's chin or Lei Feng's portrait hover within Beardsley's voluptuously detailed illustrations for his *Yellow Book* or Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*.

Monumentalised Red Guards brandish Huysmans' *Against Nature* or are partially eclipsed by Wilde's elegant profile. These grotesque composites couple a decadent (European) valorisation of aesthetic individualism and sexual libertinism with the organicist ethos of the Cultural Revolution that demanded the altruistic sacrifice of individual desires to a collective totality and to the march of history. For me, this prompts the question not whether either "aesthetic" represents an advance over the other, but what both share. Both, despite their differences, posit a redemptive 'above and beyond' of present life, which, as Nietzsche claimed of decadence, may result in a vengeful resentment towards present modes of existence. The

interest of Emmerson's work and that of others in this show is that it does not echo the transgressive rhetoric and eschatological tenor of such cultural revolutions.

One contribution that does purport to speak from 'above and beyond', to pass judgment on sinners and innocents is Pat Hoffie's *The Last Boy Scout*. This is a reworked canvas produced by the Galicia family in Manila who advertise Hollywood movies. At times, the "politically interrogative" stance Hoffie occupies so dominates her work that the formal and material aspects of her practice suffer. And since, as the curators attest, her art renders (western) audiences complicit in power relationships that pit the large against the small, the strong against the weak, the individual against social institutions and laws, I wonder about the status of the messenger? For a different take on such relationships,



Neil Emmerson, from *Rape of the Lock*



Kate Beynon, *Lucky Baby*

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Jayamanne's catalogue essay on Jackie Chan's film *The Drunken Master* is recommended reading.

Kate Beynon, who was born in Hong Kong and resides in Melbourne, integrates a number of western artistic idioms—minimal and text based practices—with Chinese mythology, cultural rituals such as the prizing of boy children, and calligraphic techniques. *Lucky Baby* coordinates these elements with economy and finesse. Chenille sticks form two scarlet Chinese characters and a plump baby boy nursing a huge catfish in black. These motifs are then balanced on the wall using pins. There the fuzzy, tactile materiality of the pipe cleaners and the derived sculptural quality of the pictogram impede a direct transaction between form and meaning. This is accentuated by the enigma of the characters for non-Chinese speaking audiences, a condition which until

recently the artist shared.

Simryn Gill's installation *Wonderlust* includes a hanging business suit fashioned out of coconut fibre, decomposing banana skins taking flight across the wall and scuffed leather shoes precariously balanced on two earth-bound coconuts. Like most of the works in this impressive show, Gill's contribution does not claim to speak from a utopic space beyond the contentious, worldly aspects of Austral/Asian interactions. Indeed, how and why "the beyond" might be figured is left an open question.

Above and Beyond, IMA, Brisbane, September 26-November 22, 1996.

Toni Ross is a lecturer in art history and theory at Queensland University of Technology.

The choreography of art practice

Linda Marie Walker on three Adelaide artists

This article is intended as an appreciation of the work of three Adelaide artists: Angela Valamanesh, Louise Haselton, Joanne Harris, who have all recently had solo exhibitions here. It is also intended as an opportunity to articulate their work through two other mediums, namely choreography and architecture, because each artist seems tenuously to intimate a certain relationship between movement, stillness, structure, and space. In other words, perhaps they intimate language as mutable substance, and the mesh and ambience of different language fields. And given that the limits of 'my' language are the limits of 'my' world, it appears that each artist pushes and attenuates vocabularies and notational formulas (plans, charts, schemes). What happens in the gallery, then, could be read as spare and generative diagrams, each of a particular and personal voice, which in their realisation, reveal and revel in subtle observations and discrepancies. These artists work like choreographers (such as Merce Cunningham or William Forsythe).

The architectural reference is more difficult, and I may have to leave it as an aside for further inquiry. Still, the links between choreography and architecture, the awful solid estrangement but especially the idea of bodies within made/staged borders and costumes, makes it worth mentioning. Both choreography and architecture are mappings, ways of telling space. And these mappings, as charted by these artists, are constituted by single and solitary gestures, and the accumulation of them into compositions:

...the logic of movement notation ultimately suggests real corridors of space, as if the dancer had been 'carving space out of a pliable substance'; or the reverse, shaping continuous volumes, as if a whole movement had been literally solidified, 'frozen' into a permanent and massive vector.

Bernard Tschumi,
The Manhattan Transcripts

The works of Valamanesh, Haselton, and Harris are not aesthetically or conceptually similar; in fact each is recognisably dissimilar. And it might be unwise, even unfair, to read them together. However I imagine something that is internally consistent and sympathetic within their practices, a restraint, a reticence or modesty even, which doesn't manifest as an obvious shared visual concern. Instead they, in their own ways, indicate strategies and narratives for both architecture and choreography.

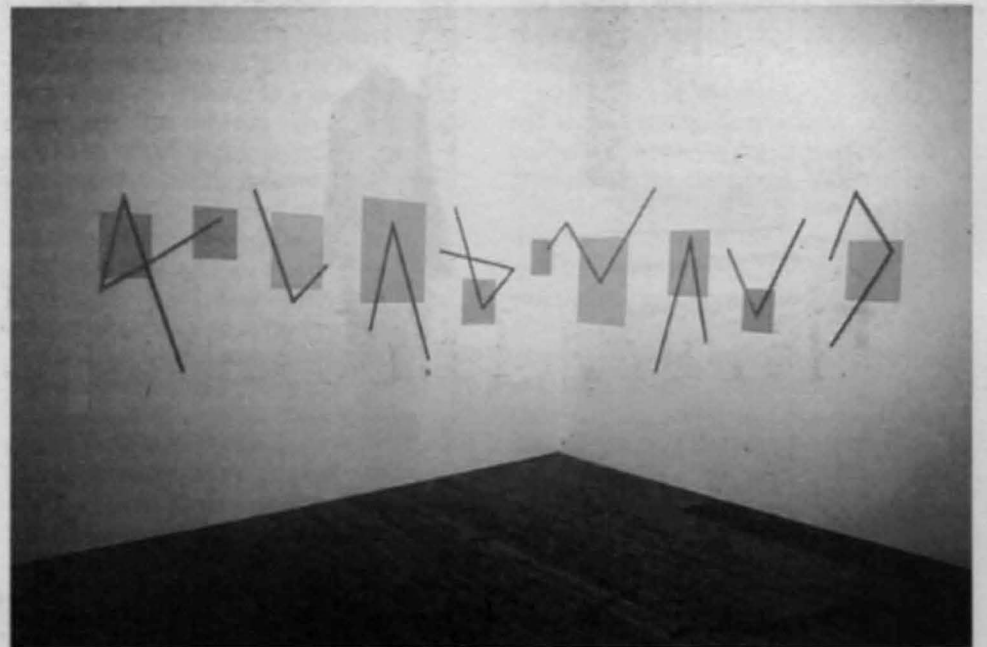
Harris's brown paper rectangles, like wallpaper-by-bits, titled *life-house* (in *Gas*, Experimental Art Foundation), with their over-layed cut-out stars, gestured toward mass-production. The little pictures stuck

on the wall, seemingly all the same, and yet each different, might have been gifts. They also suggested the idea of giving, and of 'give'—an elasticity, as one was tempted by them (can I have one?), and they made one wonder/worry about the gap, the part unfinished (did someone take them?).

Haselton's blue neon, *on your way*, the half-unfurled paper frieze of a cloud outline, and the large blanket word *WREST* (in *misspent*, Greenaway Gallery), each acted out a sense of pleasure, even while in themselves being stark, elegant and touching.

Valamanesh's work at the Contemporary Art Centre of SA *Calculations* had an overall quiet intentionality that provided a space in which to listen, and the objects looked like they may have been made to listen. This listening would nonetheless be askew, like the painted wall which at the very least made one 'fall' somewhat. This is an architecture that performs 'quiet', an architecture by small, almost imperceptible moves.

In particular these artists pay attention to placement, attention which does not draw one's own attention too harshly. That is, the work is not dominated by 'placement' or arrangement. Placement is rather an element—it might be fleeting, like a 'step', or the shadow in a corner—of equal status to other elements, such as objects, materials, colours. There is a



Angela Valamanesh, detail from the exhibition *Calculations* at the Contemporary Art Centre Michael Klivanek

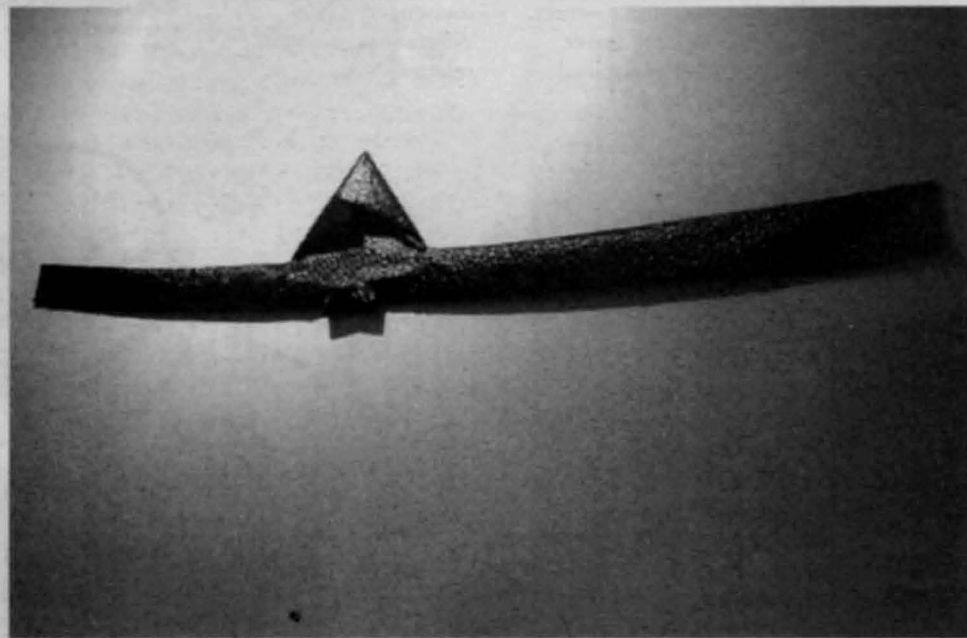
anyway, both visual and written, that is not about the exchange of information, needs, and property, but the exchange of meanings, which suggests a different type of speaking that is not parodic but knowingly playful, yet at the same time seriously faithful. In effect it is then possible, as a 'listener', to become a faithful 'speaker', one who can be of equal unexpected mystery:

identity say, but about a given time (as identified, as identification), a present and presiding syntax, relentlessly continual. That is, the fact that something is over, past, does not mean it has been forgotten, or forsaken. Rather, it has been deformed, distorted, defaced, and is now pre-sent. Interpretation is then impossible, or, many interpretations are simultaneously possible.

The wonderful thing about exhibitions, like movement, is that they physically vanish. They exist (like slowed movement, or like movement held for a long time), and then depart, and we watch them like we watch dancers fling themselves about (as vehicles for despair). It is our desire for 'repeats', like the cricket on TV, that keeps us thrilled.

These artists trust the changes inherent with time. They will use their own pasts, and the material of their art-pasts, as reference and referral to shared memories, as in their use, for instance, of ordinary, yet charged stuff, like 'blanket', 'clay', 'cloth', 'paper'. They will use their pasts not because they are what they are, but because of what they have been and might be, and what they will become. Their work eludes easy entry or description (it seems necessary to follow their line into further complexity), and yet is generous, and welcoming (exemplified by Harris's garment with its extremely long arms, accompanied, in transparent letters, by the Old English word 'YMBCLYPPAN' meaning 'embrace'; by Haselton's three-dimensional word 'misspent' completely covered in butterfly wings; and by Valamanesh's finely installed ceramics of subtle shapes and warm tones at the Jam Factory Craft & Design Centre).

Consequently, it is not ambiguous enough to use absence and presence as swift categories of appeal, as they are already themselves overt(s)exted. And yet they must be, and for that very reason, re-read, these words, as signs of doomed tenaciousness for the edge of silences and sounds, where the creatures and events of our dreams reside, and where we infrequently dwell. The edge which seduces as centre, now and then, is ushered by these three practices to the margins again: cut away, broken off, cast out. It becomes its own language, refusing to be colonised, demanding to be idiosyncratic; the edge as landscape too. Landscape with landscape, to quote a Gerald Murnane title. In *Emerald Blue* Murnane writes: "The image that caused me to begin writing this story is an image of a single cloud in a sky filled with heaps or layers of clouds". This has something to do with the artists discussed here: this same cloud might have been the impetus for their work too. It's as simple, intense and baffling as that.



Joanne Harris, *TMBCLYPPAN* from the exhibition *Gas* at the Experimental Art Foundation Alan Cruickshank

...there is a difference in subjective economy between the hierarchical transmission of an already established discourse and language, order and law, and the exchange of a meaning between us here and now.

Luce Irigaray, *I Love To You*

To extend this a little: if I imagine language as a 'scape' (or plane, or plateau, or view), like 'land'-scape, then on that I place, in this case, three threads: the practices of these artists, choreography as composing disappearances (through moving bodies), and architecture as performing appearances (or solidifying thoughts/ideas/designs: this also is movement).

In the act of movement, of 'putting something in another place', there is the displacement of a body. In the act of interpreting movement, then, there is the displacement of a displacement.

Heidi Gilpin, *Lifelessness in movement, or how do the dead move?*

In these artists' work there appear the remains or residues of displacements, shapes, forms and things that might have been where movement was, momentarily. This is strange and complex, not 'about'



Louise Haselton, *on your way* from the exhibition *misspent* at Greenaway Gallery

Alan Cruickshank

OnScreen

film, media & techno-arts

Feature

A hard call

Sandy George asks how screen culture will fare under the Coalition

Playwright David Williamson, in the inaugural Andrew Olle memorial lecture on November 8, said that without an ABC the Australian airwaves would be almost devoid of intelligence, scepticism, inquiry and objectivity. These qualities are as essential to the human mind as air, light and food are to our bodies, he said. Imagine if Australia was a place where no-one was interested in watching the ABC.

In the same week, news was beginning to arrive from the US that Baz Luhrmann's second film, the funky *Romeo and Juliet*, looked like exceeding the expectations of its owners, Twentieth Century-Fox. Imagine if no-one was interested in having a look at what Luhrmann has done with Shakespeare's story telling talent.

These are simple examples of the importance of developing a broad and mature audience within an environment which sits quite outside the production or distribution community but is just as lively and inquiring. Cinema and television are powerful forces which can act like a country's subconscious. Imagine a world in which these media pumped out only soap, or only pictures of the ilk of *Independence Day*, or only gameshows, or only CNN's coverage of the Gulf War. Some would argue otherwise but, thankfully, what we see on these mass media is not entirely homogenised.

Buy a ticket to a film festival, seek out community television, hear an experimental filmmaker talk about their work, and the experience gets further away from the factory fodder. The size of the audience drops but it's here we are often most challenged. It's here where our knowledge of screen language deepens, where we feel something startling or see something truly different. The more of this activity there is, the more it seeps into the mass media. Inevitably, it is also where the filmmaking talent springs from.

Another powerful force is government. Through legislation, often through financial subsidy, governments create and shape the entire environment. Government impact on the communications, information and arts industries is huge because it recognises its power over the community. Obviously, when new governments are voted in, as happened in March in Australia, the potential for change is at its greatest. There are major conflicting forces at work which will impact on how screen culture will fare under John Howard's Coalition government—the first conservative administration for 14 years.

Every aspect of Australia's film industry is in the process of being cut open for inspection. Putting aside the cuts to the ABC, this brings perspective to the way the film industry was left relatively intact under the Liberal/National Party Coalition's first budget, which cut deep into key areas such as health, education and welfare.

Support for film and the arts has traditionally been bipartisan. Also, film funding is a drop in the ocean of government expenditure and there were no obvious warzones. On the other hand, Prime Minister John Howard's Government is one of economic rationalism and this could end up being just a 12-month breathing space before the axe falls. The words *Creative Nation*, the title of Keating's much flaunted cultural policy statement delivered in October 1994, quickly became dirty words in Canberra after the election and the Coalition may want to find a way to put a radical stamp on the industry.

Communications and Arts Minister Senator Richard Alston has his hands rather full. The reviews and planned legislative changes within his portfolio encompass media ownership, local content on pay television, the ABC, the regulation of on-line services, New Zealand programs being counted as Australian local content, copyright reform, and what to do with the sixth channel. Then there's the planned part-sale of Telstra, and the deregulation of both telecommunications and pay television from mid-1997. They all involve big players, huge revenues, significant restructuring of whole industries.

Screen culture, to be frank, is hardly getting a look in right now, except where it will be on the agenda is in the review into Commonwealth film assistance. The organisations which fall under this review include the National Film and Sound Archive, Film Australia, the new Television Production Fund, the Australian Film, Television & Radio School, the Australian Children's Television Foundation, the Australian Film Commission (AFC) and the Australian Film Finance Corporation (FFC).

The total spending in 1996/97 will be \$117.49 million with \$48.5 million going to the FFC. The AFC was the only organisation badly affected, suffering a \$4m cut to \$16.5m. This was principally the result of a cut to the Special Production Fund (SPF), which represents all the AFC's production funding, being renewed at only half its previous level of \$8m. Those with a more positive point of view would say at least it was renewed. The fund covers features, documentaries, series, shorts, animation, experimental work and multimedia. Its aim is to fund projects considered too risky by the marketplace and to assist

the career development of emerging filmmakers. First-time directors have mounted such films as *Romper Stomper*, *Broken Highway* and *What I Have Written* under the SPF.

The activities of all the organisations being examined under the review contribute to screen culture. However, it is the AFC's Industry and Cultural Development (ICD) branch which funds a myriad of other organisations and events in the frontline of influencing and creating the environment within which people consume, make and discuss film and television. Last year the budget of \$2.9 million went to a broad array of organisations and events under the auspices of audience development, screen documentation, distribution and exhibition support, and production resources support.

Most of Australia's film festivals are funded by this branch, as well as a range of organisations such as the Sydney Intermedia Network, the Australian Film Institute, Australian Teachers Of Media and various film societies. Conferences for documentary makers, writers, producers and film historians were staged. Film catalogues and journals were published. The very popular *The Movie Show* on SBS also gets assistance from the ICD branch. Funding goes to at least one organisation in Perth, Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney to provide a regional focus for the independent screen community.

The ICD branch recently published the results of a survey into the screen culture activities and organisations funded between 1990-94. It contributed \$15.43 million to the sector in the five-year period, or 26% of the \$60.33 million expenditure. It found that the sector had 4,500 employees, and the organisations 10,210 members. It had attracted audiences of 1.3 million and 10,200 conference delegates. The survey notes that the sector is increasingly generating its own income. This trend to justify the cultural sector in economic terms—it was also obvious in *Creative Nation*—is a dangerous one if it leads to undermining the value of the industries to the development of a rich and healthy community.

Clearly, a second cut to the AFC of any significance will have a drastic effect on the activity of the ICD branch, and would seem all the more shameful in the light of the efforts the branch has made in recent years formulating policy with clients, innovatively addressing funding inflexibility, and insisting upon more accountability and strategic planning. To a bureaucrat, script editing or international marketing would seem the more important of the AFC's roles—just as it would to most filmmakers.

Indeed, it is filmmakers who will make the most noise, wanting production dollars. They want to maintain the current buoyancy which has led to interest from offshore buyers, commercial and critical success, strong television exports, the growth in US production, and so on. It is the culmination of 20 years of government assistance to training, development and production. It remains an extremely fragile industry, however, dependent on public money, and this buoyancy does not mean private dollars exist for screen culture.

It is impossible to say how much danger the AFC is in. The rumours began to roll in long before any submissions to the review had been received—the FFC being replaced by a rejuvenated system of tax incentives, control of Commonwealth funding being divested to the state agencies, the FFC and AFC being amalgamated, the heart being cut out of Film Australia. The reality is that no-one knows and no-one needs to decide until the negotiations begin before the budget is handed down next year.

The government can also take a stand to strengthen the environment for film via some of the other reviews, including the one into local content rules on pay television. Currently, the operators of predominantly drama channels are expected to spend 10% of their programming expenditure on new local content. On the agenda is increasing this to 20% but, more importantly, extending the rule to all channels.

The government is also considering what to do with the sixth channel, with the early indications being a preference for community television. Although a good idea in theory this sector is very under-resourced. At the other end of the spectrum, any significant change to the cross-media rules will unleash a storm of takeovers which could substantially change the environment.

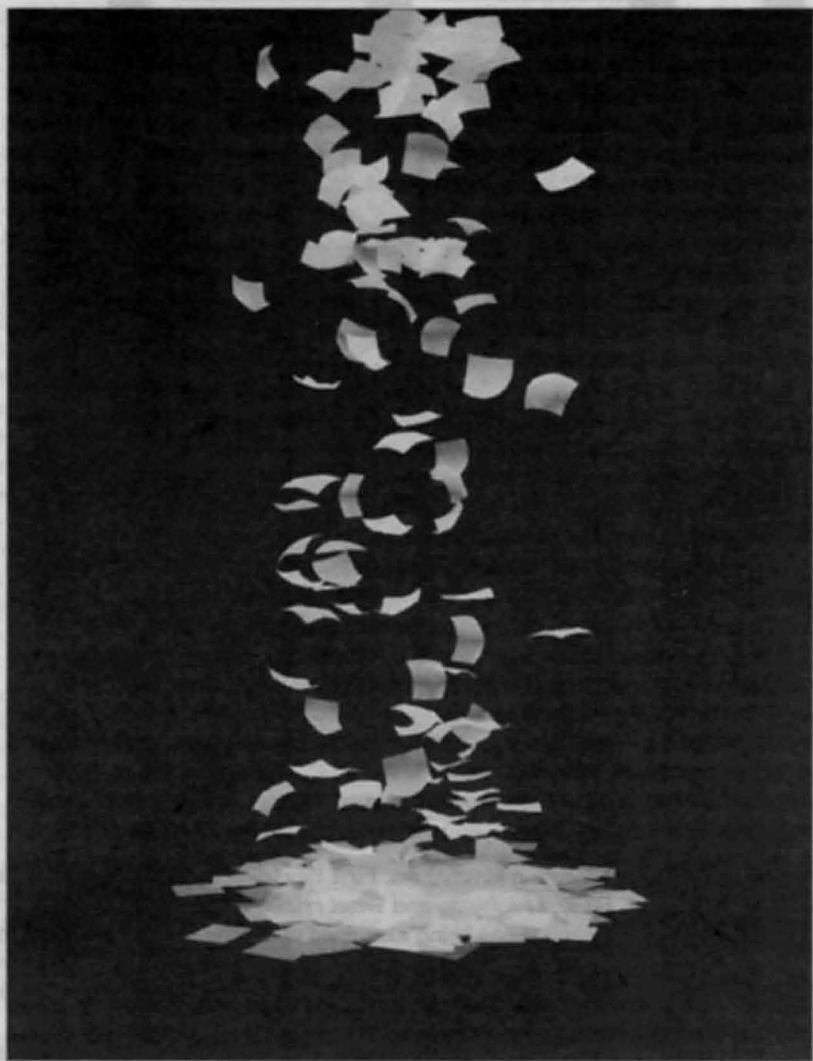
Overall, the outcomes of the reviews and the potential policy and legislative changes remain hard to call. The question is: will the Coalition take a fundamentally different philosophical stance to its predecessor and, if so, will the government have the skills to successfully carry it off?

Sandy George is a journalist and researcher specialising in film and TV. She edited the Australian trade magazine Encore for five years and is correspondent for Screen International and TV World out of London.

Review

Possessing the new imagination

Jane Goodall perceives a new animation experiment in SIN's *elastic light* screenings



still from John Tonkin's *these are the days*

Elastic Light is a program of short computer animation works curated by Jon McCormack, to coincide with the exhibition of his interactive laser-disc work *Turbulence* at the AGNSW.

Animators have always been fascinated by the ease with which they could produce movement, and the ways in which the movements made by an image could be crossed by movements created through the plasticity of the form itself. Stretching, speeding, crashing and metamorphosing were the favourite activities of the cartoon character. With digitisation, the complexity of the visual possibilities was multiplied beyond measure; animators became intoxicated with it. Techno-baroque was the pervading genre for a few years, and its multi-layering of multi-coloured, omni-kinetic compositions was far more gratifying for creators than spectators of the works. Jon McCormack's work brings concentration back into the picture. His complexity is not mere complication, the accumulation of multiple visual possibilities. It is highly selective and committed to detail, so that evolving formations on the screen explode into new intricacies of colour and movement whilst maintaining a sustained conceptual focus. Action is always an unfolding, never an arbitrarily added ingredient. Jon McCormack is a hard act to follow. After standing in a darkened space at the AGNSW for half an hour or so watching *Turbulence*, I took the escalator downstairs wondering how anything else could measure up. It didn't, but *Elastic Light* provided some valuable context for what may be the culminating example of the first phase in the first generation of computerised animation. McCormack's work takes the art into a new order of complexity by adopting the principle of emergence. The algorithm is the DNA of a digital idea which is allowed to develop and proliferate itself as a complex of ever evolving formations.

His choice of works for *Elastic Light* shows, he admits, a personal bias. But this is where it is interesting. Hanging around in the vocabulary and program notes is an evolutionary theory of animation. The program might well have been subtitled "Climbing Mount Improbable" with its Dawkins-esque commitment to making poetry out of a clinically technical discipline and its talk of "peaks" in the repertoire. A prefatory quotation from Vilem Flusser predicts a new level of existence for homo sapiens, heralded by those "who possess the new imagination". Are we leaving the manic dizziness of techno-baroque for another kind of dizziness: the dizziness of an art married to science and heading for the heights of unprecedented human achievement? I hope not. I think there is something new happening here, and something with long-term potential but it should avoid making neo-romantic claims for itself. Its origins in John Whitney's *Experiment in Motion Graphics* (1969) are described in an authorial voice that is almost comically prosaic. "My name is John Whitney", the voice-over starts. And the camera, situated politely behind John Whitney's shoulder, shows us the scientist at work with his light pen on a screen filled with columns of figures. He is not about to get carried away. "All that you see here should impinge upon the emotions directly" but "I must say that to get emotionally involved with the computer is not easy." Whitney is playing with nothing so dramatic as turbulence. His research project is "Permutations", a modest exercise in the creation of computerised non-centric movement patterns. The ghost of a future chaos principle hovers dimly as you see diving spirals go through a non-repeating choreography. It would be easy, from this short film, to read Whitney as a boffin whose literal-mindedness and naive references to art-as-emotion have a certain chunky charm for the hip-hoppers of the digital age. Whitney was nothing of the sort. He brought to computer animation a highly sophisticated and carefully schooled understanding of musical composition, and his approach to the creation of visual movement reflected a fascination with the developmental principles of "movements" in music. He sold experimental film works to the Museum of Modern Art in the 1940s and was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship early in his career. As the pioneer of a paradigm shift in the visualisation of movement, though, he remains engagingly perplexed at his own disintoxication.

The rest of the program comprised recent works. John Tonkin's *these are the days*, which McCormack describes as "a meditation on the passage of time", follows Whitney's systematic example. With its companion work *air, water part 2* (also in the *elastic light* program) it is a formal and restrained experiment in a minimalist format. In the first work, squares of white paper fall vertically across the screen, creating random patterns first through the air and then on the ground. The only hint of poetic indulgence is in the creation of a watery visual atmosphere with blue depths and area lighting. The second "movement" picks out floating squares with coloured light—yellow, then red, then green—to a sound track of cello playing. *When I Was Six* (Michelle Robinson) also experiments with the possibilities of atmospheric lighting. Furniture lit at a low angle, with distended shadows, moves around a deserted room. A chair creeps about like a spider. The child's eye view magnifies and dramatises. Movement is the beginning of any form of haunting. "All you see here should impinge on the emotions directly." It does.

A number of other works in the program are restrained formal experiments: *Stripe Box* (Kazuma Morino), *Just Water* (Evangelina Sirgado de Sousa), *Memory of Maholy-Nagy* (Tamás Waliczky). *Superstars* (Thomas Bayrle) moves formality towards the visual joke, making cellular image fabrics from multiple repetitions of micro-images, contoured into faces. The micro images zoom in occasionally, revealing body parts, including genitalia (with accompanying orgasmic noises). Jokes are too easy in this medium, so the tolerance level is low. *Brain Massage with Robo-Insects* is a clever piece of grotesque visual comedy, with mosquito-robots interfering in the work of a team of brain surgeons, but I'm not sure why it gets a place in this program, unless on the variety principle. Ian Bird's *Liberation*, a video animation made for the Pet Shop Boys, comes closest to techno-baroque, but redeems itself from the generic *mise-en-abyme* by playing a sustained game with vertical perspective that, technically speaking, is state of the art.

McCormack's own work combines the ambitious spectacle of Bird's approach with the lyrical concentration of Tonkin's or de Sousa's. The shift from an interest in form (as a given visual idea) to an interest in formation (as the visible patterns of a continually transitional process of growth) marks McCormack's work as the start of a new kind of animation experiment and, potentially, a new approach to visualisation itself. It's illuminating to see this shift taking place through the work of a number of artists committed to less consciously ambitious agendas.

elastic light, curated by Jon McCormack for Sydney Intermedia Network, Art Gallery of New South Wales, October 5 and 12 to coincide with the exhibition of his work *Turbulence*.

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Interview

Un pugno di mosche

Virginia Baxter discusses the new feature film *Fistful of Flies* with writer-director Monica Pellizzari and performer Dina Panozzo

Un Pugno di Mosche: an expression usually directed against women or hopeless cases. It means if you follow your spirit you'll end up with a fistful of flies, a fistful of nothing. A woman's path is determined for her and she shouldn't stray from it.

VB The camera on the ceiling looking down at the teenage Mars Lupi (Tasma Walton) lying on her bedroom floor suddenly reminds me of Saturday mornings when I shut the door on my family and for that brief time the house was mine. I looked in drawers for secrets. Mars masturbates. Monica Pellizzari's disturbing and funny film works within a set of closed worlds—the island of adolescence; the tense stand-off between mother and daughter; the petrified calm of a violent family; the desolation of a country town; the closed curtains of immigrant experience.

MP It's an amalgamation of stories. My research was with 18-year-olds in Griffith and Fairfield. Fairfield because I grew up there. Griffith because that's where I originally wanted to shoot the film. The stories I heard were much more horrific than anything in the film. I talked to girls from different ethnic backgrounds, primarily Italian, but I wanted the film to speak to all sorts of people.

DP It's not an isolated thing. There are migrant communities where you have your own set of rules and you are policed, where traditions hold fast.

MP And you don't have to go to Griffith or the back of Bourke. It's in the inner city—just around the corner from the groovy cafe is a little house of horror. I get really incensed when I'm interviewed by these well adjusted Anglo-Saxon Australians—like that Australian woman in Venice who lives in LA now who said, well, this is not my experience of Italians. I thought, how would you know?

VB Was that you in the bird cage?

MP Yeh. I protested once by climbing inside my father's bird cage, saying I was never gonna get married. My family said, we can't domesticate her. I humiliated their best friends. The next day they sent a card saying "Hope Monica recovers from her mental illness".

DP Acting mad is one way to get out of it. I used to jump out of windows at night. That's how I escaped the cage.

VB What stages did the writing go through?

MP It took about five years. A lot of stages depending on where I was at with my life and who I was allied to in the script stage. Also, who was in power at the AFC and who wanted what and when that person left, what the next one wanted. In order to survive and get the next round of funding, there were compromises. Over the five years I was working they weren't funding first time features through the Film Finance Corporation. By the time I got to make it, they were.

VB The performances are striking especially Tasma Walton as Mars and Dina as Grace, the mother. I found your performance really interesting and complex but I gather it's been interpreted in different ways.

DP You can look at my performance

and think this is just big and wild. Is this film acting? Or you can look at it inside the world that Monica creates and say, right, this is a very edgy, dark film, stylised and quite studied. It's not a naturalistic film where you just get in there and just be yourself, just mumble. I did want to shape the performance, make it almost like a piece of mask work, to justify this woman doing these horrendous things but at the same time keeping some sympathy going for the creature. To see this terrible trap, how cruelty revisits itself and how women keep each other down in these situations. I did push the performance, made her a woman on the edge, inside some terrible neurotic state. A lot of scenes were cut—scenes where I played other levels, softer, more tender scenes in the script that were to do with the relationship with the husband, where you got to see Grace somewhere else.

VB Why were they cut?

DP I'd say to Monica, how's the editing process going, what are people feeling and she'd say, "They keep saying, 'Faster, faster, get to the heart of it. What's the point?'" So my character risks being read as one big scream. The performance might be flawed but I think there's an originality about the approach.

VB I've glanced through your script—it's remarkably detailed for a screenplay.

MP I tend to write very descriptive scripts because I'm imagining a different world from the ones we usually see in Australian films. I had a lot of resistance from assessors when I was writing it: "Let's just have the bare bones". But I said with just the bare bones it won't make any sense. I wanted the script to be a bible so that everyone understood this world. And basically, that was the floor plan for the cinematographer Jane Castle and I. We sat down and we spent four months, four hours a day, storyboarding, working out our plan of execution. We stuck to about 60 per cent of the script as written. George Miller's theory is that you have text and you layer the rest in later when you get to the production. I just can't work like that.

Andy Lloyd-James, who's head of Drama at the ABC and was head of Drama at SBS, when he saw the film said now I know how to read your scripts. He's had faith enough to give me some development money for my next film. A lot of people can't read screenplays.

VB How do you work with the performers?

DP She's a fascist, the puttana from hell! She'll sit you there and say, "Look I don't care what you 'feel', could you just move your eye, look across to the left, count three".

MP That's because most of the time we were using amazingly close micro-lenses

where the flutter of an eyelid would have been like an earthquake. I tell the actors which face muscles to pull basically.

DP A lot of people will read that and say, ooh an auteur, why not just let it 'flow'. But the other side of that is when you rehearse with Monica you've got quite a bit of time where you can find things and she'll say yes, yes.

MP But with dialogue I try to keep it necessary. I get very irritated when actors change the whole thing.

VB Probably trying to make it sound more natural. But in direction and performance neither of you is creating naturalism. It's more heightened.

DP I don't like naturalism that much. I also find it quite uninspiring because large parts of me feel left out. Let's face it, the truth has to be there whatever the style, otherwise you've got fuck all. I also feel like a writer. I'm interested in the visuals, the editing, the whole work more than just myself in the work. So if you tell me to stand on my head, you have to take the time to share the idea with me



Tasma Walton and Dina Panozzo in *Fistful of Flies*

so I can become enamoured with it and then I'll do it for you. That's why I love working with Monica. I like the artifice. Like the way Woody Allen plays around with naturalism.

MP He's a fascist with dialogue.

DP No he's not. He has a loose structure that has to get through. He says just talk and he'll shape and shape.

MP What's great about him is that after his shoot, he goes into the editing room, works out what's missing and then goes and shoots again. I would love to have done that. You're re-writing the film when you're editing. I learned more about writing in the editing process than I did in five years of scripting.

DP I was dying to sit in on the editing process. Rather than being an actor who usually gets left in the dark and told to "just be".

MP Just for the record I never said "just be".

DP She'd chase me round on the set, telling me to shut up. I'd say "fuck off Monica!" and she'd say "If I was Lina Wertmüller..." and I'd yell back, "You're not Lina Wertmüller!".

MP The kind of things I did with my script are very un-Australian—un-American, I should say. Tone wise, the film was always a risk and that's why it went through a lot of upheavals for years with funding because people couldn't understand what I was trying to do. It's also about money. Rolf de Heer said creativity isn't just about the writing and the actors, it's about creative use of your budget. That is the biggest lesson I've

learned on this film. How you use the money to put everything on the screen. We did get an eight-week shoot which is rare (it's usually six) and a long rehearsal period. That was a good use of the money.

VB At the Venice Film Festival, *Fistful of Flies* was shown at the Fast Track program. What's that program about?

MP First and second features highlighting new talent in what they call the overtaking lane—*Corsia di Sortasso*. I think as a first feature, we were perfectly placed. The main program was very conservative. We got great reviews in the main press. At the festival it attracted one of the highest public ticket sales. It was the only film in the Fast Track program that was completely packed. Over 2,000 people saw it.

DP It's not that Europe is better than Australia but there are more people, so many more opinions allowed to be expressed. Thousands of people with a tradition of films by the likes of Fassbinder and Wertmüller who look at this film and have a context to put it in. Suddenly your work is celebrated as being edgy and dark and you belong in the centre of things, not on the fringes.

MP The most common criticism is "oh, it's angry, it's in-your-face". I take issue with those criticisms because every second film you see up there is an angry boy's film. It's just that they express it by killing people and blowing things up.

VB What's happening next with the film?

MP Stockholm, London, Sundance, Gijon in Spain, Rotterdam. The film's very popular on the festival circuit. Apparently, we sold out in Hamburg. Southern Star are trying to sell it at MIFED, the film meat market in Milan. The Brazilians have bought it. Locally it will be released by Total Film and TV around Easter next year.

DP It's really important that it has a decent run here and is discussed properly. After all, it's an Australian story.

VB And the two of you? What's your next collaboration?

DP We've known each other for about six years. Our work together always has some kind of bent, dark humour. We're both Venete [from the Veneto region of Italy], both very similar. We weren't really sure whether we loved or hated each other but eventually we realised that we had quite a special language between us. Now *Fistful of Flies* is finished, we're talking about doing something else. I'd like to work with Monica as a writer. We've talked about doing something where we put together her language and my language. We're trying to go for a cultural style that ...

MP ...that hasn't been done before on screen.

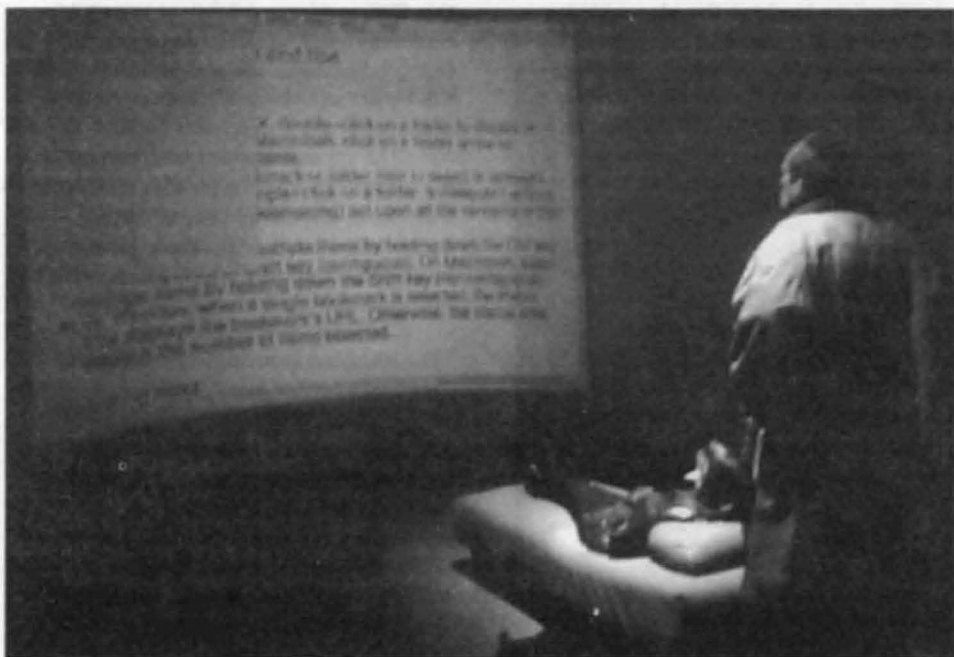
Fistful of Flies was produced by Julia Overton. At the Venice Film Festival it won the Elvira Notari Award which goes to a film/filmmaker challenging female stereotypes. It was recently awarded Best First Feature and Best Cinematography at the Stockholm Independent Film Festival with a nomination for Dina Panozzo in the Best Actor category. It also picked up the International Critics Prize. At the Gijon Festival in Spain, it won the Young Jury prize for Best Feature and Dina Panozzo Best Actress. The film has been selected to screen in January at the 1997 Sundance Film Festival.

In support of the fleshmeet even on-line

Amanda McDonald Crowley muses on internet issues at ISEA96, EMAF and DEAF

In assessing the recent International Symposium on Electronic Art (ISEA96) <<http://www.isea96.nl/index.html>> and related events held in Europe this September, I have decided to focus on the aspects of the fora which related to the internet. This may seem like an unlikely decision, as these events are specifically about the 'fleshmeet': seeing new installation based works, listening to and talking about issues facing artists working in electronic media. However, the mad rush to go on-line has infected so many aspects of art and cultural practice that it seems pertinent to have a look at what artists are doing in this area and to focus on the many disparate critical discourses currently in circulation. Furthermore, in reflecting on the events I attended, I have found myself continuously drawn back to the internet, finding that this manifestation of the 'real life' events finds resonance in the on-line after-effects.

In an article on the Nettime list <<http://mediafilter.org/ZK/Conf/ZKindex.html>> the Critical Art Ensemble has written, "The need for net criticism is a matter of overwhelming urgency. While a number of critics have approached the new world of computerised communications with a healthy amount of scepticism, their message has been lost in the noise and spectacle of the corporate hype—the unstoppable tidal wave of seduction has enveloped so many in its dynamic utopian beauty that little time for careful reflection is left". I would suggest that the amount of critical work being done on-line is not so much the issue, as the poor resources available in this area for presenting ideas and furthering discussion in a coherent manner without centralising any kind of power base.



Daniela Alia Plewe

Prior to attending ISEA this year, I decided to check out the 15-year-old European Media Art Festival (EMAF) <<http://www.emaf.de/>>. The festival, which like many of its genre started life looking at experimental film and video art, this year extended itself to include a range of video, film, performance, exhibition and on-line components. Almost as compelling as the site-specific works presented was the opportunity to log on and check out the cyber dimension. I travelled across the world to meet people and see art, yet found as much satisfaction in finding the time to log on to the internet and check out what is going on in the same 'cyberspace' I can access from home. The difference was that it was not done in a vacuum. I could discuss concerns, get pointers and tips to interesting sites and generally get more feedback than is possible logged on to the computer from home. One can certainly get this kind of feedback on-line, but perhaps it is simply that I harbour the old fashioned belief in the joy of 'touching flesh'. The other factor that must be taken into account is that it is specifically in the 'conference' environment that one takes the time to see new work. At Home or in The Office, I simply always find that other things have more urgency.

Telepolis <<http://www.heise.de/tp>> in association with Rhizome <<http://www.rhizome.com/>> set up an interactive 'newsroom' at the EMAF. The room was the hub of liveliness and activity during the conference. Flitting between video screenings live performances and lectures, the space was a haven and a place to stop, enjoy a coffee, a chat and a space to log on. (I would have to say that my favourite was the fabulously quirky and witty work of Shu Lea Cheang: a whimsical meandering through Tokyo with a gorgeous group of young women—almost an homage to soft porn Japanese style.)

In fact, the on-line facilities at this year's EMAF were fantastic: plenty of terminals, people milling around trying to get access to telnet sessions to check email. While on the one hand this points to an obsession with having to check what is happening in one's own world, it was done in an atmosphere congenial to generating discussion and talking with old and new acquaintances about their views on the exhibition and the place of on-line technologies. And of course, telnetting to Australia was so slow that it was easy to keep a track of what was happening (or not happening) on screen at the same time as having a conversation.

Unfortunately, the issue of resourcing, already alluded to, has meant that while the concept behind the newsroom was sound, the actual content which made it onto the newsroom site is not what might have been expected given the talents of the people managing its maintenance: the site certainly in no way reflects the considered critical nature of parts of the telepolis site nor the newsy relevance of the Rhizome site, both of which are dedicated to the discussion of new media, albeit in different formats.

But on to ISEA, where unfortunately, and again for resourcing reasons rather than any will or desire on the part of the organisers of the conference, there was no space dedicated to accessing the internet. Whilst it may seem at odds with the notion of a real time conference that these facilities are necessary, the fact remains that computer screens are not the single-person spaces of interaction they are so often posited. However DEAF <<http://www.v2.nl/DEAF>> was working with ISEA to stage this year's manifestation of the event and the internet facility at that event, *Digital Dive*, was a

continuous hive of activity from opening time mid-morning until around midnight, when conference attendees, drinks in hand, would stand around a communal terminal and converse about their most recent site discovery or lament the long download times of their favourite site.

On a very personal front, Kathy Rae Huffman's *On-line Encounters, Intimacy and E-motion* at DEAF and Julianne Pierce's forum with Stelarc and Sandy Stone at ISEA engaged with the personal and the sexual in on-line environments, alluding to new ways of perceiving the body in the realm of 'cyberspace'.

Stelarc too performed his recent *Ping Body* <<http://www.merlin.com.au/stelarc>> at the joint opening of DEAF and ISEA. This work is a natural progression from his wired body performances, but in this performance he takes the body on-line, or rather, the body becomes influenced by on-line activity: his body movements are not controlled by his own nervous system but by the external datasystem of the internet, with internet-activated muscle stimulators monitoring signals to various internet servers.

In the exhibition presented as part of the DEAF event, Daniela Alia Plewe took the internet analogy one step further. A water bed in the middle of a darkened gallery room invited the viewer to lie down and relax. Next to the bed, which more closely resembled a psychiatrist's couch (or is it just that I have become used to a double bed?) was a computer. The computer activated a large projected image of a text based interface. The interface operated much as text based internet environments do. Like on-line text based environments the texts to which the viewer was invited to contribute became part of a network of ideas and associations which were neither predetermined nor quite arbitrary: it was an amalgam of all of the texts entered by previous visitors.

Knowbotic Research <<http://www.t0.or.at/~krcf/>>, in the commissioned piece *Anonymous Mutterings*, also used the internet as one of a range of ways to interact with the light and sound event which almost encompassed the Dutch Institute of Architecture in Rotterdam. The digital sound component of the installation, which one could hear blocks away from the site (a useful bearing in an unfamiliar city), could be manipulated via an interface on the website of DEAF96, and also by 'bending' and 'folding' rubber mats located at various points around the building. Whilst the work was spectacular in its form, and Knowbotic Research were attempting to use the 'fault line' between the Net and the World to produce hybrid domains, the effects of the interaction on the audience were less clear.

One of the most engaging 'performers' at all three of these events was Margarete Jahrmann. Her on-line projects, which she undertakes with a range of collaborators, are almost perverse deconstructions or perhaps reconstructions of the world wide web. Most particularly the work she has done with Max Moswitzer as "Mamax" <<http://www.konsum.co.at/>>, <<http://www.t0.or.at/~max/mamax.html>> or <<http://www.silverserver.co.at/mamax/>> undermines the "Gatesian" simplicity of many internet or, more specifically, world wide web interfaces by offering new ways of getting to the source of the information, often laying bare the root structure or 'filing system' of the web site and offering that up as an example of its simultaneous simplicity and complexity.

One of the final events of the DEAF festival, which I was unfortunately not able to stay around for, was a forum titled *Reflective Responses: Networks, Criticism and Discourse* organised by Tim Druckrey. The objectives of this discussion were "to think about the ramifications of distributed information in an historical perspective and in forms that are both dynamic and considered;... to confront and incite an approach to web criticism across a range of topics; and [to]...discuss networked discourse as a fundamental issue of the political, intellectual and theoretical consequences of network ideology...". I look forward to seeing some of this discussion go on-line.

Amanda McDonald Crowley is the Director of the Australian Network for Art and Technology <<http://www.va.com.au/anat/>>. She is also a board member of the Inter-Society for Electronic Art (the umbrella organisation under which the symposia take place) <<http://www.sat.qc.ca/isea>>.

Amanda's attendance at ISEA was assisted by Museums Australia's Professional Development Program and the Australia Council, the Federal Government's Arts Funding and Advisory Body.

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Not a sweet little film about assimilation

Anne Rutherford interviews Darlene Johnson

Two Bob Mermaid is one of the films produced under the Indigenous Drama Initiative of the AFC, and screened nationally as part of the From Sand to Celluloid anthology. The film represented Australia at the Venice Film Festival and took out the award for Best Dramatic Short at the 1996 Asia Pacific Film Festival. Set in a small country town in NSW in the 1950s, the film portrays the identity conflicts experienced by a fair-skinned Aboriginal girl, Koorine, who passes for white at the whites-only local swimming pool. The issue of "passing" has generated some ongoing debate around the film. The director, Darlene Johnson, responds in an interview with Anne Rutherford.

AR In a review of Two Bob Mermaid published in Real Time #13, Virginia Baxter, while praising the film, suggests that the story is "somewhat implausible". What's your response to this claim?

DJ To say it's implausible is to imply that it must be fiction because the white people in the town couldn't possibly be unaware of Koorine's parentage. The whole point of the film is, of course, that they do know. It's known that if you're part-Aboriginal you've been, so to speak, painted with the tar brush. The premise is that the white kids pretend not to know, rather than they don't know that Koorine is Aboriginal. The kids who do know pretend they don't. The kids that don't know assume she isn't Aboriginal. That's the point of disavowing our difference.

AR So you're working with the play between what's recognised and acknowledged and what's disavowed?

DJ Yes. And with how that denial separated people, how it marked and limited Aboriginal culture, how it marked people against each other. But the film is more about the implications and complexities of identity—it's more to do with the tensions and conflicts experienced by Koorine as she learns to negotiate her identity. At the same time, I am interested in analysing white culture as the other side of the coin. White culture cannot be fully understood outside of Aboriginal definitions of what it means, and Aboriginal understandings of what it denies.

AR Pat O'Shane tells the story of how, in the 1970s as a young law student, she used to try to talk to colleagues about the Aborigines Protection Act and they didn't actually believe the content of the Act, for example, that "people had to have their lights out by a certain time". She ended up carrying around a copy of the act to prove what it said. There seems to be a sense of shock and disbelief by white people faced with the actual historical facts of conditions of existence of Aboriginal people. Do you think there's a similar disbelief operating in relation to your film?

DJ Yes, that's a really good example. People can't possibly imagine something like that actually happening. The belief that passing is impossible really reflects a lack of intercultural connection and exchange. It is a denial of an entire political history and the consequences of that history, it denies that Aboriginal people actually do live this type of existence. For example, when a fair Koori is with an Aboriginal group or with a white group, he or she is constantly learning to move from one position to the other. Boundaries are arbitrary and ambiguous. I am trying to go one step beyond the literalness of colonialism. And

anyway, the reality is these events did happen to my mother and to other Aboriginal people I know in the 1950s and beyond.

AR You talk a lot about passing as a motif to expose the contradictions of racism, and how racism divides people. Why is the practice of passing so important to you as a post-colonial strategy?

DJ Because I think it problematises the whole question of identity in the first place, especially in the 1950s, the assumption that you had to make up your mind if you were a blackfella or a whitefella. It explodes those fixed categories of identity—it brings those contradictions to the surface and shows just how complex they are. I'm trying to problematise the oppositional logic of Aboriginality—I want to try and think of it as a third concept, so it doesn't have to be one or the other. It's not tied down to the fixed definition, it's more mobile and fluid than that, it allows the person who's passing to negotiate, to have a choice in their options and to make a decision based on the circumstances at the time. This is the essence of the story, to see how ambiguous and contradictory our identities are all the time, that they're not fixed categories and the assumption of defining your culture according to skin colour is totally outrageous. I'm deliberately playing with the contradictions inherent in the social constructions of racial behaviour.

AR So it's really about exposing those pervasive ideas that understand culture as being skin deep—as if the skin is the marker of Aboriginality, and sameness and cultural identity are supposedly marked by skin colour?

DJ Yeah, racism depends on this idea of culture as a visible thing. What you see informs what you know. Therefore if it can't be seen it can't be true or real. It's the assumption that there is such a thing as a real Aborigine.

AR You've talked about Two Bob Mermaid as a post-colonial film. Could you expand on this?

DJ When I use the term post-colonial I don't mean that colonialism is over. Two Bob Mermaid is a post-colonial text in that it's an expression of Aboriginal culture—a counter culture in conflict with a colonial, dominant culture. Also passing is about making your own choices—a colonial text would have Aboriginal people as choiceless victims, an inferior position to dominant society. I am taking a critical look at the workings of racism, colonialism and how they limit Aboriginal identities.

AR Can you explain what you mean by those limits?

DJ By allowing only limited options, racism pressures you to look a certain way and speak a certain way, and those limits define who you are and set a whole lot of assumptions for people to treat you accordingly. So I'm trying to look at how that is produced in various ways. I am trying to push the contradictions of racism to the point that reveals racism as arbitrary, so we can see how absurd racism is. For example: the mother says swimming's for whitefellas, yet Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people know if you're a fair Koori you could swim at the pool, so that's a contradiction. The limit is also how the mother sees Koorine. What the mother says to her is a way of limiting

her from being different from her. For the mother the issue is about betrayal, for the daughter it's about desire. There are two notions of Aboriginality at work, I think.

AR The question of betrayal or the possibility of betrayal figures strongly in the film.

DJ Yes, which is the drama between the mother and the daughter. The mother imposes white society's limits on what their culture means which makes it harder for Koorine. Aboriginal people were granted only one identity, which is a common strategy of racism. But identity is a cultural production—something you have control of making and that changes all the time. There's no one essential thing that makes up who we are because we're all influenced by so many things.

AR How do you see passing as a question of desire?

DJ Because it's totally subversive of these categories, that's where the pleasure comes into it. Passing is not you're a bad person, you're abandoning a part of yourself. It's about the pleasures and desire of subverting the limits put on Aboriginal people as other, as object. Passing is about the dream to be free—to overturn the boundaries, it's like a secret desire. It's about the pleasures of getting away with it, and swimming becomes a metaphor for that desire. It's a sense of freedom, an escape, even if it is only temporary. Part of desire is the danger of being caught out.

AR Do you see some sense of threat—a white audience being threatened by a sense of being duped—threatened by the fact that Koorine can pass?

DJ Yes, I think passing constitutes a threat because white society doesn't approve of subversive acts. As if white people always tell the truth. But whites are implicated in the subversion too. White denial must take place for passing to be an issue in the first place. The disapproval of passing also implies that whites are always totally up front and decisive about everything—there are no grey areas. The film is precisely critical of how those categories of whiteness are the premise for defining what and who is Aboriginal. The film shows whiteness as a social construct and is an observation of life on the other side.

AR Do you think that pleasure you talk about in passing constitutes a threat to Aboriginal people who are not able to pass?

DJ I know some Aboriginal people who find the concept of passing hard, but more than not, you'll find that Aboriginal people are so spirited about this stuff, if you can get away with subverting the system, then good luck, they'd probably back you all the way. And why not? Why can't Aboriginal people use those options as an advantage? It's only going to make our culture stronger—we're not losing out by being translators, or being able to negotiate white culture—so it enables some Aboriginal people to challenge those expectations.

AR In a review of Two Bob Mermaid in Cinema Papers, Aboriginal writer Archie Weller talks about it as a film about assimilation. What's your response to this?



Two Bob Mermaid

DJ Well, it's set in the period of the assimilation policy, and it deals with some of the conflicts and issues generated by that policy. But it's not a sweet little film about white assimilation. If it was a film about assimilation per se, then Koorine would dive off the board, enter the big race and win as the embodiment of white magnanimity!

AR Weller also questions the believability of Koorine passing in a small town. As a fair Koori, surely he would be familiar with the issues around passing?

DJ Yes, obviously he's absolutely familiar with them. I think the issue for him—if you look at his comment in context—is more to do with his expectations of the story, that there should be more of an explanation of why things are the way they are. It's to do with expectations about story-telling. In Two Bob Mermaid, the viewer is deliberately placed in that position of confusion. It's not expected that such a simple narrative should encompass so many layers of complexity. It also makes the film controversial.

AR You've said that Weller wants a clear resolution at the end.

DJ Yes, I think a clear resolution would make it stronger for him as a film. He specifically states that at the end of the film it leaves one wondering if Koorine's family accept her and if she accepts her family. He is almost saying that the fact that I'm being deliberately ambiguous in the end is not acceptable. It doesn't work.

AR He wants to know which side she's on?

DJ Yes, whereas the ambiguity of the ending is precisely the conflict of Koorine's identity. I want to provoke the audience to experience some level of intimacy in this conflict, hoping that by identifying with Koorine they will finish the story themselves and reflect on the ever changing complexity of the problems faced by fair-skinned Aborigines. The end is deliberately ambiguous in that sense because there is no real end or clear choice to be made. It's more open-ended and thought provoking precisely because it's unresolved. For example, at the pool, Koorine has the option of doing two things and she chooses to leave the pool perhaps more out of an unwillingness to make a decision rather than as an absolute choice. The implications are deep rooted, unknown, contradictory. I don't think it means that she won't pass again or she won't swim again.

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After the fall

Michael Filippidis maps out the meanings of cocaine in the films and life of Martin Scorsese

Martin Scorsese's *Casino* is an opportunity to revisit the gangster genre with Scorsese as our guide. While speaking to Ian Christie of *Sight and Sound* (January 1996) about the decision to show the car bombing in *Casino* three times, Scorsese made a telling remark about the psychological effect of knowing one has escaped death by a hair's breadth: "Once you realise you could have been killed, then you never forget those moments". If that is the case then it would be safe to assume that Scorsese himself has never forgotten his own brush with death as well as his fall from grace in the seventies as a result of drugs and overweening pride. Indeed, this near death crisis is the critical episode of Scorsese's life. Within his two gangster films the object-correlative, if you will, of such a pride-induced fall is cocaine. This explains much about the lure of the 70s for Scorsese, especially as a setting for the fall of the old order that occurs in both *Goodfellas* and *Casino*; these two films represent Scorsese's attempt to wrestle with the cocaine demon of his own past.

Given Scorsese's visually exciting manner of capturing the addicts rush and state of mind (see the last part of *Goodfellas* when Henry, played by Ray Liotta, has to deliver the guns to Jimmy, pick up his brother from hospital, pick up the baby sitter, meet his Philadelphia connection, evade a helicopter, and cook the pasta), it is fair to say that he brings an insider's understanding of the effects of the

drug to such scenes. In the rarely seen *American Boy: A Profile of Steven Prince* (1978), drugs again make their presence felt. Amid all the harrowing stories of gunplay and other such misadventures that Prince recounts is an incident where he had to revive a girl whose heart had stopped from an overdose by injecting adrenalin into the heart through her chest. Given that the film was scripted and improvised in true Scorsese form, its appropriation of the documentary genre becomes a means by which Scorsese can dredge up all the volatile and excessive aspects of his own life through Steven Prince.

For Scorsese one either lives "the life", as Henry calls it in *Goodfellas*, or one dies as a man and becomes a "schnook". One simply does not live if not god-like in one's freedom from any kind of restraint. This freedom is but pride personified, and it is the one trait which Scorsese's gangsters exude most, the sense of living the best life, in the best time, at the best possible place. This sense of the power and evil of the gangster is what charges *Goodfellas* with a Miltonic grandeur in Scorsese's eyes; he cannot help but regard his gangsters in the same terms as critics often regard Milton's Satan: evil and yet compelling in a way that justifies spending two or more hours of screentime on them. Such a trope is of necessity concerned with a paradise lost, and indeed, Scorsese's mature work is imbued with a post-lapsarian sensibility. *Goodfellas* and *Casino* are perhaps Scorsese's most overt

statements of grief at the loss of an old order and of the heart's desire—*Raging Bull* and *The Age of Innocence* notwithstanding. *Casino* in particular, more so than the ironic *Goodfellas*, stands as an elegy to a lost order; the use of Georges Delerue's music from *Le Mepris* is an inspired touch as Godard's film is itself an elegy to a lost art of filmmaking.

Scorsese, however, always portrays the lower echelons of the crime world, the minions and underlings of Crime Inc. Thus in *Mean Streets* it is Charlie and his buddies whom we follow, all of them being fairly small-time and petty in their pursuits (such as when a couple of them gyp two teenagers out of twenty dollars for fire crackers which gives rise to that immortal line from Charlie, "Twenty dollars. Let's go to a movie!"), while in *Goodfellas* it is Henry and his associates who are the heart of the film, and in *Casino* it is Ace and Nicky who are in the "trenches" of Vegas, as Nicky puts it, and whom we follow as opposed to the bosses back East.

Nonetheless, when a gangster falls from grace in a Scorsese film the word goes out from the higher-ups to "whack" him. In Scorsese's films there are no real transferrals of power like the ones in Francis Coppola's *Godfather* films, only "whackings" and imprisonment. This form of retributive justice, so divine, so awful in its swiftness, is where Scorsese's Catholicism leaves its mark on the genre: the vengeful God of Catholicism rendered in the equally merciless hierarchy of the gang. It is for this reason that the deaths of the Joe Pesci characters in both *Goodfellas* and *Casino* are so severe, and it is also the reason why his character is seen at the end of *Goodfellas* firing a gun right at us and laughing manically. As the one *bona fide* Sicilian in the gang that comprises the film's circle of attention, Tommy is the character most bound by the strictures of the gang if he is to be "made" or "whacked".

Movie myths of the Mafia, especially in their cinematic articulation, gravitate around such notions as organisation and discipline and Scorsese's work is no different in this respect. It is precisely this sense of a discipline which appeals to the ascetic side of Scorsese. The would-be priest in Scorsese cannot help but be attracted to narratives which involve some discipline upon the self, upon the body and its desires. The Mafia with its rigorous strictures and protocols becomes a discipline for Scorsese to utilise in place of Catholicism.

In *Casino*, Robert De Niro's "Ace" Rothstein becomes one more of Scorsese's heroes marked by a grace that makes living in this world a torment for them. The film's opening sequence about the skimming of money reaches its climax only when Ace is introduced into the equation. Ace's gift for making a science out of gambling is what allows the casino to never lose, and is what charges him, in the eyes of the bosses at least, with a certain indemnity from being "whacked". As Nicky reminds us, the bosses will never touch Ace while they can still make money with him, a fact which he himself forgets when he begins to send back less and less money from his own jobs because of his pride and the effect of cocaine.


It is Ace's ability as a handicapper, to the point where he changes the odds simply by making a bet, that marks him as Scorsese's chosen man. The question that arises out of such a scenario is what precisely constitutes his fall? For Ginger (Ace's lover, played by Sharon Stone) and Nicky (Joe Pesci) it is a combination of cocaine and their own instability, or lack of discipline, which brings them down. In a key scene between Ginger and Ace the question arises, "Can I trust you?" De Niro's repeated rendering of this line echoes his question in *Taxi Driver*, "You talkin' to me?" The point, as far as Ginger is concerned, is that she cannot be trusted and that is where Ace falls. If his handicapping prowess is his discipline,

then he can never slacken or slip up when it comes to ensuring that the odds are in his favour. With Ginger, however, no amount of stacking the deck will ensure the right outcome. Nicky too fails in this regard, and his subsequent affair with Ginger aligns them both against Ace in true *Serpent* and *Eve* fashion—although the real *Serpent* in *Casino* is the aptly named Lester Diamond (James Woods), whose over-the-telephone speech to Ginger, "I see you for the first time...", is the formal and thematic counterpoint to Ace's first sighting of her through the surveillance camera.

Scorsese could have used any other vice to undo his characters in both *Goodfellas* and *Casino*, gambling, alcohol, sex, but he chooses cocaine. Thus in *Goodfellas* Ray Liotta's Henry Hill snorts his way into the bad books of Paulie Cicero (Paul Sorvino) and in *Casino* Ginger and Nicky bring about not only their own downfall but Ace's by making themselves so unstable as to threaten the prevailing order. My point is that when a director provides us with a close-up taken from the inside of a straw during a snort so that we see the cocaine spiral up towards us while the voice-over speaks about the effect of cocaine on the whole Vegas scene, we have to start paying attention to the thematic importance of cocaine to that director. To call the shot excessive in its thrall towards cocaine, even as the voice-over describes its catastrophic effect on Ginger and Nicky, is to realise the degree of ambiguity in Scorsese's attitude towards cocaine. A similar moment of ambiguity occurs in *Goodfellas* when Henry is seen in medium-shot snorting a line after which he lifts his head and gazes straight ahead at the camera which proceeds to frame his face in a tighter shot; the look of Henry's face tells us everything we need to know about the mess he is in, and yet the sudden impact of Henry's head looking at us while Muddy Waters' "Mannish Boy" throbs in accompaniment to his rush is exhilarating to watch.

Ultimately, these two films are as autobiographical as *Mean Streets*. The difference between the earlier film and the two latter works is that *Mean Streets* precedes Scorsese's own fall. *New York, New York* is arguably the key work in this respect. Made during 1976, the film was ambitious, personal, and a flop. In making *New York, New York* Scorsese gambled on his ability to match his personal excesses of the time to a work of similar aesthetic excess. The gamble cost him precious years of wandering in the desert. Even with *Raging Bull* only a few years after *New York, New York*, Scorsese was never quite forgiven by the powers that be until *After Hours* in 1984 confirmed that he could be both disciplined and profitable. Within Scorsese's personal narrative of triumphs and tragedy, *New York, New York* stands as the fork in the path of his career. Its epic length, together with the sheer ambition permeating its every shot and the relevance to Scorsese of its theme of the artist struggling to succeed, all make *New York, New York* a work of acute personal significance. That it failed at the box office and received less than unanimous acclaim means that for Scorsese the balloon had finally burst. After the success of *Mean Streets* and *Taxi Driver* Scorsese suddenly had to deal with a failure, and a grand failure at that. It is precisely this sense of failure, or more precisely of a fall, which haunts both *Goodfellas* and *Casino*.

Michael Filippidis is a freelance film writer living in Melbourne. A student of the Cinematheque, he has contributed several articles to the Cinematheque's journal C-Teq.



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Saturday night at the Malthouse

Anna Dzenis and R J Thompson re-view film critics as performers at Melbourne Festival Writers' Week

The practice and issues of screen criticism have been receiving welcome public attention lately. This year's Melbourne's Writers' Festival included a major event, "Reviewing the Movies", a panel devoted to discussing the writing of film and television criticism. Note that this event was given considerable prominence not simply through its sponsorship by the festival, but by its programming slot: Saturday night in the Malthouse's big room. The event was packed out (which one may hope will encourage the festival to include more such events in future).

The Australian Film Institute and Cinemedia (the sponsors) built the panel around prominent international identities: Jonathan Rosenbaum, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Jane Feuer, chaired by Adrian Martin.

Martin has increasingly been filling the role of Australia's official public film critic, and doing it very well. His work turns up everywhere, most regularly now on Radio National and in *The Melbourne Age*. He has his own clear agenda about what film criticism in the public sphere should be, and it's a far cry from settling for the dead parameters shuffled again and again as formula daily paper film reviewers tick off items on a checklist and avoid at all costs frightening the readers with anything as lively and active as an idea. It's equally far from annoying broadcast reviewers (from the ABC down) who hawk a watery stew of inane opinions and self-congratulatory one-liner sarcasms, apparently relished by a small group of magazine show producers and presenters. Martin sees such things as waste, as a failure to use an opportunity, a space, a place, to do some useful talking or writing about something important: what happens on screens we are watching.

What does Martin want? Here is the framework of key questions he set for the speakers at the outset. What can writing about film and television change? How can that writing be active and an activist practice? What intervention can it make in the traditional ways that films and television are discussed, consumed, circulated, taught and made? The audience, confident that it is in good hands, settles in for the main event.

A word on staging. On the fully-lit platform is a podium and four chairs. Speakers use the podium, and in the question time speak from their chairs. The chairs are in a familiar rounded-L formation, the short leg of the L to our left, angled so its occupant, the convenor, can look directly at each of his three charges down the long leg. First on our left, Adrian Martin, in his trademark black

shoes/sock/slax combo-topped with a hot deep-orange long-sleeved shirt, a definite punctuation. Next to him, Jonathan Rosenbaum in a comfy, three-piece beige suit, accessories (skin, hair, shoes) coordinated with the beige theme, ready to merge with most backgrounds. Then Trinh T. Minh-ha, the simplest possible stroke: black hair pulled straight back, black spectacles, black pants-suit and shoes. Finally, on the other end, Jane Feuer in a long tunic of very assertive blue, precisely the colour of tropical fish called neon tetras. Neon tetras are very tiny fish, so it's hard to figure how many are stitched together to make this eye-stunner, but it is definitely holding down its side of the stage. These staging remarks are made because the event unexpectedly began to move toward performance art and away from critical practice.

Rosenbaum spoke first. Rosenbaum has been publishing criticism for at least 30 years and has always been enviably prolific (he estimates he's published about 2,500 articles). Rather like Adrian Martin, his interests and causes spread across the wide range of film culture, from Orson Welles to the avant-garde, from *Midnight Movies* to Frank Tashlin. He wanted to be a novelist at first, and has stubbornly remained a very personal critical voice, finally centring his critical identity on it in his two autobiographical books, *Moving Places: A Life at the Movies*, and 20 years later, *Placing Movies: The Practice of Film Criticism*. Of the three speakers, Rosenbaum is clearly the only one who considers himself as what we think of as an all-round film critic. He speaks—conversationally, invitingly—of being raised in a family which operated movie theatres, one kind of fortunate context, and of being a beneficiary of the French New Wave, one of a generation whose film culture was formed in that particular moment of film history. A weekly reviewer for *Chicago Reader* for ten years, Rosenbaum's talk leans toward the concerns of reviewing, audience relationships and expectations, limitations on writing for staff critics (although he feels a remarkable degree of freedom in his own situation). He is quite thoughtful about the relationship between such critical activity—tied as it usually is to currently opening films—and the machinery of publicity. He is worried about the sameness of much of this criticism, the power of the press kit as true auteur (a phenomenon here as well as in the US). His talk is not long, but busy because he has raised many points without belabouring any, opening as much space

for the rest of the evening as possible; his has been a performance of gesture and guidance: the right hand points: "Here..." quarter-turn left, left hand sweeps: "But here..." He leaves us with a reworking of Godard, who said, "I await the end of cinema with optimism". Provocatively, Rosenbaum suggests he awaits the end of film criticism with equal optimism.

Trinh T. Minh-ha has no problem staking out and holding territory: she speaks for twice as long as either of the other speakers. Hardly someone whose work would lead one to think of her as a film critic, she has developed her own areas and style of theoretical discourse around post-coloniality and women's issues (she is a professor at UC Berkeley) in *Woman, Native, Other*, 1989; *When the Moon Waxes Red*, 1991; and *Framer Framed*, 1992. Her films include *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* and *Shoot for the Contents*, often discussed as experimental documentaries; and *A Tale of Love*, her recent more narrative feature, although as we shall see, one hesitates to label.

Trinh T. Minh-ha begins by describing herself not as a film critic, but a subject of film criticism, an activity that concerns us all in that as viewers and consumers of film we are responsible for the way films are circulated and discussed. She speaks in a cool, clear voice, few abstract words, in a light rolling rhythm, more susurrating than incantation, but very much its own object, very distant, very self-contained, formal: her version of French-model theory rhetoric and structure; symmetrical, binary, proceeding via overlap. Like watching someone sculpt spheres out of air (and equally dependent upon metaphor). Like Althusser, she is interested not in fitting works into a system but in finding gaps in them to convert into meaning. For her, criticism is best understood as a sort of reading, a divination, so that the writer and the reader exist simultaneously with the work as in the mediation, the middle, we become each other's translators and mediators: one is never at the beginning or the end but always in the middle.

She gives some extended examples (all, interestingly, from the traditional European art cinema): *Hiroshima, mon amour*, Resnais/Duras; *India Song*, Duras; *Stalker*, Tarkovsky. Throughout, she is able to weave the sub-theme that film criticism has had problems saying appropriate things about her work, perhaps the most interesting subtle move of the night. The cleverest (and never spoken) performance aspect of all this is the constant play with visual and verbal Oriental stereotypes.

Jane Feuer is having a bad voice week—it has let her down, and this to a person who makes many demands of her voice. It is a croak. Professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh where she teaches film and television, she is the author (or author/editor) of three major works: *The Hollywood Musical*, 1982, new edition just issued; *MTM: Quality Television*, 1984, and *Seeing Through the Eighties: Television and Reaganism*, current. Roseanne Barr seems to be a key role model for Feuer. Opening line, milked for all it's worth: "Trash is my life". The evening has now crossed the bar completely from criticism to performance. This is over-the-top, is-there-anybody-I-haven't-offended?, stand-up stuff. She makes it very clear that she has nothing to do with art (although pointing out that she came up through the same sorts of film, film culture, film courses etc as had Jonathan Rosenbaum and Trinh T. Minh-ha), only with *Dynasty* (she gives us a lesson in how to pronounce it), *L.A. Law* (she has studied some episodes 150 times) etc. She describes herself as a Michael Arlen-style belle lettrist writing wittily about 'trash', and trying to redeem it by demonstrating that trash is more than just pure entertainment; among other things, it has political dimensions—familiar, 70s political dimensions at that. It is possible that Feuer simply likes to stir: she told her English Department colleagues that *Dynasty* was a much more complex text than Joyce's *Ulysses*, telling us with crocodile tears that got her in a lot of trouble.

The evening winds down genially through a series of questions each equally important to its asker, all handled gracefully by Martin and the company.

Events such as these are strange. Who dreams them up? Given that you want a panel on current issues in screen criticism (not theory, not production, not history), who would pick these three and why? Given the costs of flying in and putting up three international screen studies celebs, how do we know if we got out money's worth? Such speculation must be part of the fun. In any case, these three didn't have much to say to or with each other, but they sketched interesting places for themselves. They performed as available role models, a positive but unquantifiable value. They gave a sense of contact and immediacy, a witness which could be queried. They re-enacted, again, a timeless cameo drama: the representation of self as public speaker and performer in a frame, a context, established by a very different activity: writing. And the event provided an instance for the film culture community to again constitute itself, to join together around something, declaring the importance, if nothing else, of that community itself, however fragile, however threatened.

"Reviewing the Movies", Melbourne Festival Writer's Week, Saturday October 19.



Flickerfest '97

Flickerfest '97

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Report

Anarcho-techno possibilities

John McConnachie in Adelaide reports on the UTLCA Symposium: Community Cultural Development and Multimedia.

The real value of this symposium lay in its intersection between potentially conflicting fields—the grass-roots methodologies inherent in community arts, and the still-rarefied strata of digital technologies. As such, the symposium was aimed more towards the community end of practice, a welcome space in which to discuss the implications of emerging technology without the tech-heads or the incomprehensible minutiae required to explain the operations of digital media. Credit goes to symposium artistic director Lylie Fisher for placing content and means on the agenda, firmly ahead of form, rounded out by a comprehensive series of hands-on workshops and demonstrations held each afternoon. It's perfectly fine to explore what we can do with this technology, but it is imperative to discuss why we would want to do it at all, pushing debate beyond the Mt Everest (because it's there) syndrome.

As it turns out, the community arts is a contentious arena in which to stage this debate. Its more traditional supporters and practitioners view the technology with suspicion, as exemplifying the alienation inherent in Western industrialism—the enemy of the people. If it is that, it should be cast in Ibsen's appropriation of the term: something crucial is happening and to turn our backs to it is at our own peril. Key-note speaker Stephen Alexandra hinted precisely at this, that to avoid this technological revolution is to cast the community arts as envisioned in the 70s even further into ghettoisation and marginalisation. But he also stressed some of the peculiarities and

contradictions inherent in the structure of new beasts like the internet and other digital media. On one level we find the power struggles of multinationals seeking their stake in information technologies, dynamic battles which will restructure our concepts of national autonomy, cultural boundaries, commercial and civil infrastructures. On another, there exists a digital community which is best described as grass-roots with a virtually (pun intended) unfettered exchange of information and ideas, including political organisation and protest. As a mass-medium, the net circumvents other ideologically determined media, as described in Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent*. Quite to the contrary, the net provides the perfect opportunity for Chomsky's celebration of counterculture, whether it be environmental activism or gay lobbying (as discussed in detail in Michelangelo Signorile's *Queer in America: Sex, the Media and the Closets of Power*, Abacus 1993). This is because the plethora of content on the web is so diverse that it mimics a genuine anarchy. Later speakers would throw cold water on certain cherished concepts of web-utopia. But in the meantime, we can say that while corporate battles are waged, individual expression runs riot, as any web-surfer would be aware.

Speakers who followed over the next few days (many familiar to readers of these pages) only emphasised this point: Francesca da Rimini speaking about the work of VNS Matrix, Zane Trow on his role as Artistic Director of the Next Wave Festival, Brett Spilsbury on Australian

Network for Art and Technology's seeding work for art in the digital arena, and Michael Doneman's run-through of a website for Brisbane's youth arts organisation, Contact Inc. I was delighted by some of the contrasting approaches given expression over the three days.

da Rimini, for example, emphasised the non-technological approach of VNS Matrix's efforts. Working only on a need to know basis, and drawing on expert help when required, emphasis is placed firmly on discursive strategies fluidly aimed at subverting a patriarchal unconsciousness most popularly summarised as 'boys and their toys'. Yet implicit in VNS Matrix's approach is a growing awareness and sophistication: once you start playing with this stuff, you start getting good at it. Still, VNS Matrix have succeeded by deciding on a focus, their pro-libertarian feminism is refreshing, the final effect delightfully fearless. In contrast at least to VNS Matrix's stated aims, Zane Trow emphasised the skill of the artist who uses the computer as a virtuoso instrument. He presented a devastatingly brief manifesto of such wit and truth that its more unpalatable side was greeted with guffaws of recognition, especially "our art is so radical it is sponsored by the government". Perhaps because his background is in sound and composition/performance, one of the first arts practices to embrace digital technology, his attitude was refreshingly down to earth. The computer is just a tool. Or, again recalling Chomsky, a reminder that if access to digital information could really change things, the Pentagon wouldn't let us have it. As it is, cyberculture is best characterised as 'adolescent', not democratic. But most importantly, it was stressed that community arts in the digital age would never be about 'decoration', which has characterised Western art since the baroque met bourgeois ideology. That in itself is a breakthrough, making digital

art about 'things' (if not objects), and implying links between the virtual world and the material one of bodies, communities and power.

The symposium had the excellent sense to address exactly these issues by choosing artists working in both multicultural and indigenous contexts such as the Milanese Ermanno "Gommo" Guameri who gave an account of disenfranchised Italian youth who have moved into cyberspace to conduct community events. Last month, the old News building on Adelaide's North Terrace, the origin of Rupert Murdoch's media empire, caught fire—no doubt through the activities of homeless street kids. Imagine instead that it is filled with computers, begged and borrowed, hooked into the web as an integral part of its fabric and giving voice to an anarchist youth who find this technology as familiar to them as phones. This might scare people, but frankly, Gommo's account of such events in Italy looked a lot like fun. In Australia however, it won't be street kids working this stuff, but the (hopefully not) well heeled children of the bourgeoisie. It still raises the question of community access which is where Gary Brennan's somewhat dry address to the symposium belied the importance of what he had to say. Gary's consultancies with both the Australia Council and the Australian Film Commission have identified the means for providing access, basing skunkworks in the existing Screen Cultural resource organisations such as Metro, Open Channel, the Media Resource Centre and FTI in Perth. This deserves a report to itself.

United Trades and Labour Council of Australia Symposium: Community Cultural Development and Multimedia, Mercury Cinema, Adelaide, September 24-26.

Underground Asia

Freda Freiberg on independent short films at the Melbourne Fringe

For the film and video component of the Melbourne Fringe this year, Tim Patterson curated a program of a dozen independent short films from east Asia. Selected from the best Korean, Japanese and Hong Kong shorts shown at the Pusan, Pia, Image Forum and Hong Kong Film Festivals over the past two years, and screened on two consecutive evenings, the program provided a rare glimpse of quirky, personal and experimental work produced outside the commercial industry and without state support. Though Korea, Japan and HK can hardly be said to represent "Asia", the epithet "underground" was apt on several scores—thematically, industrially, and formally.

The programme highlighted animation from Korea and HK. One of the Hong Kong works, *Hey Man, What you Want* (Chan Ka Hing, 1995), demonstrated the kind of visual dynamism and dramatic intensity that we associate with the manga cinema of Japan and the HK action cinema; but the other animated films, from both HK and Korea, were closer to the socio-political parables that used to come out of eastern Europe. *The Mushroom Paradise* (Dick Wong, 1995) can be read as a Cold War (or Two Chinas) parable: the people are seduced by competing demagogues who insist on exclusive mushroom production, ignoring the flowers; the mushrooms grow into giants, obliterating the light; and the people finally wonder: where have all the flowers gone?

The Korean shorts, *Entropy 2* (Chang Woo-Jin, 1995), *Under Construction* (Choung Won-Gu, 1995) and *Dick from the*

Power Plant (Yi Kwan-Yong, 1996), all deal with the social costs of development—the despoliation of the environment, the dehumanization of work, the destruction of community, the loss of human dignity—employing different techniques of animation—computer, clay and cutout, and cel respectively.

Though in the form of live-action dramatised fiction, *Drift* (Yu Sang-Gon, 1996) also constitutes a parable of the modern human condition. Adrift on a raft in a wild sea, a lone man learns to overcome his craving for sustenance, support and salvation, accept his loneliness and hopelessness, abandon any sense of solidarity with others, ignore human suffering, and embrace his selfish survival instinct...

The longer films were all Japanese. One of them, *Twilight* (Tengai Amano, 1994) was screened at the 1995 Melbourne Film Festival, where it received the award for best short film, so was already familiar to local aficionados of shorts. A homage to the 'primitive' silent cinema of prewar Japan, it employs jaunty theme music and sound effects but no dialogue; speedy and jerky movement, jumpcuts and sudden metamorphoses; and loving parodies of the charmingly choreographed routines performed by Hiroshi Shimizu (a classic director of 'youth films' unfortunately unknown outside Japan). It builds up a frenetic pace, but goes round in circles, meaninglessly and endlessly repeating itself, going nowhere—possibly with (national) allegorical intent...

In *Mokkikou* (1996), experimental



Junko Wada's *Peach Baby Oil*

video artist Atsushi Sakurai tells a story of a man reincarnating himself as a tree. In so doing, he disrupts conventional notions of normality and realism in action and language.

However, for the ultimate in Japanese underground, one has to turn to the women's films, *Flower from the Sea* (1994) and *Peach Baby Oil* (1995), which won the Grand Prix awarded by Image Forum (the MIMA of Japan) in 1995 and 1996, respectively. These two films offer personal, poignant and pungent explorations of private feminine experience. The former is shot in clumsy amateurish style, aptly aping the awkwardness of a female beginner who is finding it hard to handle the camera—and to cope with troubling experiences of romance and rejection. In groves and grasps, she acquires some measure of agency—with the aid of a wise and loving grandmother—

and increased control of the camera, which enables her to shape her experience.

Junko Wada's *Peach Baby Oil* is a more polished and erotic exploration of the threshold between girlhood and sexual maturity. It dramatises the fears and fantasies of the young adult female, her regressive and compulsive impulses. The confined spaces of the protagonist's one-room apartment are used dramatically and shockingly, sharply counterpointed with a mock-childish voice-over narration. The film dramatically evokes personal space as hermetic prison and as groundswell of burgeoning sexuality.

1996 Melbourne Fringe Festival, Film & Video Program, State Film Theatre October 14 & 15 1996.

Report

Animania

Rebecca Farley at *Celluloid Briefs* in Brisbane

Brisbane has long had a dedicated animation audience. It's starved quietly over the past few years with no new festivals, celebrations or tournées screening at the Classic or anywhere else; so it wasn't difficult for the First Brisbane Animation Festival to make nearly 700 of the city's strangest people very happy.

For two days we inhabited the Schonell theatre's lower cinema, with its deep black seats and sparkly ceiling. The busy foyer boasted program posters, T-shirts and a lavishly-mounted exhibition of art from Freezframe animation gallery.

The first session, *Kids' Stuff*, was, as the name implies, G-rated. Some films simply shone: *A New Start* (Bruce Krell) by virtue of its beauty; *Pat and Mal* (Lubomir Benes) by virtue of its silliness; *An Artist* (Michele Courmoyer) because it spoke beautifully to that misunderstood child in all of us. Also *The Birds* (Thor Sivertsen) where seagulls, failing to communicate verbally, shat satisfyingly on industrial polluters. (If only it was that simple!)

Film critic Raffaele Caputo once gallantly refused to review an animated children's film, since no self-respecting member of the appropriate audience would read the review. Likewise I won't comment too harshly on the films which underimpressed me, since I stopped being their target audience some years ago. I can only say that I hope Italian children do occasionally see better cartoons than *Pimpa*, and wonder how anyone could describe *Mr Bohm and the Herring* (Barbro Hallstrom) as a children's film.

Outside, we found a new horde of willing victims. Thus passed the remainder of the festival: a small core in

for the long haul, staggering out for air through the incoming rush of eager faces. After *Kids' Stuff*, no session had more than 20 empty seats.

Queensland Animators' stated goal was to present a broad spectrum of animation forms, and they succeeded stupendously. Apart from ads and music video, nearly every imaginable type of animation was featured, and a great many films were (multiple) award winners.

We saw cel, computer, rotoscoped, puppet, stop-motion (with and without models), and drawn or scratched-onto-film animations. We saw Australian, European, North American and African films, some dubbed, some not. We saw films from every decade since 1930; we saw films from 34 seconds to 29 minutes in length.

We saw excruciatingly serious films: *Balance* (Christoph and Wolfgang Lavenstein), *The Hero* (Mexican), and films that were seriously excruciating (*15th of February* by Tim Webb; *Nights and Bob's Birthday*, Alison Snowden & David Fine). We saw films that touched us (*Wooden Leg* by Darren Doherty and Nick Smith; *Dada*, Piet Kroon) and films whose creators were obviously 'touched' (*Forever Young*, Michael Buckley; *Ah Pook*, Eva Steegmyer—sorry, Burroughs fans.)

We saw films that made sense and some that didn't (*Migration of the Birdcages*, John Francis; *Joe & Basket*, Peter Spans). We saw films of incredible beauty (*Screen Play*, Barry Purves; *Phenomenal Identities*, Erik Roberts) and films that were simply incredible (*Tango*, Rybcynski; *Abductees*, Paul Vester).

A real treat was *The Cartoon Mirror*, part of the National Cinematheque, featuring early American cartoons. Extra



Celluloid Briefs: The First Brisbane Animation Festival

bright stars were the infamous, elusive *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs* (Bob Clampett, 1943) and the Nobel Peace Prize-nominated *Peace on Earth* (Hugh Harmon, 1939).

The next best part was the cocktail party. Guests Clare Kitson (UK, Channel 4) and Joy Toma (*eat carpet*, SBS) grazed alongside veteran animators, academics, students and scores of happy campers content just to rub shoulders with like-minded people.

Criticisms. In places, the editing was somewhat patchy, leaving embarrassing blanks between films—though at least one's retina got a break! Also, while seeing certain animations twice can be illuminating, the three repeated films, sadly, weren't that special. And the children's session lacked concord; perhaps childhood encompasses too many developmental stages to satisfy a single audience.

Overall, though, there was something

for everyone (and I mean everyone!) and the festival more than satisfied the hungriest animation aficionado.

An animation binge is terrific fun, but exhausting. The density of meaning and intensity of message in 70 films compresses a lot of brainspace, leaving the sense that you've missed a lot. Fortunately images are still percolating into my consciousness. Which I guess will have to last until the next Brisbane Animation Festival.

Celluloid Briefs: The First Brisbane Animation Festival October 5 and 6, 1996 Schonell Theatre, The University of Queensland

Rebecca Farley wrote an Honours thesis on Australia's animation industry and assisted at the birth of Queensland Animators in 1994. She is now writing a Masters thesis on animation and edits the Queensland Animators Newsletter.

Book review

Devereaux, Leslie and Hillman, Roger eds,
Fields of Vision: Essays in Film Studies, Visual Anthropology and Photography,
University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1995

When disciplinary boundaries grow permeable, there is the possibility of looking again, with new questions in mind.

Devereaux and Hillman

Fields of Vision comes out of a series of synchronous yet separate events. The essays in the anthology arose from a year of scholarly activity sponsored by the Humanities Research Centre (Australian National University, Canberra) in 1989. Two conferences, titled respectively *Coming to Terms with the Photographic Image* and *Film and Representations of Culture*, as well as a festival of films *Documentary: A Fiction (Un)like Any Other*, curated by Bill Nichols, were the focal points which brought together speakers and audiences from cross disciplinary and national perspectives. The National Film and Sound Archive also participated by hosting a festival of 1920s French cinema.

Yet, for someone like myself steeped in a love and fascination of cinema and the potency of images, reading this anthology takes me into another terrain. Do not expect to find in these pages

passionate encounters with particular films, or engagement with the sublimity and texture of form. Worlds constructed in and through images were, for many of the authors, 'evidence' of a problem that lacked rigour and empirical veracity. The problem of the 'reality' and 'truthfulness' of photographs are specifically addressed by two essays. Anne-Marie Willis, in "Photography and Film: Figures In/Of History", examines the Sovereign Hill theme park and how film and photography are used in the construction of a hyper-real historical space. Bernd Huppau's essay, "Modernism and the Photographic Representation of War and Destruction", surveys the classic iconography of war arguing that the abstracted reality of modern technological warfare poses a problem for any attempt at the visual documentation of emotional and moral truth.

Questions of 'how we read what we see' are further developed through various analyses of the cinema. In her essay "Horror and the Carnavalesque: The Body-monstrous", Barbara Creed

applies Bakhtin's notion of the Carnavalesque and the grotesque body in a detailed study of numerous generic variations of the horror film. The body of matinee idol and theatrical actor John Barrymore, and his performance in the 'romantic melodramas' of the 1920s, is the subject of Gaylyn Studlar's essay "Barrymore, the Body, and Bliss: Issues of Male Representation and Female Spectatorship in the 1920s". Studlar argues the case that female spectatorship is more complex and active than previously suggested. Roger Hillman points to the need for far greater attention to be paid to the film soundtrack. His analysis of Fassbinder's *The Marriage of Maria Braun* reveals its complex, virtuosic, layered auditory narrative. Gino Moliterno's "Novel into Film: *The Name of the Rose*" critiques Annaud's film version of Eco's novel for its inability to translate the wit, irony and playfulness of its source. He argues the difficulty inherent in adaptations across cultural, geographic and formal boundaries.

However I found the most compelling issue within the anthology that of the 'voice'—the voice with which we speak and the place from which it is spoken. In her essay "Experience, Re-presentation and Film", Leslie Devereaux begins with an image, a description, a memory of a

Zinacanteca woman's belt. She tells us that the belt, woven by the women themselves, is the piece of a Zinacanteca's woman's clothing most emblematic of her femininity. As soon as an infant girl is born her nappy is cinched with a miniature version of the belt. She wears such a belt throughout her life. Devereaux reflects on its associative context and its meaning for others who do not share precisely her experiences of having seen this and known this—the place of the women; their houses, the smells, the sounds. This leads her to reflect, "We live at all times in embedded, contingent ways in our minds and in our physicality...we have both the specificity and the embeddedness: the node and the web; the thing and the relationship. And we have somehow, in order to live and to understand living, to keep both these aspects in view..." It is her call to realise our 'specificity' and our 'embeddedness'—this voice, this poetic invocation of the need to speak from our situated subjectivities, that lingers longest in my thoughts. This curious image fragment has unexpectedly become part of my own image, my many reveries. On the basis of Devereaux's essay alone I would especially recommend this book.

Anna Dzenis

Report

New mood, new orthodoxy?

Kathryn Millard attends a conference on actor-director relations

Introducing the combined Australian Screen Director's Association/ Performance Conference at Melbourne's Malthouse Theatre recently, ASDA president Stephen Wallace talks of a creating a "better spirit of collaboration between directors and performers". The conference program—with strands on film and television drama and documentary, plenaries on topics such as rehearsal processes or new media, individual case studies of films and television programs and sessions on the practicalities of casting and rehearsing—is extremely full. A feature of the Performance Conference is its emphasis on rehearsal processes and performance for both drama and documentary film and television: an acknowledgment of the ways in which

She describes her aims for the rehearsal period as being to provide a solid structure for the actors and a sense of intimacy, fundamental understandings that can survive the move into production week when various technical layers are added. For Nevin, the rehearsal space and its resources (from fresh flowers to reference materials) are extremely important. Actress Josephine Byrnes makes a meandering but impassioned plea for more information from directors about the design concept, style of the work, and framing of the shot. *Shine* director, Scott Hicks comments on the dangers of too much film rehearsal. In his view, too many contemporary films are beautifully lit and composed with

documentary and drama filmmaker, that each informs the other. Making documentaries creates a confidence about creating scenarios and capturing an atmosphere and energy on film. In the end, the filmmaker's task is to capture what happens in front of the camera.

Director Michael Jenkins introduces a discussion focussing on the television mini-series *Blue Murder* as a case study in the collaboration between writer, performer, actors and dramaturg. From the beginning Jenkins sees his role as "creating an atmosphere of expectation" and encouraging the performers to take risks. If we take the view that the script is a living, dangerous, flexible thing", how far can the performers go in their exploration of the material? How do we avoid rigid route maps? Keep the process open as long as possible? Jenkins does not find choreographing the performances for the camera helpful. Instead, he prefers to work with the actors in the locations before deciding on shots. Other decisions about

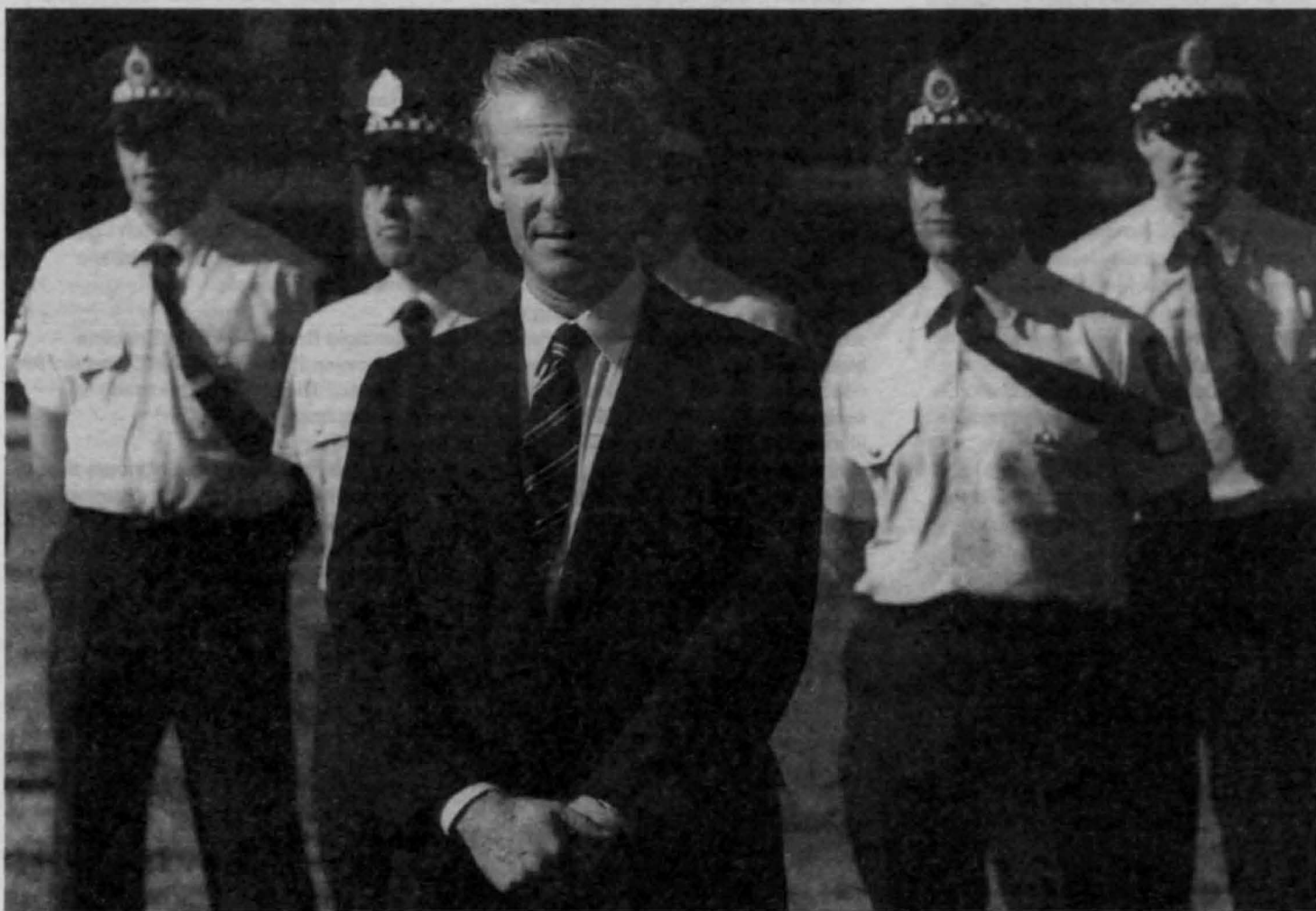
director work together? What did the dramaturg on *Blue Murder* actually do? Is the emphasis on action suitable for all kinds of film and television? Or is it best suited to large cast ensemble pieces like *Blue Murder*, *Heartbreak High* and *Only The Brave* (Anna Kokkinos's 50 minute drama film on which Lathouris had a similar role)?

Later, George Whaley, Lindy Davies and Lathouris discuss rehearsal processes. Whaley's presentation seems grounded in the classroom. He gives an historical perspective on Stanislavski and what he perceives as the uses and misuses of his writings. There's too much internalisation in contemporary screen acting, Whaley asserts. The art of acting is in decline. Nico Lathouris makes another philosophical presentation around acting and actions. He finishes by saying, "If you were told you were going to be mugged next week, you wouldn't practice clutching your stomach, falling and saying 'got me'. You'd practice running". By now, a cool change has swept through Melbourne. As the rain beats down on the tin roof, there's an air of concentrated attention. Lindy Davies, Dean Of Drama at the Victorian College of the Arts, takes the floor after session chair Paul Thompson reads out an impressive list of credits. They include acting as performance consultant on television and film projects like Dennis Potter's *Karaoke* and Sally Potter's *Orlando* and *Tango Lesson*. Davies describes her main role as creating an environment where actors can work freely. Her personal keys to creating such an environment are to treat actors as capable and autonomous artists, to provide them with good scripts and to make clear the parameters they're working within, for example always describing the camera frame the actors are working within. In contrast to Lathouris, Davies insists on giving actors sources to work from, rather than assuming actions.

Director Sue Brooks and casting director Dina Mann speak about workshoping, casting and rehearsing the low budget feature *Road To Nowhere* (scheduled for release in February 1997). Set in a country town, *Road To Nowhere* features a large number of characters of similar age, background and cultural history. In this case, the writer and director elected to workshop the script with 10-12 actors a year before it was shot. This was to "see the script on its feet" and consider any rewriting well before the rehearsal period. Writer Alison Tilson comments that rehearsals are too late to do more than minor script revisions. The week long workshop enabled both the writer and director to consider the overall structure and shape of the script. Nearer production, theatre director Paul Hampton worked with Sue Brooks to rehearse the actors over a four week period. The brief video excerpts of the film shown (featuring Bill Hunter and Denise Roberts) are absolutely tantalising.

It's clear from the work shown and discussed that there's considerable attention being paid to achieving stronger performances in many areas of Australian film and television. And a more collaborative mood. Often theatre directors are being brought in to work with actors and screen directors. But is there a danger in creating a new orthodoxy that says screen directors should always work primarily with the camera, bringing in theatre directors to work with the performers? How can screen directors learn to communicate and work with performers? And what other kinds of collaboration between directors and performers are possible?

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Richard Roxburgh as Roger Rogerson in *Blue Murder*

documentary filmmakers, often working with social actors over considerable time spans, can shape performances for the camera just as much as their drama counterparts.

The opening plenary canvasses a wide range of views on rehearsal processes for film, television and theatre, setting up many of the issues discussed throughout the weekend. TV series director Brendan Maher gets a laugh when he claims, "I was a little bemused when asked to speak at this conference about TV and rehearsal". He explains the constraints he works within: for each hour of television produced, he's allocated one hour of rehearsal. Maher's own method is increasingly to "cast the person" for a TV series, since there is no time to build the character. A read-through takes up the one hour of rehearsal. After that, he snatches any moment that he can to communicate with the actors, shooting up to four or five takes and problem-solving and shaping the performance as he goes. Maher describes TV production as a machine which once started cannot be stopped. Many producers see rehearsal time as prohibitively expensive, hence the need for directors and performers to develop ways of working within the given production constraints.

Theatre director Robyn Nevin's experience could not be more different.

performances that are absolutely dead. "Sheer taxidermy", he says, quoting film critic Pauline Kael.

A relaxed and thoughtful Hicks elaborates on many aspects of the development and realisation of *Shine* at a later session. *Shine* is almost a failed rites of passage story, Hicks suggests. In David Helfgott's words, "I never grew up. I grew down". Like many feature films, *Shine* had no formal rehearsal period. But for Hicks, everything that happens between casting and shooting could be described as a rehearsal process. The read-through, in particular, is an important exploratory tool. Preferring not to burden the actors with unnecessary information, Hicks doesn't talk with them about areas such as design and music. For actor Geoffrey Rush, audio tapes of David Helfgott speaking and playing were important rehearsal tools. Hicks described Rush's method as working with sound sources almost as texts, studying and interrogating them in considerable depth. In contrast, Noah Taylor worked more instinctively and with less reliance on research. It was Hicks' job as director to moderate the performances overall and "act as guardian of the bigger picture". Hicks does not particularly encourage actors to come to rushes, believing that many actors come primarily to reassure themselves about the director. He emphasises that there is a relationship between his work as a

style flow from this. For example, *Blue Murder* was shot with two cameras and overlapping dialogue. Conventional continuity was thrown out the window as the director and editor worked to create a deliberately jagged editing style. *Blue Murder* dramaturg Nico Lathouris delivers an intriguingly dense, philosophical speech. He makes assertion after assertion. The role of the dramaturg is to make what's meant visible and what's visible meant. The actor must serve the drama. The performative process is always grounded in physical action: action as process. Directions to the actors must always be expressed as "to get someone to do something". Lathouris' presentation has the feel of a manifesto. His performance builds in intensity throughout the delivery. The seemingly mild mannered, softly spoken Jenkins is a great foil. From the stage, *Blue Murder* actor Steve Bastoni speaks about his experience of working in this way. Questions flood in. Clips from the programs are shown to enthusiastic applause. Summing up, the *Blue Murder* collaborators argue that intensive rehearsal processes like theirs are extremely cost effective for television. They add quality to the finished product and, ultimately, save money.

The *Blue Murder* session creates much discussion. How do the dramaturg and

No budget filmmaking in the raw

Stephen Ball celebrates the undaunted Super 8-ers

Melbourne Super 8 Film Group pulled out as many stops as possible to ensure that *Naked 8*, the 9th Melbourne International Super 8 Film Festival, went ahead after the Australian Film Commission declined its usual support. One wonders what inspired this funding decision. It would be difficult to rationalise economically as it is hard to imagine an organisation that gives more cultural 'value for money'. It is tempting to surmise that an independent no-budget filmmaking practice, however prolific or significant, does not fit into the scheme of a planned culture. Such suspicions can understandably raise paranoid hackles about funding totalitarianism which opts for determinism over a more conciliatory and responsive approach.

Undaunted and with true refusenik verve the group aligned itself with another unfunded institution, Melbourne Cinematheque (which underwrote its venue costs against loss), solicited community support through advertising sponsorship and presented a no-nonsense, hype-free festival consisting of five programs over three days.

Anyone familiar with the group's 'open' philosophy will recognise the rationale of the 'mixed-bag' programming. Little heed is paid to conventional, arguably elitist, notions of 'excellence' or technical proficiency. The festival presented an impressive range of expertise from the fumbling haphazard gestures of first time filmmakers with their serendipitous naive charm to filmmaking practices finely honed over many years. While this approach can alienate viewers with pre-emptive expectations, it evinces an egalitarian self-determinism largely sidestepping the normal qualitative reference points.

While *Naked 8* amply demonstrated the continuing efficacy of film technology developed for domestic use as a medium for the production of artworks disencumbered from the usual economic and cultural dictates, its most important role was to showcase the imaginative strength of works arising from that facility.

If generic categorisation is necessary most of the films in *Naked 8* can be placed somewhere on an axis between personal and experimental, with occasional diversions into documentary and dramatic comedy. Mercifully few films aspired to the professional mainstream conventions that super 8 is all too inadequate at accommodating, or the clever one-liners that often pass as 'experimental' in more official versions (the *eat carpet school?*) of contemporary Australian production.

Many films incorporate formal experimental techniques into layered complexities of image, sound and text. Two selections by Maeve Woods, *Tawdry Sass* and *Tut*, feature vivaciously hand scratched and coloured film. This 'abstraction' is mediated by voice-overs weaving around the images, reflecting on 'the cut' in the former, with the latter telling of a telephone that rearranges the world placing ideas back to back. This 'pataphysical' world predates the web, evidence that lateral association exists quite independently of html and 'hypertext' clichés. Heinz Boeck's



still from Pat and Richard Larter's *Portrait*, 1976

frame enlargement by Arthur Cantrill

Knitted Brow Anthology is a synergistic montage of discrete fragments of similar scratching and colouring techniques with Supremacist abstraction, urban landscapes, depopulated interiors, electronic music and fractured poetic phrases. Other films imaginatively re-invigorate split-screen techniques such as the mosaic-like construction of Canadian John Kneller's *Drop In/Shoot/Drop Out* and *Shadows of the Sun* by Silt from San Francisco which collages abstracted hazy, re-shot home movie and 'mandala' images into a sultry nostalgic resonance.

Several films evoke a refined sense of place. Arthur and Corinne Cantrill's *Tidal River* is one of a series of filmworks made at Wilson's Promontory; *Private Eye* by Tony Woods is a macro study of inner-city Fitzroy; John Harrison sets the work of Harry Hooton against the backdrop of urban Perth in *Homage*. Each takes a different approach: the Cantrills, a single frame exploration of coastal bush environs; Woods, an opportunistic intimate voyeurism; while Harrison's camera roams city streets and industrial estates capturing them in grainy black and white. All are typified by an ambience that results from a transformation of striated space into intense atmospherics over time, a trend that is particular, but not exclusive, to contemporary super 8 practice.

In marked contrast is a tendency among a Canadian selection to explore questions of identity. *Skin Flicks* by Carl Stewart and *The Leather Boy Next Door*, are both celebrations of 'queerness', the main point of reference

seems to be *Scorpio Rising*. In spite (or perhaps because) of there being less pernicious censorship than in Anger's day (we are treated to images of cocks, SM rituals and nipple piercing) these films do seem slightly gratuitous and somewhat directionless. More interesting is Maria Y. Shin's *The Three White Men* (or *Of Desires and Education of Yong-Me*), exploring the power politics of inter-racial, bisexual relationships, a second projector presenting a text counterpoint to the 'seductive' images. While in *Diary of a Housewife*, an *Edible Woman* by Alyosha Derry, a housewife 'feeds' the family, from breast feeding to oral sex to the final black comic absurdity of offering herself as dinner, trussed up like a roast at the family meal table.

The final program of *Naked 8* was a retrospective of the super 8 work of Richard and Pat Larter which, unforeseeably, became a posthumous tribute to Pat Larter who died less than two weeks before the screening. A fitting tribute indeed as these films, rarely screened especially in Melbourne, were full of Pat Larter. As an energetic performing subject and collaborator with husband Richard she plays the mock ironic sex object with relish in provocative home-made parodies of soft porn. Her role is integral to this remarkable collection of irreverent films (1974-76) which have the very serious intent of exposing the absurdity and hypocrisies of advertising, commodity fetishism, politics and gender exploitation. The films are frenetic, kitsch and often hilarious—makeshift collisions of

Richard's 'pop' paintings, performance and absurd props (such as the amazing 'full-body condom in *Latex News* or *Latest News* or the joke store stock of Gorilla masks, vampire teeth and greasepaint in *Mascara Flic*).

Naked 8 demonstrated the continuing efficacy of super 8 film as a no-budget form. In the current context of controlled screen culture, including everything from industrial commercial product to the shiny machinery of 'new' technology, super 8 practice seems refreshingly vital, somewhat akin to an improvisational oral 'folk' poetic form. The practitioners continually renew, refine and reinvent conventions. It is a form that integrates a rarefied candour, younger voices share equal billing with seasoned performers and, like improvisation, the audience is required to accept the occasional bum note and extended jam session as part of the total experience.

Naked 8, The 9th Melbourne International Super 8 Film Festival October 24, 26 and 27, State Film Theatre, Melbourne

Steven Ball is a Melbourne based filmmaker, artist and writer. He was administrator and festival coordinator for the Melbourne Super 8 Film Group 1990-94 and has coordinated numerous other media arts events in Australia and overseas.

Film reviews

Hype
directed by Doug Pray
distributed by Globe Films
opens nationally December 5

Common as dirt, clapped out as a mother-in-law joke, as doggedly persistent as dental plaque, the term Grunge continues to stick to everything from music and fiction to balacavos. Advertisers and marketers love it, it's vague, it connotes sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll in one word and it sells like the proverbial buttered hot cake. More than a documentary, *Hype* is an archaeological dig for the origins of the term.

Poking about with an errant camera and a microphone *Hype* unearths some of the truth, some of the humour and a few shards of self-righteousness in the Seattle music scene. From the back of a pick-up we follow logging trucks, winding through the backroads of a Twin Peaks landscape to the city of Seattle, mapping out the improbable terrain of a musical phenomenon. As one of the interviewees points out, this is an area more apt to produce conifers and serial killers than rock stars.

A series of casual, chew-the-fat-over-a-few-Buds interviews follow with members of various Seattle bands including, Sound Garden, Eddie Vedder from Pearl Jam, the Stone Temple Pilots, Mud Honey and The Melvins. The good-natured, self-mocking tone of these conversations makes them a refreshing change from the usual "if Jesus was around he would have been our roadie" pretensions that issue from the mouths of rock messiahs. As one of the members of the Melvins confesses candidly, "we're the sort of guys that no girl would have dated at school".

There is of course an inevitable exploration of the rise and fall of Kurt Cobain and Nirvana which does not take a central role but is portrayed as emerging from the Seattle Zeitgeist. What was that spirit? Grunge has been attacked as the whiter, safer apolitical alternative to hip-hop. Certainly it is more palatable to a white audience than songs about lynching the local constabulary, but it's not exactly Pat Boone. It is perhaps, *Hype* suggests, simply a bunch of western guys with desires they can't satisfy, annihilating themselves and their sensory faculties in an overdose of uncut noise. *Hype* is also something of an autopsy of this spirit as it ends up on the cold commercial slab with a 'For Sale' tag on its toe.

An amiable if less than ground breaking documentary, *Hype* will satisfy those who like their music down and dirty, and those who like to rattle their bones at the evil demon of capitalism.

Annemarie Lopez



Gwyneth Paltrow and Toni Collette in Douglas McGrath's *Emma*

Emma
written and directed by Douglas McGrath
from Jane Austen's novel
distributed by REP Becker

Douglas McGrath's *Emma* is an enjoyable romantic comedy, and there's little need to fear we won't like this Emma Woodhouse. Gwyneth Paltrow plays the role with witty elegance and style. Emma's faults are obviously redeemable and placed firmly in the context of her sense of duty and responsibility.

Yet, while there has been an attempt to hang on to all the novel's characters and as much of the plot as 120 minutes allow, somehow much eludes the film. The pace seems rushed, the plot feels compressed, with the result that some characters, notably Jane Fairfax (Polly Walker) seem to lack a purpose. By contrast, director Ang Lee and writer Emma Thompson's *Sense and Sensibility* taking more liberties with both plot and characters, understands Austen better.

When it comes to making films of novels, the issue of how to tell is often problematic, and so it is with *Emma*. A fair attempt has been made here, but at times its voice-over technique stumbles, as when the script resorts to Emma recording "Dear Diary..."!

Ultimately the film doesn't trust its audience's intelligence enough. Conversations are irritatingly punctuated by the

musical score. And the only reason for casting Toni Collette to play Harriet Smith as clumsy, countrified and foolish must have been to bludgeon us into recognition of Emma's superiority. The problem this creates is that it's hard to imagine Emma befriendng such a Harriet in the first place. The failure to risk Emma falling into any real disfavour with the audience (McGrath seems to have taken Austen's comment to heart that Emma would not be much liked) limits the film. When Emma makes mistakes we are never seduced into making them along with her; we observe rather than participate in her all too transparent passage to self-recognition, love and marriage. Jeremy Northam as Mr Knightley and Greta Scacchi as Mrs Weston are convincing. And, as intended, Gwyneth Paltrow is the star.

Suzanne Blagrove

LIFE

directed by Lawrence Johnston
distributed by Dendy Films
screening nationally

When ordinary people are placed in extraordinary situations, in which together they may come face to face with death, a too-often restrained human dimension sometimes rises up from the deep well of their human being: the capacity to empathise. The history of oppression is littered with many examples and demonstrations of such devotedness to others, to sometimes complete strangers. If there is nothing new in this, however, it remains an unfortunate fact that this very human quality mostly prefers the hidden life, maintaining itself, for the better part, in a state of deeply submerged ineffectuality. Lawrence Johnston's *LIFE*, a story of imprisoned men struggling to live and cope with HIV/AIDS, asks why it takes less than propitious circumstances to bring out the best in us. If to forget about the other person is to forget oneself, then this film is a timely if uncomfortable prompt, a reminder of our obligation not to forget, of the responsibility that each of us has for at least one other human being.

To live one's life in imaginary isolation, in solitary confinement, is to not live life fully as a human being or, in a sense, a number of lives. To be fully human therefore also means that one must die a multitude of deaths. This is the significance of Oscar Wilde's enigmatic phrase written while incarcerated at Reading prison: "...he who lives more lives than one/More deaths than one must die".

To not care represents the nadir of being; it guarantees that the death of another—and so one's own death—may be unnecessary, prolonged, undignified, painful, and lonely. *LIFE*'s characters demonstrate that despite the limits of one's repertoire, produced, say, through the hardening of character, the capacity to form empathetic relationships can in no way—under certain circumstances—be inhibited. The ability to step into another's shoes, the taking away, by proxy, of his or her suffering, forms the basis and impetus of all ethical relationships: it minimises the effects of all forms of cruelty, degradation, suffering and neglect. Too often, however, the demonstration of empathy and the extension of care does not arise, and this occurs, ironically, when the all-too-human state of forgetfulness prevails and dominates. Even if one dislikes the prison genre, the ethical dimension of this film transcends its otherwise well-crafted form; it is well worth seeing from a purely human dimension. Shaun Davies

Stelarc/Cyber/Psycho
directed by Mick Gruchy
text and performance by Stelarc

Stelarc is an inquisitor, employing art as an instrument of time travel and speculation, as a mechanism by which the future can be seen. He is a visitor to extreme places, recounting stories of fantastic destinations plucked from the visioned image bank of transcendental posthumanism. Places we perhaps would rather hear about than visit for ourselves—making us all the more glad that someone else is doing the spadework for us. The novelty of such boundary riding has found Stelarc audiences, interest and (validation) around the world. As Jane Goodall expressed it in her address at the SIN premiere of the documentary *Stelarc/Cyber/Psycho*, he is a "national treasure"—exportable, marketable and renowned.

Mick Gruchy's documentary in part recounts Stelarc's arresting oeuvre (the second half a manifesto for future directions), tracing a developing interest in speculative post-human evolutionary strategies from the very early and very low-tech 'body art' days. Images are taken from *Penetration/Extrapolation* (the artist crashing through a sheet of glass) to gut-wrenching glimpses of 26 suspension events including *sitting/swaying* and *Wind and Waves* and other "sensory deprivation" (his term) performance events using endoscopy such as *Stomach Sculpture*. These videoed vignettes of bodily extremis reveal an endurance test for

performer and viewer alike. Stelarc's anecdotes, punctuated by his celebrated Frankenstein belly laugh, in part diffuse the spectatorial discomfort. At one stage he recounts a story of being stuck halfway between two buildings in LA while dangling from his infamous meat-hooks, drug dealers below pelting him with nuts and bolts for bringing unwanted attention to their turf, angry police demanding his descent, sirens wailing in the background.

Having outlined the links between his 'sensory deprivation' events (ie testing the limits of the body), the focus shifts to current work, developing post-human evolutionary strategies and posing the question what does/will it mean to be post-human? We are offered speculative blueprints for a future where the body is a redesigned and anaesthetised host for technology, existing in a form of submissive symbiosis—stripped of its obsolescent organs and skin, regulated by nano-machines, hardened to survive from the energy of photosynthesised sunlight in extra-terrestrial deep space. We see an aesthetic of prosthetics developing in performances with the third hand and an industrial robotic arm, and the inclusion of other techno-body interfaces with virtual limbs and the most recent *Ping Body* performance in which the artist's muscular responses, in certain areas of the body, are driven by electronic echoes from the infosphere.

In seeking to exist, practice and speculate on the cognition edge of these cyber-extremes, Stelarc is attempting to perform the rhetoric of the technological sublime. *Cyber-Psycho* does not offer any form of response to the list of commentators who are at odds with this rhetoric, or the questions of power that are raised but not answered by an artist whose practice intersects technology with the body.

There are no revelations here for people aware of Stelarc's work. The presence of Australia's most successful techno-performance artist is etched across the new media horizon (again). DV



Aleska Palladino as Laurel (Lo) and Scarlett Johansson as Amanda (Manny) in Lisa Krueger's *Manny and Lo*

Manny and Lo
directed by Lisa Krueger
distributed by Dendy Films

Manny (12) and Lo (16) are sisters who run away from their (different) recent adopting families. In a garden-variety family station wagon they unite and hit the road, becoming streetwise thieves, siphoning petrol from street machines, monitoring police pursuit in the dairy department registry of missing children—images printed on milk cartons. Together they break into demonstration homes in model housing estates; soft-focus pictures of ideal consumer families watch over them as they sleep on perfect floral quiltware (no sheets).

Manny collects photos of such happy families, archiving her own longing with each new image. With a magnifying glass she plays with the surface and texture within the frame, the glass hovering over these photos and the settings families are supposed to inhabit.

When Lo discovers she is pregnant (too pregnant to have an abortion), the two kidnap the matriarch of a small town maternity store as midwife and hostage. Elaine, childless, single and beyond the age of child bearing, becomes more than a compliant captive, adopting the two strays, warding off threats to their newly found unity. (She knocks unconscious the man who enters the hideout of her kidnappers and ties him up without telling the older gun-wielding Lo). United by their exclusion from the force-fed American family utopia/dystopia the three find together what they feel has been missing in their lives.

In *Manny and Lo* we see the rhetoric of the happy family as shielding a refusal for any collective societal responsibility for the welfare of children, and thereby the exclusion of those who do not fit its bounds. The older and less trusting Lo abandons Elaine for not telling her about the man who almost found them. For a few hours they are alone again as sisters. As Lo is struck by labour pains on the highway, she says, "The cops will be here any minute now, they saw us!" "No-one is coming", replies Manny, "No-one". They return to Elaine who has not moved from the bridge where they left her. DV

Book review

Ross Gibson
The Bond Store Tales
Museum Of Sydney Publications

A literary version of Ross Gibson's laser-disc driven *Bond Store* at the Museum of Sydney, this book is medicine for all those turned off Australian history. Forget about bullocks, dust and foolish men venturing inland, *The Bond Store Tales* is Sydney 1788-1850 as a maritime centre. The book is full of imagined monologues ranging across the class and race spectrum of the colony. Seafarers, convicts, servants, preachers and many others all have their say, backed up by economical research notes. A beautifully produced book, this is a creative treatment of history that will lure you into the Museum, as well as make you re-assess the history of Sydney, and history itself. JP

Newsreel

Flickerfest

The annual Flickerfest short film festival is now into its 6th year. This year's event will feature over 100 films screened day and night, a two day forum on US independent filmmaking, a huge free screening right on the beach showing the best of Flickerfest of the last five years and out of competition selections from South Africa, South America, Eastern Europe and the UK. Bondi Beach Pavilion, Bondi Beach, January 3-12. Touring nationally January-March.

Get the Picture

The 4th edition of the *Get the Picture* handbook has just been released by the Australian Film Commission. This source book on the Australian film industry features over 300 pages of data and commentary, including revised sections on digital and new media production, as well as commentary from key industry writers including Sandy George, Philip Dutchak and Gary Maddox. For further information call the AFC on 9321 6444

Inside and Out

Filmwest is hosting screenings of Australian short films at the Paramatta Riverside Theatres and at the Dumaresq Street Cinema, Campbelltown. The program will include *Guru* by Safina Uberoi as well as *Two Bob Mermaid* by Darlene Johnson (see the interview with Darlene this issue), as well as many others. Paramatta Riverside Theatres, January 27, 8pm; Dumaresq Street Cinema, Campbelltown, February 2, 4pm.

Mardis Gras Film Goes West

Queer Screen, the presenters of the Mardis Gras Film Festival are expanding their bent turf to include a special five day screening at Village Paramatta, to run concurrently with the city festival, offering people from the greater west a chance on ample sample of queer film and video work. Mardis Gras Film Festival, Greater Union Pitt Street, February 12-26; Mardis Gras Film Festival in the West, Village Raxy Paramatta, February 19-23.

Film Industry Defends Documentary Production

Government support for Australian documentaries has fallen over recent years, federal funding is again under review and there is concern that existing cuts are already restricting Australia's ability to reflect upon and interrogate its own culture on screen. Further cuts may cripple the documentary sector, and would come at a time when the industry is gaining a foothold internationally. The Australian Screen Directors Association is calling for the federal government to make a commitment to documentary funding and for a quota system of Australian documentary content on pay and free-to-air TV. For further information call Ian Collie at ASDA's Sydney office (02) 9555 7045.

Pacific bodies

Cassi Plate at the 7th Pacific Arts Festival in Western Samoa

The four-yearly arts festivals in the Pacific are addictive. Music, performance and atmosphere place you in the heart of the cultures of Oceania. The twenty-six island nations (and the island continent of Australia) at this year's 7th Pacific Arts Festival in Western Samoa presented displays of traditional music and dance, performed by and for the indigenous populations—abundant evidence of the festival's original aim to conserve and develop the various art forms of the Pacific and prevent the loss of traditional arts. These Pacific arts festivals are the biggest gathering of Pacific countries and peoples for any purpose. The last festival in the Cook Islands in 1992 attracted 2,000 performers.

Literary arts—oral and written, film, traditional arts and crafts are all celebrated. This year's festival expanded to include contemporary music and arts, as well as body art—both the body painting of Melanesia and Easter Island and that birthright of Polynesia, tattooing. When Aboriginal Australia hosted the festival in Townsville in 1988, body art consisted of ear, nose and neck wear, amulets, leg and arm adornments and head-dress. In the intervening years there has been an explosion of tattooing as affirmation of cultural identity. Witness the revival of tattooing in *Once Were Warriors* and you can picture the exquisite beauty of this body art, not just in Maori culture but in Samoa, Tahiti, Hawaii and the Cook Islands. Samoan *fale* (huts) housing practical arts demonstrations from every participating country included week-long sessions on tattooing from the Polynesian islands. It was possible to witness the

complete transformation of people's bodies, under conditions of appropriate ritual and respect. Songs of encouragement are sung as part of this symbol of the transition from child to adult. In Samoa they sing,

*Relax sir,
this is an old time custom.
You groan continually, but I sing:
the women must bear children,
The man must be tattooed...*

Women are also tattooed in Samoa and while the man's body is covered from waist to knee, *pe'a*, a women's pride, courage and endurance are celebrated on her thighs, *malu*. We also witnessed extraordinary body painting from the small delegation of Rapa Nui (Easter Island) in the Pacific's far east. Mythical, fully-painted figures paraded before us—chief, fisher, warrior, astrologer and a planter carrying huge bunches of coconuts and bananas.

There were other signs of cultural strengthening in the eight years since Townsville hosted the 5th Pacific Festival of Arts. The delegation from the Solomon Islands seemed then, in both dress and performance, to have been crushed by one and a half centuries of missionary zeal. But this year the musicians of Malaita, playing a hybrid of haunting music on their traditional pan pipes, entranced the entire festival, along with performances from another group celebrating canoes and fishing, the life blood of this complex spread of islands.

Kanaky (New Caledonia) is the largest territory still subject to colonial rule with a distinctive Melanesian culture completely different from that of French Polynesia. In



Tatau, Tatouage Polynésien, Tupuna Productions

1988 the Kanaks were still negotiating terms of a peace arrangement with France and were not well represented at the festival. In Samoa we were treated to unique performances. The Kanaks explained that much of their dance and song had been lost through missionary bans and cultural intervention but in the past few years they had revived their stories and music from scraps of memories, images and oral tales. The most dramatic of these new performances was based on the bat or flying fox, the performers so identifying with their totem that their swooping, accompanied by extraordinary noises and music performed by transformed human voices, made the hair rise on your scalp as you ducked to avoid their wings metres away from you.

The most humorous performance, judging from the largely Samoan family crowd's response in the local hall, was by members of the Australian delegation from Cape York who told stories of wily crocodiles and hunting kangaroos—minimal performances with just three or four people on stage including musicians—totally different in feel from the huge and spectacular Samoan performing groups, each featuring about fifty people.

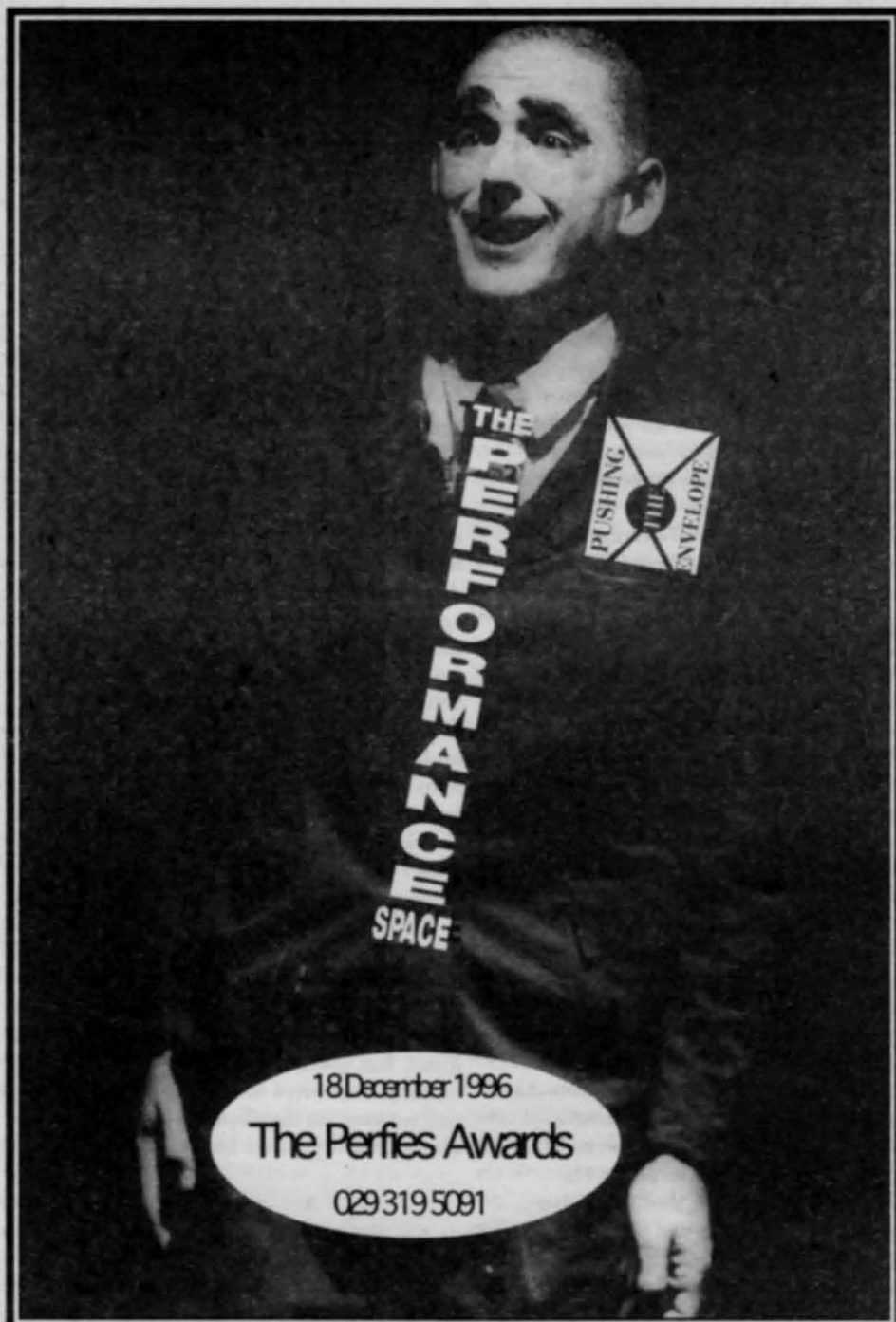
An incident towards the festival's end illustrates the diversity and complexity of these island nations. The largest and most populous of them, Papua New Guinea, specialises above all else in body decoration. At the completion of one of their magnificent displays an elderly

Samoa, outraged at their relative nudity (Samoa is an intensely Christian country), struck a Highland performer with a palm frond. The incident did not mar the goodwill apparent on all sides in Samoa, but drew a heart-felt response from a PNG spokesperson who reiterated the importance of retaining cultural integrity.

It is this integrity which makes the Pacific Arts Festival such a powerful experience. The drumming of Polynesia, and the singing from tiny islands like Tuvalu, is generally overlooked and the force of this music not fully appreciated. Maybe the context is everything and the full pleasure of these festivals lies in being in the same place and time as the production of these rich and diverse expressions of culture. That said, I can't fail to hear a snatch of Polynesian drumming in any context without wanting the next festival (in Kanaky in 2000) to begin!

Seventh Pacific Arts Festival, Western Samoa September 8-23, 1996.

Cassi Plate is a writer and broadcaster. She was in Samoa researching the restless life of her artist grandfather, Adolph Gustav Plate who lived, painted and travelled in Samoa, Fiji and Tonga in the last decades of the 19th Century. An exhibition of his work, A Restless Life, is currently showing at the Lewers Bequest and Penrith Regional Art Gallery until late January, when it begins a national tour.



Heidrun Löhr

The power of *Tatau*, was not in the the play, but the ritual that framed it, the tattooing of a young man, a former criminal, in an induction into his culture, hammered percussively with needle and ink into his body. Even then, it was his speech after the completion of the image tattooed round his navel on the final night of the Sydney season at Bondi Pavilion that reframed the whole event as almost too real, as the words shivered out of him, almost too unbearable to hear, the apology for wrongs done his victims, his wife, his Samoan people. For us, the audience, this was a painful privilege. There was shame to share and a sense of release, to see what is possible, what is not lost. No black arm bands, Prime Minister Howard. Between the tattooing that framed the show, there was a spare narrative of young Samoan males drifting into crime in New Zealand, losing their culture, doubly dislocated, an explanation of why this ritual was necessary. This was not great theatre, but a story that had to be told. That it was told uneconomically, jerkily, with an excess of pedestrian miming (of doors, of distances, of instruments) and doggedly educational intent, didn't matter in the end, but it should have, because the performers were too good for it. Oscar Knightley's doubling between the frighteningly gobbledygook was exemplary of the cast's ability. Had I not been there for the completion of this rites of passage tattoo ritual, perhaps I would have been a lesser witness. I saw it when the time of the nightly play and the time of the many days ritual finally intersected. I was privileged.

KG

Pacific Underground and Zeal Theatre with tattooist Su'a Paulo Suluape II, Tatau directed by Stefo Nantso; Pacific Wave Festival, Bondi Pavilion, November.

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Fine work on shaky ground

Boris Kelly at the National Festival of Australian Theatre

The sixth NFAT was held in the nation's capital city under the directorship of Rob Brookman, a former Administrator and Director of the Adelaide Festival, currently consultant Artistic Director of New Zealand's Wellington International Arts Festival. This annual event, held this year in conjunction with the Australian Performing Arts Market and Canberra's Floriade Spring Festival, attempts to showcase the best of contemporary Australian performing arts with an emphasis on forms of theatre which sit in counterbalance to the dominant, text-based productions favoured by our flagship, mainstage companies. Brookman has been particularly aware of the need to balance the needs and tastes of the local Canberra audience with those of interstate and international visitors. In doing so he emphasises the need to consolidate a form of 'brand loyalty' with the locals by imbuing the event with a sense of place which recognises and celebrates the city of Canberra and its position within the national psyche. Given the general loathing with which the city is regarded, deservedly or not, by the broader Australian public, Brookman's balancing act rivals those of Circus Oz.

The programming clash with the October long weekend (how could this happen!), combined with Canberra's notoriously late Spring and the lack of physical focus resulting from renovations to the Canberra Theatre Centre proved to be obstacles the Festival could not overcome. Despite its demographics—highly educated high disposable income etc—the Canberra theatre going public is decidedly conservative in its tastes and this year's festival, perhaps more than others, has

demonstrated quite clearly that the town is not behind the event in the way it needs to be to ensure its long term viability. The festival program was diverse and adventurous, but hardly visionary. Big ticket items like Circus Oz's *Aqua Profunda* and Jimmy Chi's *Corrugation Road* were predictable 'hits', although there was a



Corrugation Road

Jeff Busby

rumble of dissatisfaction amongst those who realised that Canberra was being used by producers as a warm-up for the Melbourne Festival. Both these shows showed clear signs of needing to be run in. William Yang's *The North*, to a lesser extent, fell into this category but managed to cover a little better due to its modest

scale and the sure hand of Yang himself as a performer.

The obvious concession to 'cutting edge' forms in the program was Perth group *skadada* who presented a one man show by performer John Burt supported by the sounds and images of Katie Lavers and John Patterson. The performance

meddles with the subject of new media by deploying it inventively and provocatively although it is remarkable to witness how quickly notions of being 'wired' have become cliché. Chunky Move suffered from an inappropriate venue and those who had seen Gideon Obarzanek's *Fast Idol* at The Performance Space lamented

the loss of presence and a sense of danger which dissipated on the big stage of the Canberra Theatre Centre. Sarah Cathcart proved again that she is a highly competent solo performer in her collaborative venture with Andrea Lemon, *Tiger Country*, which suffered from its early position in the program.

The inclusion of local productions has always been a difficulty for the Festival. There is a diplomatic need to include Canberra companies which have often been criticised for not meeting the general standards of the event. However, the public and critical response, particularly the success of Paige Gordon's dance performance *Shed*, would indicate that local companies have fared well this year. Outdoor performances by postmodern pole sitters *Strange Fruit* and stalwart lizards *Chrome* also proved very popular as did the Festival Club, co-hosted by the Gorman House Arts Centre. Since the festival's inception it has suffered from the lack of a Club where the informal, spontaneous entertainment can occur amidst the party buzz and industry gossip. Although Gorman House was no Fez Bar (or Red Square) it came closer than previous attempts to meet that need.

Rob Brookman now stares another festival in the face at a time when the event must be on shaky ground. Canberra is a place singularly lacking any enduring sense of itself, a city beleaguered by the myopic legacy of decades of bureaucratic domination. Massive retrenchments in the public service certainly haven't put the town in a festival mood and as the local economy turns down, the National Festival of Australian Theatre was always going to be a struggle. And it was.

National Festival of Australian Theatre, Canberra, October 4-19, 1996.

Dreaming of well-mades

Roland Manderson inspects plays in the National Festival of Theatre program

Around Canberra we've been talking about the place in our imagined universe of the well-made play. Rob Brookman's 1996 National Festival of Australian Theatre celebrated an abundance of circus and comedy and dance/movement/monologue/visual theatre with a couple of plays, variously well made, to round out the menu. And after several years of diverse, interesting and unexpected theatre that has punters at least as suspicious as they are excited, it was really only *Circus Oz* and Jimmy Chi's *Corrugation Road* that packed them in to any venue over 90 seats. And I blame the absence of the well made play.

Most of us here in Canberra like a well made play. I'm not too keen on it myself, and prefer more eclectic or amorphous theatrical adventures. But I miss it when it's not there. And, like most theatre creators, I miss the audience even more when it's not there either.

The big disappointment last year, in retrospect, was that the MTC's production of *Summer of the 17th Doll* came to the Canberra Theatre in August, rather than featuring as the mainstage highlight of the National Festival in October. A renowned, highly regarded, coherent and affective play, interpreted with visual dash and strong, sparkling, stylish theatrical performances could have been the perfect jewel in the crown of a national theatre festival. That's if we wanted the festival to make its mark on a wide slash of Canberra's population.

The highlight for me this year was an evening of sculptural performances by

ACME Inc at Gorman House's associated Festival Of Contemporary Arts. Christy Gilbert shaving a hairy ottoman (or is that pouf?) and then brushing a cascade of her own bum hair into a French Roll was but one of the exquisitely personal moments of artistic expression. But with a maximum of 80 in the audience, paying about \$6 each, ACME's investigation into bureaucracy was always going to be a fringe event.

The 1996 dramatic centrepiece was Sydney Theatre Company's *Black Rock* by Nick Enright. The STC technique seems to be to use well known TV performers to attract a crowd, on the assumption that it is fame rather than content that attracts the punter. Playing broad archetypal Novocastran characters at the start gave us something accessible to laugh at, but undermined some of the power and universality of the play. The strongest performances, however, such as Kirsty McGregor as Cherie and Angela Punch McGregor as Jared's Mum, were physical, emphatic, detailed and touching.

I saw another version in 1993, *Property of the Clan*, which was written for Freewheels Theatre Company and its younger audiences. If you've got an hour and a bit in a high school, you don't muck about. This was a tight, focussed, powerful, theatre event (better, in my view, than *Black Rock*...but then I would say that). Without doubt, the mainstage play has profited from that development time and effort. For in addition to being powerful and realistic, *Black Rock* is well made. The terrible cry of frustrated teenage boys that a girl shouldn't look like a slut if she isn't a

slut, points to its probable longevity. *Black Rock* struggled for audiences in the 1200 seat theatre because it was bleak maybe, and because it was more or less unknown, not this time because it was innovative in form, nor because it was unfinished.

From rape and death in the individual circumstance and ordinary young complicity in *Black Rock*, to the mythic seduction and destruction of all women by Bluebeard and his eventual overthrow in Beatrix Christian's *Blue Murder*. That was the extent of your straight drama in NFAT this year.

Eureka! Theatre Company's *Blue Murder* had its problems as a production and as a play. The three ghosts of wives departed were exhilarating when they twisted and wailed across the glistening, flooded, candle lit stage, and the haunting notes, mostly off stage, from Angus King were evocative and...haunting. But the presumed seductive power of Tom Considine as Blue, disguised as the Count from Sesame Street, wasn't compelling enough to be the cause of every woman's downfall. Also, I couldn't make any connection between the early sexual bravado of Evelyn's (Miles Paras as *Blue Murder*'s) living protagonist and Blue's comeuppance, and her emotional surrender and journey thereafter. So while I have quibbles with the direction and some of the design, it is mostly with the play. The trouble being it is almost well made. If a troupe of players had to live off *Blue Murder* for a couple of years, they'd make it "well-er", and with Beatrix Christian's blessing no doubt. But I imagine *Blue*

Murder will stay how it is, and not get the further productions it might.

Corrugation Road is another case in point, even though it did well at the door. It is not yet the well-made musical and, as with *Blue Murder*, the unformed lumps within it got in the way. Canberra audiences came streaming to the fairly small Street Theatre because *Bran Nue Dae* (a few years) ago was fabulous, the music was bound to be great, and we wanted this production team to do well on principle.

We got half of what we wanted. The spirit, the joyful singing and dancing, with so much high energy, hilarity, emotions on the shirt sleeves, skill and polish, with the infectious music, were memorable and inspiring. The fact that we couldn't see the band (I believe it was live), the gratuitous display of female bodies, the fairly clumsy, and sometimes pointless, twists in plot and time frames succeeded in distracting us from an otherwise nourishing and enlivening time. Happily I'll retain the disembodied smiling singing heads, sticking up from the floor, the bizarre hospital nativity scene, the array of surreal and ludicrous images, and the round-the-world-journey-through-music-and-dance-finale until I die. Still, I wonder if it will ever come together.

Puppetry and dance companies keep their work in repertoire, and so develop and refine it if they choose, or if they have to. Maybe, because this is a musical, the same thing might happen with *Corrugation Road*. But, given the exigencies of state arts funding, how often in Australian drama will we keep on developing and refining the object until it grows a life beyond our hold?

National Festival of Australian Theatre, Canberra, October 4-19, 1996.

Peering, circling, passing through

Zsuzsanna Soboslay in Canberra for the festival season

The waitress at the Canberra Hyatt is flipped on cleaning fluid, spraying hapless champagne guests amidst her mad polishing of tables (dirty or not) and next seen carrying mini-coils of cable through the parlour. She nearly sprays my face point blank before taking our order. Theatre fever hits Yarralumla with a poisoned splash!

This is a festival cavorting and swinging on the banks of Lake Burley Griffin with all the muscle of a circus and the occasional sashay of baguettes. Nigel Kellaway and Annette Tesoriero have the late-nighters rolling in the aisles with *Choux Choux Baguette* whilst Chunky Move, Circus Oz, Rock 'n' Roll Circus and the Umbilical Brothers promise activity, youth, panache, the brash. None of these I see, as I've been pushing Elisabeth Paterson's quirky Odd Jalopy around Gorman House and Floriade and am (happily) tired out by its boot of wood and sides of tin, and roof of rose garden and magic tapestry that unfolds like an Arabian dream. We picnic in the bush, fight in the suburbs, succumb to mountain heat and get lost in Egyptian markets within a contraption made of lace, flattened biscuit and oil tins, journeying through memory and landscapes of migration and new settlement whilst the jalopy itself bleats like sheep, broadcasts anthems, organs, and bush sounds. We are miked so our arguments and intimacies are relayed into a crowd intrigued by what they usually don't hear.

Insides. Outsides. Skadada does a take

on the way the clatter of supermarket trolleys and other machines break us into their jagged rhythms. The particularly wonderful "domestic samba on an interactive floor" has Jon Burt's body patterned by feet tapping, lodging on a grid of household sounds. By what seems like the third drag nightclub scenario, however, and still accompanied by a relentless digitalised music score, I find myself tired of the insistence on external mouldings. There is no counterpoint to the ones shaped by the digital world. Katie Lavers' video work is strong, the morphing of a body's back and front, ears into skull being technically superb and physiologically shocking; yet for a piece which purports to deal with "memory, the body and its emergent senses", I experience its vision as restrictive and ultimately tiring. Burt as solo performer reveals great stamina and skills in leather, but the piece's insistence on the videovisual and a single rhythmic stance makes this a flattened world.

William Yang's humanely analytical *The North* contrasts with the Fringe's *A Man's Story*, which purportedly swept Canada, Edmonton, Adelaide Fringe and made top six at Saskatoon. Whereas Yang engages the problematics of identity, sexual difference, landscape and memory with humility, incisiveness, and cultural irony, the latter is innocuous enough to leave the all-female audience on the night I attend wondering whether we *should* leave the auditorium *now* (and not quite able to), yet disturbing enough to have me dream of lynch mobs after (the subconscious *will*

smell out the unresolved). Alan Lovett as performer never accepts or deals with his material, (not quite) shoving it in your face as a dirty old stand-up con whose many jokes I don't understand (and by instinct don't want to), a weedy cardiganed bachelor who gleams out a window at a young thing he later can't bring himself to protect from rape; interspersed with the pathetic defence of a sad childhood history of unfair and occasionally brutish treatment from his dad. This is a piece so unreconstructed that we don't know what to do with it, a work truly missing its mark from a performer who can't look into his audience's eyes.

At the Australian National Gallery, *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita* is Alfredo Jaar's installation of a pile of the same photostage: a woman's eyes snapped immediately after the village massacre of everyone she knew. Small viewfinders are provided around the periphery of an enormous underlit photoedit table covered with thousands of the same slide that from enough distance looks like a burial mound—a mountain, a whole country's map losing the intimacy of her suffering. This is the violence of unprocessed looking: one can sort and match the stills, peer through glass, arrange the news; my companion reshapes six slides into a pattern and then callously throws one back into the pile. The violence of his action is shocking and he knows its effect. We stand and watch others as they come in, peering, circling, passing through.

At the Canberra Theatre, Paige Gordon's *Shed* was a place where four

men danced vulnerably, violently, with great laconic humour, recalling bewilderments of childhood and the rituals of territory; barricades between youth and age and across the sexes explored with great detail. An opening sequence of each guy showing off his favourite truss, frame, lever and support, putting his own body where his mouth is ("look at that, eh? The A-frame. Go on, try and push it over") contrasts with other moments where a memory is retold by one man whilst the others capture the exquisite abstract tone of his story in simple yet emotionally-complex, mellifluous rolling and curbing on the floor. The four performers excel; the audience loves it. My only problem is that some of the verbal telling is so "nice" and smiled that it detracts from the complex, honest, confounding likeability anyway of motion, teller and tale.

Death, life, violence, confrontation and avoidance; at the ANG, Christian Boltanski's high-rigged negative photo portraits are hung beneath with white linen shrouds. More shrouds are folded in the corner for us, waiting. The room is ice-cold, ceiling fans chill the air; this is cryogenics, the ultimate delaying of death and change.

The National Festival of Australian Theatre; Gorman House Festival of Contemporary Arts; Floriade; Islands, Contemporary Installations, National Gallery of Australia; Canberra, October 1996.

Wanted: an audience

Boris Kelly surveys Canberra's Festival of Contemporary Arts

The second FoCA was, predictably, bigger and better, in design at least, than the last. The program of visual and performing arts, ambitiously stretched across almost three weeks, included contributions from local artists augmented by work from interstate. The event ran concurrently with the National Festival of Australian Theatre (NFAT) and the Australian Performing Arts Market (APAM), a combination which should have made Canberra pulse with performing arts fever. However, citing a rule of thumb for the event's success with the public, one hard-nosed visitor remarked that he had been catching two cabs a day for four days and not one cabbie was aware of any festival(s).

The FoCA program included a mixed bag of performing arts, installations and exhibitions, the Two Dog Nightclub (co-hosted by NFAT) and a terrific selection of contemporary film and video. Although the event was principally located at the Gorman House Arts Centre, it did manage to rope in other happenings, mostly exhibitions, occurring elsewhere in the city. The curatorial nature of the program distinguishes it from the 'fringe festival' category although most of the work exists quite happily on the margins of mainstream practice. As to be expected, the results were as mixed as the program and, in general, it appeared as if the public stayed away in droves, which is a pity because there really were jewels to be found.

Performances by the ACME group, an alliance formed out of the Canberra School of Art Sculpture workshop, headed by

David Watt, received very good responses both for their *D Block* show and for their appearance in the prelude to Splinter's attempt at *Faust* at the ANU. Tom Lycos and Stefo Nanstou turned in a stunning, sweaty night of theatre in *The Stones*, based on a story about two adolescents throwing rocks at cars from an overhead bridge in Melbourne and fatally wounding a man. Annette Tesoriero stamped her authority on the role of the diva from hell in *Choux Choux Baguette Remembers*, with Nigel Kellaway on piano also making a brief appearance as Madame Butterfly. Tesoriero has buckets of talent and deserves to be seen more often. Comics Moira Finucane and Megan Elliot made brief but engaging appearances and an interesting collaboration between Kevin White, Clint Hurrell and Renald Navilly on the subject of Rimbaud deserved to do better business. A contribution from the Australian National Playwright's Centre *Stage Two* workshops was a welcome addition with rehearsed readings of three new comedies directed by Carol Woodrow, Lyn Wallis and Eulea Kiraly. Full Tilt Performance Troupe's *Potion X* was a disappointment. This street theatre piece was forced indoors by bad weather the night I saw it. Nevertheless, it really wasn't up to the ten dollar ticket charge.

In the visual arts the Gorman House Arts Centre provided the sites for Group 11's installations collectively entitled *Spirit House*. Vivid amongst these were beautiful ceramic, swathed bat figures suspended in the hawthorn tree in the northern courtyard. Bronwyn Coupe's witty

interactive *The Inside of Houses* contributed to the broader exploration of space and place as did the *Nooks and Crannies* series of installations exploring the quirky, hidden, private parts of Canberra's heritage Arts Centre—broom cupboards, stairwells, phone boxes and the like. Temple State's rave-scene installation *Satellite Shrine*, at the Canberra Brickworks and an exhibition of Canberra School of Art alumni contributed to the overall eclecticism of the program. One of the most exciting aspects of FoCA was the *Reel Art* program of art films and videos from around Australia and overseas curated by Genufa Gorzula, which suffered from a late run in the Festival. Hopefully, it will have a higher profile next year.

FoCA was a strange event. To call it a festival may require a redefinition of the term. To borrow from Barrie Kosky, it spelt neither a-r-t nor p-a-r-t-y. Here is a regional festival, not bad but far from brilliant, with all the best of intentions, yet unable to attract any real support from the public. Why? Perhaps it is because they don't know about it, a simple problem of information and promotion. The reflexive response would be to increase the marketing budget but it is very doubtful that this would rectify the underlying, chronic disinterest shown by Canberra audiences. If the festival is to remain selective in its programming, as opposed to the open door policy of most fringe festivals, perhaps the net needs to be cast further afield in an attempt to attract the best of emerging performing arts talent from the national pool. Otherwise, the event would definitely benefit from a re-scheduling to the warmer month of March when Canberrans are far more inclined to venture out at night.

Festival Of Contemporary Arts, Gorman House Arts Centre, Canberra, October 2-20, 1996.

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A is for Artrage, C is for cultural worker

Erin Hefferon and Fiona Maclean in conversation with Jenny Silburn in Perth

"Do you remember," Fiona began, "how the artistic director said that he saw Artrage not in opposition to opera, the theatre, or the pub but as an alternative to sitting in front of the telly?"

The minds of the three women who gathered round the Macintosh SE in an inner city bedroom raced with images as they recalled the antics and adventures of the three week Artrage Festival...Lining up in the laneway with Saturday afternoon shoppers going past...coming out of a show into a strange car park, high wall on all sides... vanishing through curtains to have a cigarette at interval...walking at night from the car park to the Gasworks building...knowing it was risky territory...and going up those excruciating little stairs and then spilling out onto the different levels...

"But not on a Wednesday. That's *X Files*. In fact, when I was at *Dr X and his Amazing Seven Deadly Skins*, I found myself saying over and over to myself, 'Why do I like TV? Why do I like TV?' It became like a chant", explained Erin. "Oh, why?" asked Fiona with genuine interest. "I guess because there was so much going on...I couldn't take it all in...it exceeded itself...I couldn't focus...the gold engorged latex penis was amazing though..."

Jenny had taken up a position at the keyboard. Her gleaming nails tapped in a flurry of creativity: "In a corner the Sky Surrenders, Robyn Orlin." She paused for a moment to address her companions. "How do we read the Artrage program in terms of its semiotics?" The question floated in the room as Jenny resumed her typing. "The cardboard box is shut/Aperture of light/reveal a figure/within."

"Do you mean," Fiona probed, "the way the program is modelled on the TV guide, the one that comes out in Saturday's paper? The same size and shape. The same layout on the cover?" She picked up the little red publication, examining it more closely.

Erin's thoughts took other turnings. "I think Orlin was wrong in that theatre space. She should have been outside, on the street. Or even in the alley way. That space was too boxy."

"And the angle from which you viewed it was wrong," Jenny added, glancing up from the screen. "You should have been flat with her in the space." She returned to her poem, "The box unfolds/A rhizome turning in/On itself/Each skin/A borderzone /of separation/communication/ the bleed of exchanges", then once more picking up the thread of conversation she remarked, "It was too boxed in. It was."

"It's not only the program that was about television", Fiona burst out, "So many of the shows and exhibitions were. There was a performance that was set up like a video night, and a billboard painting of a TV soap, and the film and orchestra version of music videos."

"What about the Gasworks as a venue? Did you think it worked centralising the festival like that?" Erin glanced down at her "I luv u" baby fur seal Swatch with its white fake fur wrist band. "Nearly time for *Seinfeld*." "Absolutely. It made it so much more coherent."

"Unified?" queried Erin. "Not so fragmented," Jenny replied, "although there was a problem with the sound from one show leaking into another."

Fiona thought she saw an opening. "Maybe we could think about the festival, the shows, as assemblages built out of combinations of different popular discourses, bits from television worked together with bits from live performance." She knew she was speaking too fast, that her forehead was probably creased, but she felt unable to relax or slow down.



Dr X and His Amazing Seven Deadly Skins

"Neophyte of Perception had circus, Comedy, Death and Lenny Bruce had stand-up, *Dr. X and His Amazing Seven Deadly Skins* had the bare breasts and harnesses of an S & M night club performance, *Gadzooks* mixed up all kinds of things: nursery rhymes, home-movies, cabaret, school concerts, even the plate smashing that sometimes happens at Greek restaurants.

"I remember when I was watching *The Descent*, it was a really serious moment and all of a sudden there was this tap tap on the wall. Someone was hammering, getting the party decorations up. At first I thought that this was really bad...but then I started to think that it was good to be aware of what was beyond the performance. Perhaps I am getting too loose. It's hot in here. Fiona could you open the door?"

"Do you think it's safe?" "I think as a woman on your own at that time of night you're always on the look out", said Jenny matter-of-factly tossing back her blond mane. "The Gasworks is pretty isolated and it's not well populated or well lit, and in fact if you didn't know there was a performance on there, I think you could have missed it."

"Are you scared out here?" "What was that?" "What?" "I saw nothing".

The women tried to find names for their experiences and came up with words like "margin", "periphery" and "deterritorialisation". They resolved that the festival had changed their sense of the city's geography, given them new routes, new landmarks, new land use distributions. They considered whether the notion of "underground" might apply to a

performance with ideas under the surface and not quite breaking it. They wondered how much money festival sponsors the fini Group was making out of their inner city apartment projects. They mourned the loss of spaces like the Boans Warehouse, Money Street, the Oddfellows Building... rejuvenated briefly by artists, only to be then bought up by developers.

Something rustled interrupting their separate thought processes and drawing them to a focus. Erin and Jenny turned to discover Fiona, proudly sporting a pair of

blue coveralls. Like a model on the catwalk, she swivelled to display the Artrage logo emblazoned in meticulous orange cross-stitch on the back.

She held out a pair of matching coveralls to her friends. "Try these for size," she said and proceeded to tuck her long blond hair under her new white hard hat. "Why?" asked Jenny aghast. "But don't you remember" pleaded Fiona. "It's what they all wore. Look—it's on the posters and the program". "Yes, but what does it mean?" asked Jenny, trying unsuccessfully to mask her impatience.

Erin saw the pieces falling into place. "I think I've got. Perhaps it's the Artrage aesthetic. Work. Cultural Production. The artists as Cultural Worker...Fiona, where are you going with that shovel?" But there was no answer as she disappeared into the night.

Away in the desert, engineers were listening for the regular clank and grind of crushing mills, mechanics changed truck tyres as wide as they themselves were tall, and weary kitchen hands washed the cups and plates of minefuls of workers. Tomorrow's papers might refer to the thousands of jobs a resources boom was about to create in Western Australia, but it was unlikely the employment pages would list anything under C for Cultural Worker.

Erin Hefferon is a Perth based performer currently touring with The Geography of Haunted Places to Brisbane, Sydney, Adelaide and Perth; Fiona Maclean is a Perth based writer completing a PhD in Australian Literature at the University of Western Australia.

Street theatre seriously

Carolyn Connors gets outdoors and analytical in the Melbourne Festival

Many of the works in the street theatre program of this year's Melbourne festival went far beyond the wobbly-stilt-and-a-bit-of-fire kind of show which can anaesthetise the public into a passively receptive or actively disengaged relationship with outdoor theatre. These include the bright and sassy acrobats at Southgate, especially Club Swing; and the City Square installations: the massive human rat world of Subterrain, and the Snuff Puppet's squishy landscape that births itself. Three works in particular dealt with language, content and the audience-performer relationship in ways which challenged environment and audience.

Language and content are dealt with in an unusual way in *Karavaan* by the Hunting Party. Six singing women slowly walk into the designated performance area pushing an ornately decorated cart loaded with their belongings. The audience settles in for an amplified and lit visual spectacle. We watch and are occasionally included with blessings of rice showers, gifts of bread, a dusting with a broom or a peacock feather. We barely understand a word of their invented language, a conglomerate of familiar sounding vowels, consonants, phrasing, and occasionally recognisable words borrowed from anywhere. Always assuming that we comprehend them, the women exclaim, gesticulate, chat, admonish, sing, encourage, announce and generally verbalise incessantly and joyously: the gestures of language rather than the words become our common territory. This gives the show an exoticism and aural sensuality—we listen harder than usual—without the pitfalls of cultural plagiarism. *Karavaan's* content is dominated by preparation rather than the event. The women are busy, all the time, but what do they do? They set up and light three barbecues, have a drink, sing a song. We meet the Terrible Feather Duster Goddess. We're at an exotic barbie where the sections of the show could be shuffled and presented in any order. *Karavaan* asks us to suspend our usual city understanding of time and purpose.

Five men lived for sixteen days inside four display windows of Myer, a department store on Bourke Street Mall. Each connecting window of the *Urban Dream Capsule* had a bright and simple utilitarian design: bedroom, living room, kitchen, bathroom, with the loo being the only off-stage facility. Although historically and conceptually placed as performance art, their eyes and teeth, their costumed willingness to please meant entertainment. Moving in and out of self conscious performance pieces in solos, duos, trios etc and 'ordinary' behaviour such as having a cup of tea, the UDC played with representations of communication, the domestic, privacy, excess, imprisonment, self-denial. The audience became voyeur, participating captors, an enthusiastic rabble. We hunted them out, the glass a shield, protection, a cage, a barrier. We left whenever we could or had to, constructing thousands of performances framed by the limits of each audience's own patience, interest or time.

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Street theatre seriously

• from previous page

Neither side could hear the other, and communication was by phone, camera, fax, e-mail, web, mime, sign, pen and paper, white board. We became performers as they imitated, filmed, read or spoke to us. The performance space was extended and multi-locational through the technologies, the media, and through the imagination: "I wonder what they are doing now?" I saw the work every couple of days, read newspaper articles, watched them on TV, and I loved watching the audience. The UDC elicited an astonishing level of enthusiasm and questioning from the general public: "Who are they? What are they doing? Why?" Their extraordinary situation resonated with the banal and mundane. Repeatedly I found people answering the questions by using the UDC as a mirror, and imposing their positions or realities onto the work: this is The New Masculinity; how are their poor families coping; it's the watcher watched.

The Melbourne Festival Training Squad by the Not Yet It's Difficult company under the guidance of David Pledger took preparation as content further. Nine impressively fit bodies in identical black lycra, caps, sunglasses and runners performed synchronised sequences which included running, jumping, slogan yelling, and choreographed movements from a number of sports: boxing, martial arts and body building. The MFTS attempted in a humorous and subversive way to comment on the fanaticism and self-absorption of sportspersons' training by formalising some of the rituals, gestures and energy. Unsmiling, sweaty, unidentifiable in their uniforms and unyielding to audience input, the MFTS was frequently described as fascist. Insisting on its own power, shoving muscle, aggression and slogans at the audience, subversion failed to be realised. The content never shifted from being acquisitive, and ultimately became a militaristic self-glorification. Some kind of irony or an unexpected dissolving of power could have been created if the work had employed a broader range of physical pursuits (croquet? callisthenics?), a wider range of body shapes in various degrees of fitness, a failure of some kind, or complete megalomania. In the real world, on the real footy oval, training is a preparation for moment by moment improvisation involving physical virtuosity and quick thinking which create the individual sports heroes our culture so joyously embraces. The MFTS does not tread a fine aesthetic and political line: it functions within an unbending, narrow and dangerous band that ultimately glorifies a particular human body type in a fascist way, describing power without expanding my understanding of it. Could Elle Macpherson organise nine appropriate, paid bodies, frock them in appropriate clothing, put on a modelling show and call it subversion and parody? The outdoor theatre program stimulated the audience to both ask and answer questions, and it feels as though serious dialogue is possible in Melbourne about street theatre.

Carolyn Connors is a performer/composer who has worked around Australia and overseas in contemporary music and street theatre.

Post-colonial distemper

Corrugation Road, *Song From a Forgotten City* and *The Doll* at the Melbourne Festival cause Richard Murphet to reflect on artistic purpose

The natives are fucking restless man—and who can blame them. All three performances I have seen at this year's Melbourne festival have been about colonial power, one way or the other. In two of them, the energy for liberation was the driving force and from the evidence of the third, there is still a battle to be had. *Corrugation Road*, Jimmy Chi's latest musical from Broome via the Black Swan Theatre Company, and *Song From a Forgotten City*, from Edward Thomas and Y Cwmni in the eponymous Cardiff, are on the face of it strikingly different dramatic experiences. *Corrugation Road* is a bitter-sweet musical about madness, suffering, escape and rebirth; *Song...* is ironically not a musical but a bleak, violent, furious scream for attention from three lost young men to a world that is deaf to them. Both, however, are fascinating and stirring attempts to resurrect identity from the ashes of colonialism. On the other side of the ledger, *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, white Australia's working class drama about the horrors of coming of age in a big world, has been colonised by the high art of opera and, for this viewer/auditor, loses, in the process, dramatic subtlety and the bite of lived experience, finally drowning in the sentimentality which remains.

I have to admit here that I'm not fond of musicals. I suspect much of my delight at *Corrugation Road* is that it explodes the stultifying forms of musical comedy. Jimmy Chi has a lot of love for the genre quite clearly, but the show's power (quite apart from the radical elements of its narrative) is that it does not reduce the complexity and unruliness of its thematic lines to fit in with the simplistic structure of the musical. This is a view of a crazy world through the eyes of a schizophrenic. It is exhilaratingly eclectic, 'inauthentic'. Scenes of deep emotion rub up against mock laments, psychotic Christmas revues, audience provocation, siren seduction, drag burlesques, a sea and land voyage of mythic dimension, family deaths and reunions, satires of white social conventions, blues songs, country and western, serenades, gospels and carols, G&S comic duets (by the white Siamese twin psychiatrists), big show stoppers—and somewhere in the middle of all this a wonderful dance sequence which begins as 'authentic' Aboriginal dance and rapidly proceeds through Balinese, Slavic, Greek, Indian, African, Irish and Morris dance routines. I was constantly reminded of the word Stephen Muecke (via Claude Levi-Strauss) used to describe Aboriginal culture's fluid sense of territory and ownership—bricolage.

Corrugation Road is not a postcolonial "reversion to native traditions of performance". It reflects more truly Paul Carter's belief that "occupation of an in-between ground not only formed the condition but the subject matter of a post-colonial art". This in-between ground is unstable in narrative and form. It is open and treacherous—not closed and seamless like a Lloyd-Webber musical. It lurches from moment to moment, it has no real ending: the man next to me stood up to applaud four times as each false ending capped the other. It goes on and on and we don't want it ever to end. The simple

platform stage itself is equally unpredictable, irriguous: heads pop up from underneath, a hole opens to drown Bob, a chain saw is pulled out, flames flare out of a grate, the whole centre section rears up occasionally to reveal a pit beneath. The lighting plot does not just illuminate action, it has its own life and veers around as crazily as the world it interacts with.

This is theatre as transformation. What Jimmy Chi and Black Swan have realised is that in his escape from the role of madman placed on him by the psychotic psychiatric white society, Bob Two Bob has to undertake not only a socio-political journey but also an inner psychic one. And in that realm he encounters and must conquer the demons of memory and the lures of fantasy. It is a realm that has the narrative illogic of dream and as such threatens the colonial principles of sanity and order. The whole explosive performance threatens constantly to fall apart but never does. It is held together by the joy of singing, by laughter, by the sheer power of living presences and by two remarkable performances from Stephen 'Baamba' Albert as Bob and Josie Ningali Lawford as his love, Fiona.

If *Corrugation Road* is a theatre of journey and escape, *Song From a Forgotten City* is a drama of stasis, dominated by images of containment and entrapment. The cyclic form begins and ends with a man standing stock still, gun in hand pointed at his brain. Whether the fictional space be a room in a decaying hotel, a domestic bedroom, or a point of drug assignation, the stage space remains the same: two huge horizontal cages filled with household debris, several long vertical aluminium plumbing pipes, looming abstract paintings (encased in glass?) and, in the key focal point downstage, a toilet with no sewerage pipes connected (even the shit can't escape). The sound track is distorted versions of Lou Reed, in particular *I'm Waiting For My Man*, again and again like a song you can't kill.

This is Asylum Wales from the inside: Dylan Thomas Wales turned ugly; folksy Milkwoodish Wales in disrepair; funny Harry Secombe Wales as DAAS would present it; romantic Tom Jonesy Wales with a mouth full of bile; forgotten Wales, desperate for liberation from the hold of England, but under that hold for so long that it has lost any identity or integrity or pride with which to begin its own journey home. It is a tragedy of postcolonialism—that the desire for freedom goes hand in hand with fear that there is no soul left to liberate.

The soullessness in Edward Thomas' play is imaged as Cardiff, a city that is not enough of a city around which to build a country. It is an image of emptiness at the centre and is embodied in lives and the 'attitude' of the three young men in the play. Where are the women in the cast or in the lives of the men? The maleness is self-enclosing and limiting, there are times it verges on ridiculous. It is a testosterone desperation but desperate nonetheless. They play fast, they move furious, they speak tumultuous and foul—but they run around on one spot and end up where they began with only one fatal way out.

The play hits hard from the start—in the leaden atmosphere of the Merlin theatre on a hot night, it almost cancels the audience out. But the second half digs down deeper and there is space for the audience to breathe inside as the detail of lives unfold, with a jolting irregularity between surface and inner reality. The performances are high energy and occasionally over-physicalised for my liking. But like *Trainspotting*, this is an attempt to jump-start a dead world. As in Welsh's book the main spark comes from the language itself.

What then of the VSO's world premiere of *The Doll*? The daily reviewers raved and the audience were murmuringly appreciative but without any of the emotional release of the audiences at *Corrugation Road*. Unfortunately, *The Doll* as opera left no room for that. Lawler's tale about cane cutters and city women was enclosed in a tight operatic mode and its human dimension stripped away. It left me completely unmoved. I had hoped that the juxtaposition of the two modalities would have shifted the operatic one somewhere new. I can't speak for the music but dramatically the opera seemed caught in predictable territory. In another language, the operatic version of dialogue may work to develop musical and emotional resonance but when operating in the vernacular it feels forced and ridiculously over emphatic. The constant repetition of lines means that small moments are prolonged beyond need and phrases become heightened to the point of self-parody. Just how many times can you sing "Have a beer" or "Here's mud in your eye" and get away of it.

There were positive elements. The operatic mode of simultaneous internal monologue within an ongoing external scene was able to highlight aspects of the drama that the realistic conventions of the play could not, and the choric character of Emma was an interesting if underdeveloped invention. Finally, however, the production seemed unable to make up its mind where to go. On the one hand, verbally, the loaded symbolism and the heightened form burdened the slender tale with over significance. On the other hand, the action and image of the play were cut off from any metaphoric dimension by its preoccupation with the domestic business of 50s life. I kept remembering Jean-Pierre Mignon's surrealist version of the drama, where the realistic veneer was stripped off, the set, costumes and action revealed the archetypes beneath and yet the detail of human interaction remained. In the opera, Brian Thompson's tastefully kitsch and expensive all pink 50s retro set both made mockery of the juxtaposition of romantic yearnings with the tawdry mundanity of life and trapped the events in a closed visual domain.

In another context in *Art and Text* #55, Anthony Vidler expressed the wish that "we might erect new and more socially effective (myths) that speak of...racial and ecological heterogeneity in the face of a mounting conservatism that is busy promoting a more pernicious myth of simple verities and cheap solutions". That way, too, we get more exciting art.

In transit...to the same point

Barbara Karpinski talks with Margie Medlin about working in cyberspace and designing with light in Malaysia

Down in Darlinghurst in a dark underground bar sometime around the mid-eighties, was a group of just-turned-twenty, pre-grunge, post-punks. They were making a video based on their own lives about girls and unemployment, *Let's Work, Let's Live*. Among the Technical Girls were myself, photographer Jasmine Hirst and lighting designer Margie Medlin. I didn't really get to know Medlin in those days. Not much of a girl for idle chat, she had an outward demeanour of drop-dead-cool. The Technical Girls Collective later went on to make a film about endless torpor, *With Inertia*.

I met Medlin again this year, this time in Melbourne, where she was working on *Mobility in an Artificial City*, a series of filmed images of movement projected over a 3D computer-generated city. This gives the illusion of travelling through space, a sort of computer-generated cross-cultural experience.

Mobility In An artificial City is about a metaphorical journey to Mexico through strange and ordinary destinations: the border town, the deportation centre, the market place, the transit centre and home. "Symbolic", these places "came to me in a dream", says Medlin. "The transit zone is like an airport: going from one culture to another and being totally in a vacuum while you are doing that."

In November, she went on another cross-cultural journey, but this time not just in cyberspace. She travelled to Malaysia to work on *KL-KO (Kuala Lumpur Knock-Out)*. Ann Lee, a Malaysian director and founder of Kualu Works, a women's theatre company based in Kuala Lumpur, was developing her new play, *Kuala Lumpur Knock-Out*, at the Playbox Theatre in Melbourne, a deal partly funded by the Australian High Commission.

Seeing Medlin's design for *The Two Executioners* by Chamber Made Opera, Lee invited Medlin to work on the play about a young Malaysian girl and her dream to fight heavyweight champion and convicted rapist Mike Tyson. Kualu is the Malay word for "the wok" found in all Malaysian kitchens. "Kualu"

denotes all those women who like to be in the kitchen as well as those who hate to be.

The play is a comedy about gender war. The main character, Ai Leng, has "always wanted to box. Ever since I was five years old when I saw Muhammad Ali on TV". Says another character, fight promoter, Mahadzir, a "fast-talkin', tough-talkin', wheelin', dealin' black man": "It's a win-win situation really. She wants to box. We want the crowds".

Intersecting the central story is a sub plot about "breast touching" at the electronics factory where Ai Leng works. Issues are raised about whether breast touching constitutes harassment under Malaysian law. Before the play could be presented to the Malaysian public, it was censored by three different government departments on issues of race, religion and police. The script survived the culling and went on to a successful season with the help of corporate sponsorship. "The way things are presented is in a very corporate way," comments Medlin. "I've never met so many people who come from marketing, advertising, P.R. Unlike Australia, there is no government funding and a very small theatre scene." In the traditionally conservative Malaysian press, *KL-KO* has been described as "Feminism sans Ferocity".

When Medlin arrived she was meant to have a lighting assistant, but he came down with a tropical fever and she had to scour the lighting shops of Kuala Lumpur alone. Finding another assistant proved a difficult task. "The whole theatrical structure, who is responsible for what seems to be totally different...People don't work on a casual basis in the theatre as there isn't enough theatre to be able to do that."

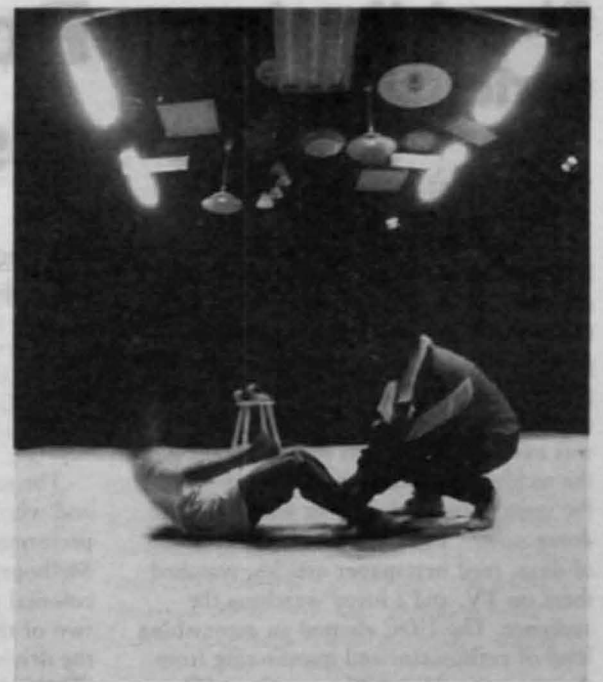
What cultural difficulties and differences have you experienced? "There are situations where suddenly there is an industrial dispute over who should do the wiring. Communication can be incredibly difficult. There is a head person who speaks English but he doesn't have a lot of control. People tend to work in large groups so everything takes a lot longer," says Medlin.

And on the positive side, Medlin adds: "People seem to have more energy and I think it is to do with the heat and people being interested in what they are working on". Most of the cast have day jobs and so rehearsals take place in the evenings and often go into the early hours of the morning.

How has the relationship with Lee changed since landing on foreign soil? "When I first met Ann, it was all just excitement and possibility and now it is real. I'm living in her house so she takes me out. Her girlfriend comes around often. She went to school in England and the way she lives her life is very much like me, very fast."

Margie Medlin brings together computerised animation, filmed images and theatrical lighting. This adds layers of depth and texture to a visual image. She describes her design for *Kuala Lumpur Knock-Out* as "much straighter" than her other designs. The idea is based on a lighting showroom. On arrival, she spent time journeying to homes, shops and showrooms. Says Medlin: "There is a bland brightness everywhere. Everywhere you go is fluorescent lighting. The lighting is just like a beacon in the night. It draws people in. Night markets, food places, they just have fluorescent tubes. I think the lighting is not about trying to hide things. In the lighting of the play, it's quite possible to see the audience as well. The stage floor is white and bright. There is a lot of lighting up high. Like a foreign world moving into Malaysia or a big expansion of modernism".

Medlin's many claims to creative fame since being down-and-out-in Darlinghurst, include *The Cobra Itch* (Desoxy Theatre), *Remember* (Jenny Kemp at The Gas Works Theatre) and *Stages of Terror* (The



Margie Medlin, *Kuala Lumpur Knock-Out*

Performance Space). She has studied scenography and computerised design in U.S.A., London and currently in Melbourne. Says Medlin of her current academic studies at RMIT, "I find the idea of having to fit into the flavour of the month very difficult". At one stage she was so misunderstood by a supervisor that she had to get "special permission not to have anything to do with him".

Was *Lets work, Lets Live* in your early days in Darlinghurst a beginning point for you or just a forgotten memory? "It was a beginning point and it led directly to my friendship with Jasmine Hirst and it was the basis of *With Inertia*, an extraordinary experience and an amazing document of the 80s. It had a fantastic sense of individuality."

"I'm still presenting the ways people live and work, but in more an aestheticised way. I set up these totally fictitious locations and place people in them. *Lets Work, Lets Live*, and *With Inertia* were about people in a specific time and place. Now I'm trying to suggest something more repetitious and cyclic. People aren't really going anywhere in anyway. They always come back to the same point."

Grand gestures and family trauma

Terri-ann White at George Blazeovic's *Nevesinska 17*

The family romance: what powerful material it can be, first lived and then for artistic expression. And when it is a family trauma, a family riven between two cultures, two lives, it is even more dynamic. Parents removed from their home and their sense of themselves, of their place in the world; and then their children, the children of immigrants, children born in this new place. The conflicts are pretty easy to begin to imagine. Bloody hard to live. A concept of ethnicity and the whole swag of cultural legacies. Trying to reconcile the differences, daily.

The distinction between private and public life, the life of the family, a set of individuals all trying to breathe independently. As adults, the children may look back and realise that their harsh judgements of parents and the routines of everyday life were precisely that—harsh, and some regret might be felt. Maybe that is just nostalgia for a distinctive identity, the now-lost memory bank of culture and heritage, other lives in another place. This is the material of *Nevesinska 17*, a coming to terms with family conflict. And was what interested me most about George Blazeovic's first mainstage play.

Much less engaging was its main focus, its context, what this family drama was embedded into, the big sprawling history question. Capturing the 'moment of history': a potted and probably skewed survey of the disastrous politics of the Balkan States in the twentieth century and backwards. The history made into a ghost, a uniformed man who tells this version to the audience. I wished for less of him and, I expect, also got it: now remembering little of what those nationalistic and militaristic speeches were really made of. The melodrama of history: I was much more interested in the small definitions of individuals living their dislocation, their readings of history.

The writer in his program notes states his intention, that "no-one seemed to be writing in the same field. That somehow, the recent events in the Balkans were beneath serious consideration of writers and dramatists... there is no natural state of being which says stories should be simple and that outcomes will be positive". Perhaps the answer to such a reading might involve addressing the difficulty of approach, the making of sweeping statements, grand gestures, master narratives. This is how the 'history' part of the play let it down. It was dogmatic and at odds with the tone of the family romance even if naturalism mixed with the ghostly apparition of history and the melodrama of both love story and teen rebellion story was, at times, an odd if interesting combination.

What was entirely unnecessary was the push to verisimilitude that allowed a scene of snags cooked on a backyard barbecue covered in fat from each night's cook-up. I was there at the end of the season and it

smelt bad and the air was oppressive and without ventilation and I coughed my way through some bilious minutes. And no-one even ate the bloody things. The script contained smatterings of Croatian, but mostly words were held in folk song sung throughout with accompanying piano. Where did these songs come from? That was not evident in the program.

The appearance, however, of a baby onstage at the climactic end of the work was showy and lovely. New flesh, a tiny thing heralded by its backstage crying, held in the hands of the guest actor from Zagreb, Tomislav Stojkovic of the Croatian National Theatre Company. I'm a sucker for babies, and a tiny baby is the best symbol of newness around (even if it's been done to death).

One of the wonderful offerings was Stojkovic's performance. His style, expressive and gentle was a great joy; his generous span of hand gestures and facial expressions kept me engaged, and his interpretation of the script was deft, understated. Alongside the stylised performance of Stojkovic, the Australian actors seemed more declamatory, prone to over-acting, than I am used to seeing from them.

Nevesinska 17 was a fascinating and frustrating production with its whirl of different styles and elements and some jagged edges; the main message for me, regret—an adult man looking back and writing a paean to his dead mother and father. An ambitious play by an emerging writer.

Nevesinska 17, an Australian-Croatian Odyssey by George Blazeovic, directed by Angela Chaplin, Deckchair Theatre, Fremantle, October 3-26.

Terri-ann White writes fiction, teaches writing and lives in Perth.

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Grog dreaming

Joy Hardman reports on the Sugarman Performance Project, a work-in-progress near Alice Springs

A while back a mob of whitefellas put on a performance-in-progress work at Injartnama, an alcohol rehabilitation outstation west of Alice Springs. People from the Injartnama area requested a Grog Dreaming story, this was the project's aim. Whitefellas brought alcohol to Aboriginal people so they must know the story for it. The Greek myth of Dionysus was taken as a whitefella myth explaining the origins of alcohol.

Injartnama is one and a half hours west of Alice Springs. It is dangerous to drive at night here (might hit a cow or a kangaroo), therefore all the non-local audience stayed

the night. The 40 or so performers and crew had been sleeping on location, pulling work together for a few days prior. Audience attendance was by invitation only, the idea being that non-performing attendees contribute in some other way.

Sugarman is best described as a self-styled whitefella corroboree or ritualised gathering. It involved big mobs of people dancing, live instrumental music, stilt walkers, fire, large 2D and 3D sculptural representations of Greek deities, movement with coloured flags, fight sequences between characters wearing



Louis Pratt

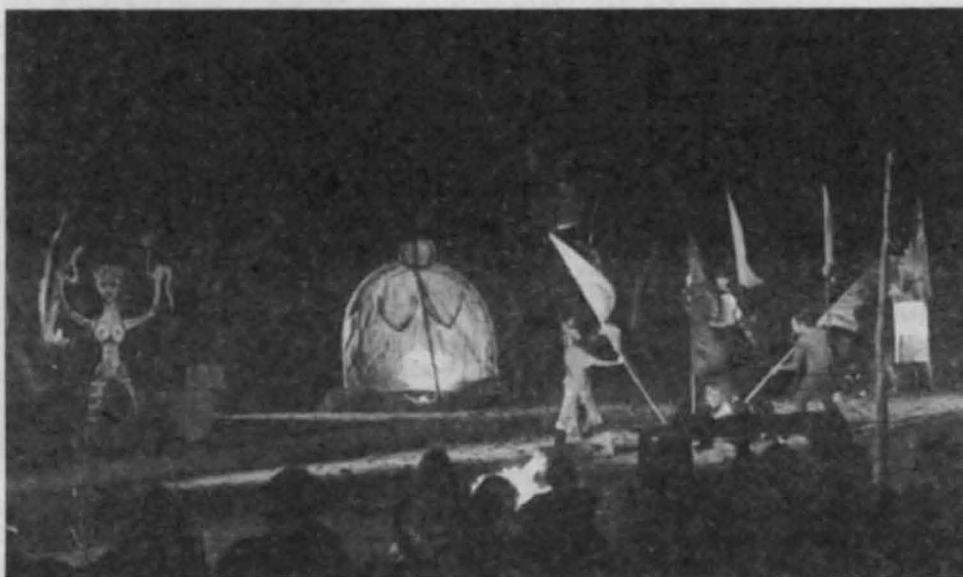
corrugated iron masks and painted bodies. All these elements were at the mercy of the spoken narration re-telling an appropriately adapted version of Dionysus story, referred to in this context as the *Sugarman* story, alcohol being one derivative of sugar fermentation.

The form of the work was epic. A star studded sky covered a large clearing in the outback. The performance was long—five hours! This included food breaks, sausages in bread or bean stews and salad, no alcohol. Similar to Peter Brook's *Mahabharata*, *Sugarman* was narrated, employing small amounts of local Arrernte language and Aboriginal English. The performance space was defined by a number of large representations of Greek deities, a few families with their swags (bed rolls), the main audience and any performers not currently performing.

the Ancestral Being's body as it lay on the beach. An arid desert environment contrasts sharply with a beach landscape, however the physical nature of a design's origins is common to both areas. Designs are not empty repetitions of past events but understood as a direct powerline to the ever present Ancestral Beings. In this context whitefellas wearing indigenous designs appeared like a child dressing in its mothers' clothing, mimicking words and actions in an attempt to learn and understand.

Integration, belonging, participation. In *Sugarman* one "performer" stood out for me in this regard—the video camera man. Disguised as a performer, decorated face and clothing, mask on the back of his head, this character did not observe but participated. He danced enthusiastically while a digital Hi-8 video camera connected hand and eye. Unintentionally in *Sugarman* the video medium was extended. The cold, solitary surveillance monitor was disregarded in favour of an active, involved, humanised mechanism.

Video, along with 4-wheel drives and rifles, plays a key role for all racial groups in central Australia. Neil Turner noted: "Children at Ernabella (Northern SA) have seen themselves on TV more than any other of the world's children" ("How the Elders of Ernabella became TV producers and got the better of the Brady Bunch", *Artlink*, Autumn/Winter 1990). In "Hollywood Iconography: A Warlpiri Reading" (in *Bad Aboriginal Art*, Allen and Unwin, 1994), Eric Michaels draws parallels between Warlpiri graphics and video inscription. He sees both mediums as operating in the service of oral interpretation only possible through the appropriate kinship systems.



Sugarman

Visually, after the initial impact I found the show lacking, likewise the physical performances undirected. Human scale was a problem contrasting with the big landscape. The storyline became repetitive and it was difficult to remain focused on. However it was a work-in-progress and Alice Springs is a small town. The live music was excellent, and kept momentum going. The use of fire—a large spinifex deity was incinerated, as is common here in outdoor entertainments—was satisfying. This review however is not concerned with *Sugarman*'s formal properties nor its ambitious humanitarian aims. Rather, *Sugarman* raised and presented images specific to the cultural cross-over which occurs in central Australia.

The dominant artistic culture in Alice Springs is that of indigenous Australians. There are innumerable Aboriginal art galleries here. Western desire for such work has questionable associations with accessing some form of inherent sacred power. In *Sugarman* performers were decorated with painted body designs given by Warlpiri women from the area. They offered the crow totemic design from their culture, connecting with Crow in the Dionysus story. Aboriginal designs originate in the mythological events and actions of the Ancestral beings. For instance, a design from the Yolngu of north-east Arnhem Land stems from the tidal impression left on

Michaels goes on to suggest the significant point was not the arrival of TV to indigenous communities rather the arrival of fiction. Aboriginal stories are true and there are tight controls in place to maintain this.

My final point of interest in *Sugarman* is in its post-performance ramifications. These spin offs have occurred through people involved in some way either as audience or performers. They largely revolve around the metaphorical stories told and the use of the cross cultural principles underlying the work. The NSW Road and Traffic Authority Aboriginal Road Safety Program is developing and trialing education programs for young people, employing a "Road Trouble Story". The coordinator for Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Services in NSW jails, who performed in this work, is using theatre performance in the adaptation of traditional stories. Barry Cook, one of Injartnama's coordinators uses *Sugarman*'s stories as healing metaphors. Since the performance Elva Cook, an Arrernte woman has painted two elements of the *Sugarman* story, in traditional style. Alice Springs may be remote, small and hot but the cultural difference here at times leads to a dynamic existence.

Joy Hardman is a video-installation/performance artist and student of religion living and working in Alice Springs.

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Big noise, quiet city

Di Weekes talks to percussionist Vanessa Tomlinson

In 1993, a 21-year-old Adelaide percussion student won two of the Adelaide Advertiser's tongue-in-cheek Oscar Awards: Best Soloist, for her spellbinding playing of real hard-core new music, and Biggest Noise, for convincing Etcetera Records to give her a recording contract. Three years down the track the noise has found a global echo in the contemporary music scene.

A graduate of Adelaide's Flinders Street School of Music, Vanessa Tomlinson completed her degree before heading off to the Musikhochschule in Freiburg to study with Bernhard Wulff and Robert Van Sice. She is now completing a Masters program under Professor Steve Schick at the University of California where she is also a regular member of the acclaimed percussion sextet red fish, blue fish.

As for performing experience (whether as soloist or ensemble member), Vanessa can already chalk up the Adelaide Festival, Darmstadt Ferienkurse für Neue Musik, Sydney Spring New Music Festival, Barossa International Festival, Bang on a Can Festival (New York), Green Umbrella New Music Series (LA) and WOMAD. Since 1989 she has commissioned and performed over thirty pieces for solo percussion, and recordings include premieres of works by John Cage (Etcetera CD) and a solo work by Ferneyhough (Elision Soloists CD). her repertoire also includes works by Morton Feldman, Quentin Grant, David Harris, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Alvin Lucier, Eric Lyon, Vinko Globokar, Fredrik Rzewski and Kurt Schwitters.

During her recent return to Adelaide she spent several weeks as artist in residence at Flinders Street School of Music where she performed, gave lecture-demonstrations and worked with composition students in the Contemporary Music Workshop.

DW How does it feel to be back in Adelaide?

VT My perception has really changed over the past two months. I think I came back underestimating Adelaide because I expected the scene would be restricted, so I was apprehensive. Actually, there are still plenty of possibilities for action. I've worked with the orchestra, given solo concerts and done a lot of teaching, which makes everything worthwhile. There's still a lot of space to do things here and an audience ready for a challenge, even though they're sometimes hard to find!

DW How have you enjoyed your residency at the School of Music?

VT I think the students have really responded

to having someone their own age, and besides I've had a chance to interact with them for three weeks at a stretch so that concepts and ideas can be developed from one week to the next. Previously I've only been involved in one-off type teaching situations where there's a sort of "hey-wow!" reaction but no chance for any follow-up. This time I've been able to respond to them as well as the other way round.

DW You're familiar with the local contemporary music scene here. How do you compare it with what's going on overseas?

VT I think there's always a temptation to undervalue what is really most important and any lack of confidence is reflected in the music. In Adelaide one has to come up with one's own solutions. There's no hierarchy, no big names, so you have to rely on your own resources and that can be a distinct advantage. If it's seen as a disadvantage, of course it can be negative. Young people don't get a lot of help here because there's no 'scene' to follow, and it's up to the individuals to get on with their own work. Too many seem to get bogged down with non-musical (I guess I mean 'political') decision making.

When I first went to the US I had a perception that I'd probably be regarded as average or even provincial, lacking in 'worldliness', but in fact I found I had the advantage of having developed an individual style, and this has really helped me to build a profile. In order to have the confidence to continue as a soloist I had to find out where I was musically and academically. I ended up gaining access to other people's ideas but at the same time realising that what I had already accomplished was incredibly valid.

DW When did you become interested in going to the States?

VT I met Steve Schick in 1990 while I was at Adelaide University. At the time I had a sprained arm and wasn't able to play, but I had two lessons in which we just talked about music and repertoire. We had similar ideas about music and percussion playing, and our subsequent correspondence was based on the possibility of my going to study with him at UCSD. I sent some tapes and had lessons by post and even though it was only a few letters a year, it was enough to keep me questioning. When I was offered a full scholarship for the Masters program I decided to accept it.

DW What's your impression of the other students' performance standards?

sparingly; most pieces are lyrical sound works, sometimes with the seams showing, sometimes hidden. The scavenger's art at its finest. JP

Danger
Various artists
Death Defying Theatre
DDT001

Danger is about suicide, crime, gaol, domestic violence, race, gender and gang tensions. It's angry, it's defiant, sometimes remorseful, sometimes it mourns. It's also about voices and about rapping. These are voices from Sydney's western suburbs, Koori, Lebanese, Pacific Islander, Croatian, all working in the same fundamental idiom, hip-hop. The cultural roots of the rhythms are recognisable, but except for an occasional male mimicking of black American accents and syntax, the voices are distinctively western suburbs' Australian English inflected by various cultural backgrounds. So is the music equally inflected by blues and funk, pop and a range of world musics. Some voices can sing, some are poets speaking, but all share an articulate rhythmic craft transforming even the most pedestrian lyrics into powerful statements. The sing-talk of hip-hop allows for the maximum number of words to be packed in, whole stories to unfold, opinions to be stated baldly and boldly. Lines and phrases leap out with peculiar spoken power: "You get to the point where you say that's it...I've had enough...I'm gonna love myself the way that I am" (Maria Matar, *An Adolescent Reflection*); the white man described as "just like an eclipse/they shadowed the land" (Danielle Tuwai, *Savage Existence*); "got to rebuild the bridge/each brick carefully laid/unification/the justified plague" (Tuwai); "I used to wake up scared/chucking cold sweats/cause mummy



Vanessa Tomlinson

VT What impresses me most is that each percussionist has a very individual style with particular strengths. Steve has worked on developing a studio which explores the breadth of possibilities in percussion rather than making clones of himself. Generally they are all exceptional players, all-rounders, but at the post-graduate level one begins to specialise. Some students are more academically involved in musicology or ethnomusicology, and others concentrate on improvisation, or tabla playing, or performance for music theatre. A few are also collaborating with composers in developing new technology. We come together in the ensemble red fish, blue fish (named for Dr Seuss, who hails from San Diego) which commissions new works, plays contemporary repertoire and tours throughout the USA, Mexico and Europe.

DW How many students would go on to post-graduate study at UCSD?

VT It's a fairly small performance faculty but the students all take academic seminars, and in fact it's a very rigorous academic environment. There are about 60 doing post-graduate studies, and of those 40 would be composers, mostly studying for a PhD.

DW There's debate these days about the way music scrapes into some of the tertiary institutions in general courses like Media Studies or Performance Studies. What are your thoughts on performance education?

VT I think universities need to make much greater efforts to be involved in community music-making. They need access

to and feedback from 'real' people. Within large institutions there's always a danger of staff and students becoming isolated, of being restricted to a clique where people play and talk to each other but churn out the same basic ideas with increasing complacency.

As far as 'hybrid' performance courses are concerned, I believe musicians must be knowledgeable about the other art forms, but they must first spend years perfecting their own technique. I have developed an ability to play music well and therefore I now have a viable tool for artistic expression. I'd rather be seen as an artist (that is a 'maker of art') than a percussionist. The aim should be to invigorate, challenge and question ideas, to probe and provoke the status quo. I've been involved in performance art and one has to explore other art forms in order to have more insight into the tools necessary to create the product. This is an area which could have much more rigour within the universities, and where a hands-on approach is always better than a purely academic one. You're not qualified to evaluate or criticise until you've confronted the problems yourself. That is what's so valuable about the approach taken here at Flinders Street where first year students have to write their own compositions in various 20th century styles. I don't know of any viable alternatives for a hands-on approach to creative writing or artistic performance, although practical criticism and disciplined academic argument are always valid at a later stage. The more performance practitioners who are also active as tertiary educators, the better.

DW So what are your own goals at this stage?

VT I can see myself becoming more interested in teaching, although I didn't realise until now that it was so exhausting! I'd also like to become more involved in programming musical events, juxtaposing expectations to create a new medium. I do think music in this country is in danger of becoming audience driven and that the perception of most arts administrators regarding what an audience wants to hear is usually wrong. We play to intelligent people who also want to be provoked, and who can easily be educated in subtle ways. Hence my interest in programming—I really believe that we could be listening to old works in new ways, and vice versa.

If things go according to plan (and why shouldn't they?) Vanessa Tomlinson will certainly make opportunities to construct musical events in Australia. I wonder which of our many festivals will be first to appoint her as artistic director, and how long it will take? Will the Big Noise work on the boomerang principle, or will it simply resonate abroad? Only time will tell.

CD reviews

Takemitsu
Sydney Symphony Orchestra
ABC 454 516-2

This disc contains two intriguing pieces by Japanese composer Takemitsu. *From Me Flows What You Call Time* was inspired by a poem by an 11-year-old Australian girl; Takemitsu converts the literary notion of time as a garden into an exploration of sound as decay. Scored for percussion and orchestra, this piece draws shapes with glockenspiel, ceremonial bells and other percussion instruments, while the orchestra defines larger contours. This and *Rain Tree*, a delicate percussion work, are sensitively performed by the SSO under Edo de Waart, and Synergy. The music is both sensuous and fragile. There must be a question about the dynamic range of the recording, however. When Carl Vine's Symphony No. 5, also included, enters, it sounds like the volume knob has been turned up double. JP

D-J Shadow
Introducing...
Mo'Wax/MD5 MWO59CD

"This album consists entirely of samples", DJ Shadow proudly proclaims of this album. "No live instruments, drum machines or keyboards were used." And as you might expect from an album made of samples, copies, flotsam and jetsam, this is an original, refreshing work. From wherever Shadow has dredged up some of these musical bits and pieces, he melds them all into consistently engaging music. This is the kind of hip-hop called "abstract" or "scientific", but that merely means melodic and intelligent. Spoken word is used

and daddy wanna fight/wanna make threats/to a kid/growing up/it's confusion/He prays to God/to make his life an illusion/so he takes suicide as his first step/cause going to school/with no books/was a bad rep/They won't face the facts/cause it's damn raw/My lyrics remain smooth/it's down with the hard core/unplugged real rhymes/as I flip this out/to anybody out there/who dares to get wicked" (Chris Amittuanai aka Furious Player, *What Next?*); "I didn't come here to bore ya/Only comin with hard verse the gentle/That'll make you wanna hear more/My raps are immaculate fact not fiction/straight to the point..." (Eb, *Never stop looking*). The music is played with drive and finesse by South West Syndicate and Serreck, with performances and lyrics by Doctor Nogood, Maria Matar, Danielle Tuwai, Furious Player, Eb and others, production by Kimmo Vennonen is richly ambient. This is not outrightly commercial product, it's not as aggressive as its American counterpart and nor do the bass lines shake you, but the distinctive, often very young voices, ranging from driven to conversational, and the high production values make it a great cultural document worthy of a wide and popular hearing. Congratulations Death Defying Theatre. KG

The United States of Poetry
Mouth Almighty Records
Mercury CD 532 1392
distributed by Polygram
3 episodes screening SBS TV
from Saturday December 28 8.30pm (8.00pm SA)
The United States of Poetry. Sounds like a Leonard Cohen title, and true to form one of the best performances is Cohen's ironic *Democracy is comin' to the USA*: Cohen in a suit, wearing fly-eye-lens specs, at a desk, speaks in front of a big US flag which

transforms in and out of a bar code. This is an ambitious project. The CD draws from five half-hour television programs (three of which will be screened by SBS TV). A huge range of poets, from the professional (famous poet men Creeley, Ferlinghetti, Milosz, Ginsberg, Walcott, Baraka) and barely know regional cowhand poets and street rappers, the disabled, the elderly, Jimmy Carter) to the everyday (army platoons, cheer squads, square dance callers, child rhymers, radio voices), and even impersonators (Johnny Depp doing Brad Pitt doing Jack Kerouac—ugly). If you love your poetry on the page or the sole intonings of the live poet, then this is not for you. This is video clip poetry by an old MTV hand, Mark Pellington; images cascade and cut up, soundtracks nestle in among words, poets dialogue with themselves, texts scroll about. Some are mini-movies. I love it. Not all of it. Not enough long poems. Not every image clip fits the words. Some of the poets are a right turn-off. But, as an aged voice crackles at each program's opening, "If it aint a pleasure, it aint a poem", and you know what you like. Each program is themed, a day in the life... love and sex... words... with a little extra visual help from Jenny Holzer (lovely unfoldings of phrases) and Barbara Kruger and unspoken quotes from famous dead poets. Words begin to stick, phrases stay—"deep as a word"; "my teeth bite on this poem"; "with eyes you could steal"—and the preacherly rising American intonations are pervasive, across subcultures and bilingual deliveries. Subjects and sentiments are frank, tough, real: Ginsberg's wanted ad for a new lover, a black and white home movie fantasy; another gay poet's sad reverie on male hookers; Maggie Estep's double bind tirade to you the viewer as lover behind a lurching camera, "I'm an emotional idiot, so get away from me...Marry me".

• continued page 38

Unimagined soundscapes

Carolyn Connors' heart leaps in the Reflective Space electroacoustic music event

Contemporary Music Events presented a major concert series of electroacoustic music which emphasised the European tradition and local composers in concerts, broadcasts and installations. Piggy-backing on the experimental media arts festival *short, sharp and very current!*, the series was curated by Lawrence Harvey and based in a decommissioned power station in the centre of Melbourne.

Stockhausen's *Kontakte* (tape, piano and percussion) was performed with flair and virtuosity by Michael Kieran Harvey and John Arcaro. Rhythm, melody, phrasing and texture fold in on and redefine each other in this fantastic, ground-breaking work from 1960. It's scale introduced us to the sound of the room and the possibilities of the sound system. Eighteen speakers were arranged around and above the audience, while the cars in the laneway, footsteps on the floor above, and the road behind provided ongoing sound contributions and some lovely disagreements about what may or may not have been on tape. Luigi Nono's *La lontananza nostalgica utopica futura* is an extraordinary piece which looks at the very fabric of listening and presence. Music stands are scattered throughout the space just as the sound is scattered. When Oliver Dennis (violin) appeared to join the tape, I was troubled by how my circumnavigating listening to the string fragments on tape was disturbed by his presence and became an unalterable front-oriented listening. I was stuck in an extraordinary journey that wasn't moving, where footsteps, a car, voices became gifts to my boredom. The piece is an infuriating and beautiful aural non-sequitur. Dennis played with admirable concentration, delicate technique and subtle timbral nuance.

The chairs of a concert of exclusively tape pieces were rearranged into a circle and we were encouraged to close our eyes and immerse ourselves in the sound. Xenakis' recent work *Gendy 3* appealed to my enjoyment of the indiscrete, the inappropriate, with sound material reminiscent of blowies, motors, balloon-with-the-air-coming-out melodies. It had a witty, tacky edge. A stochastic piece—'continuous discontinuity'—*Gendy 3* sounded anything but random, a confusion for the ear that seeks form, creates order when none may be intended. Stockhausen, Xenakis and Nono were each acknowledged in the series in concerts centring around their respective works.

One concert was for the presentation of recent works by young Australian composers. Overall, I was surprised at how cautious and conservative the music was. I braced myself excitedly for some organ-vibrating volume, or embarrassingly unbridled enthusiasm. We got competent, careful music.

If anything is to be read into this, it is that the cutting edge is happening in the mature mind which takes some time and experience to acquire. *Daring to Venture*, by Ebony Hack and Alex O'Connell (tape and two mute sopranos), is a reworking of songs from a theatre piece. The women on stage silently employed gestures of performance while the tape did its thing, an observation on the nature of live performance and prepared technologies. These two elements were strongly connected through the performance, scrutinising and juxtaposing the nature of each. A tasteful restraint was shown in *Lorem Ipsum* (voice and live processing) by Lisa Speakman. The vocalist was relaxed, discrete, and not afraid of silences, the texture describing a will to live which bubbled and subsided.

The notion of this series being 'performance' was embraced with various degrees of awareness. Initially, in the absence of a live body on stage, the audience would rustle, wriggle and murmur during tape pieces. Yet we proved ourselves a self-educating body and the expectation of an impending tape piece subdued the restlessness. Lighting, theatrical effects, such as sheets of plastic with water running down them, a stage, all transformed the unusual venue into a performance space.

There were the failures of acknowledgment from both sides: the computer operator/composers who walked on stage did the task, and left with barely a nod at us; the presenter of *Cinema for the Ears* who bounded into the waning moments of Steve Adam's tape piece *Afternoon Tea Series* (a delightful exaggeration full of storm-in-a-teacup, flooding-

pour-us-another-one puns on the making of tea) denied us the opportunity to applaud and Steve's right to hear it. The ingredients of radio, cinema, performerless tape piece and unusual venue collided at this concert in the Kino Cinema, each challenging the conventions of the others. While leaving the traditional concert hall set-up we need to keep a watchful eye on how audience and performer/composer can continue to respectfully acknowledge each other. The Kino as a listening venue excited me despite a number of problems: there was a distractingly loud line hum, the stereo wasn't, and the quality of the sound varied in different registers. However, with high-backed chairs, soft furnishings, and thick closed doors which sealed us in from extraneous sounds, it was a generally satisfying and clear listening experience which could have been outstanding if there had been more time in the venue to correct the problems. The programming was excellent. Adam's work, as well as Andrew Yencken's *Carousel of Light* suited the film venue, suggesting a program music of the imagination. *Carousel of Light* is a relentlessly thick textured collage which is held together by internal musical rhythms and rhythms of content: ritual, sport, religion, farming. *Five Easy Pieces* by Ion Pearce, is a delicately composed work whose separate elements appear, join, then comment on each other: a self-observation, watching the outside from the outside.

Elsewhere in the Reflective Space program, Mardi McCusker's strongly embodied flute playing made Kaija Saariaho's *Noa Noa* (solo flute and live computer processing) a sustained listening journey. Snappy vocal work shaped flute lines, and the tape material often worked with and as enhancement of the live performer. Martin Wesley-Smith's *For Clarinet and Tape* starts simply with repetitive motifs which grow longer, faster, and again is rhythmically driven. It is a witty game between the two parts, and at times the composer demands that the clarinet call and response and unisons are established. Then after a full and impressive clarinet line played by Carl Rosman, the tape material engages and cheekily races off with an idea, impossibilities that the clarinet could never produce. Rainer Linz and Bridgid Burke successfully mix improvisation, technologies and live playing. Their pieces are neat and concise in their conception and production, and can be sweet, edgy, witty, and silly. Hope Csutoros also combined acoustic and electronics well in *Domdradi Enek 1*. Inventive, wistful, the work has balance and development, and is nostalgic without excessive sentimentality. Alistair Riddell's *Prosthetic Concrete* had some beautiful sounds and was conceptually strong, but was not a convincing performance because of the weak relationship between the tape and live processing and David Karla's saxophone.

The final night presented a mixed bag of pieces. Tim Kreger's *Vessel* was the pure enunciation of one idea: feedback manipulated by coffee pots, tubes, cups. At last my secret fantasy to hear some really loud, low stuff was realised as he reached for the long cardboard tube and made the room boom. Larry Polanski's *The World's Longest Melody: Piano Study* (what a threat!) was reworked for computer trio. Joined by Darren Verhagen and Tim Kreger, I had no idea what was going on, but it was a fun listening experience. Scattered throughout the program were the Frog Peak project's one minute tape pieces which will eventually be released on CD. As all pieces have the same source material, they are fascinating as examples of what technologies and the imagination can do. I particularly enjoyed Lulu Ong's lions and babies inhabited *Gribbit*. The scrap disco finished the night and the series. Steve Adam, Darren Verhagen and Sam led us into the wee hours. Complete with mirror ball, conversation and no dancing, we were suddenly present at a school dance—a bizarre, fun way to end the series.

It was a joy to immerse myself in serious listening for ten days. I feared that hearing so many tape pieces back to back would create an unnecessary comparative environment in my brain, but the outcome was quite different. My ear formed relationships and contexts between pieces, and my heart literally leapt, particularly at the Kino, at the infinite variations of the recording of acoustic sounds, and at the unimagined sound landscapes some tape works placed me in.

radio eye

Radio Eye—an island of sound experience in an unrelenting flood of information and talk. Tune in every Sunday night at 8.20 for an earful of people, places and ideas.

DEC 1 8.20PM **Pan, Panic & the Australian Bush**

by Jane Ullman, with music by Sarah de Jong

What makes people scared of lonely places, of the bush? What fears have been transplanted into the Australian landscape by European culture? Has Pan been driven out of his traditional haunts in Europe, and reappeared in the wilds of the Southern Hemisphere?

Bushfires

As Bushfire 8.20PM DEC 8

season gets underway, journalist and volunteer fire fighter John Tognolini gives us this intimate portrait of his bushfire brigade over the course of a year. From carrying out the decomposed bodies of suicides to selling raffle tickets, its an often humorous view of a how a brigade works, and its role in the community.

Titanic Mix

DEC 15 8.20PM As a metaphor for the audacity and sheer arrogance of the industrial age, nothing has matched the loss of the White Star Line's flagship on its maiden voyage in April 1912. Across Radio Eye tonight Matthew Leonard has put together a monster mix of Titanic music (from Leadbelly to Gavin Bryars), ideas and stories. Ideal summer listening!

Encounters with Swedish

Two strange and beguiling approaches to looking for love. In LOTTA AND THE ENGLISHMEN, 8.20PM DEC 22

Swedish writer Lotta Erikson goes to England and each day for a week meets a different man in a cafe: a City broker, an actor, an East End roofer, a Portsmouth teacher, an artist. They go on a date, of his choosing. These real encounters are interwoven with Lotta's musings, memories and fantasies. A revealing look at the courtship rituals of the English male. Plus Jon Rose's SWEDISH FOR VIOLIN PLAYERS.

Left on the Runway

DEC 29 8.20PM The award winning team of Tony Barrell and Rick Tanaka report from behind the lines at Japan's Narita Airport, where local farmers and a host of political activists of various persuasions have been fighting against the airport and its runways for thirty years. How long can you wage a protest war? What happened to the last cherry tree? Who was the pickle packer?

January on Radio Eye is a month of murder, mystery and dark conspiracy. Tune in each Sunday as we open our own X Files.

Letters to Anne

JAN 12 8.20PM produced by Lorelei Harris of RTE, Dublin

In 1984 a 15 year old girl gave birth to a baby in a grotto dedicated to the Virgin Mary in rural Ireland. Both mother and child died. 13 years down the track, what might be said about a tragedy that turned into a cause of national shame? LETTERS TO ANNE movingly combines testimonies, fiction and a letter to examine not the girl's death, but the way the story has been told.

Remorse: the 14 Stories of Eric Morse

A 5 year old boy is dropped from a 14th storey window of a high rise in a Chicago housing estate. He was dropped by two boys themselves only 10 and 11 years old. This provocative and fast paced account of the death of Eric Morse was made by two local kids working with independent producer David Issay. 8.20PM JAN 19

101 Degrees

JAN 26 8.20PM produced by Matthew Leonard

Sometime after midday on Australia Day 1966, three Adelaide children went missing. They were last seen playing and swimming with 'a tall blonde man' on Glenelg Beach. The disappearance of the Beaumont children sparked an exhaustive manhunt, which eventually included clairvoyants, religious cults and endless rumours. The children or their bodies have never been located, and their vanishing remains a mystery.

ABC
Radio
National

Call your local ABC office for frequency information

CD reviews

• from page 36

Thankfully, the accompanying music is not by the singalong famous, so the poet stays in front. I don't know why SBS purchased only three of the five programs, but I'd recommend watching. Or you could buy the CD. But there's something in seeing those faces, if only once, as they mouth their words and show their weight, their skins, their teeth and conspire in the producers' fantasies of what poets are and what collective America sounds and feels like. Last words therefore to Canada's Leonard Cohen for whom the US is "the cradle of the best, and of the worst...I'm sentimental, if you know what I mean/I love the country, but I can't stand the scene./And neither left nor right, I'm staying home tonight/getting lost in that little screen". This is one screen I'm happy to get lost in. KG

Nuraghi Echoes
with *The Riting of the Runda*
Hazel Smith and Roger Dean
Rufus Records RF025

There's not enough Spoken Word on CD in this country, so we should be very thankful for this Hazel Smith and Roger Dean collaboration. Like a Spoken Word version of the novelist Ursula Le Guin, poet Smith conjures imaginary worlds with their own languages and mores, worlds given added resonance by Dean's synthetically constructed sound compositions, thematically potent and (especially when on their own) urgent and rich. The collaboration is at its best in the shorter *The Riting of the Runda* (11'03, 1995) where voice and percussive patterns interlock. Here Smith achieves moments of range and intimacy that we do not expect from the solo tracks. In the epic *Nuraghi Echoes* (40'30, 1993) her volume and tone is insistently declamatory, she sounds like she's addressing a hall and not the ear. And nor is Dean's sound as sympathetic to the voice as eery as his tumbling dice-like stones are. *The Riting of the Runda* may appear more rhythmically obvious, but its allowing Smith to run with or skip across its strokes is welcoming and no less challenging. In both works, her voice is shifted to a variety of spaces (and personae), but the effect can be irritating, a spatial trickery that cannot compensate for the lack of vocal variety. However, when multi-tracked and speaking with and against herself, we begin to hear the possibilities of the voice. Smith the performer needs a tough producer. None of this is to deny the excellent sound worlds produced by Andrew McLennan (1993) and Greg White (1995). Smith's poetry has its strong moments ("a woman carrying age across her cheek"), but it's a touch too often deadpan plain, punny and given to lists and reversals ("towards a definition of infinity/an infinity of definitions"), and its politics are simple (for all the claims of the sleeve note). The imagined worlds rely too much on having to listen to long passages of an invented language that the listener has no investment in other than a limited aural pleasure. Smith is no Amanda Stewart or Carolyn Connors and sets herself very big vocal tasks. The radical pleasure of sound over sense has long been celebrated, but the promise of getting to know the imagined worlds is too often denied, even though there is a nice suggestive interplay between past, present and future ("the child was digitised and strong") in *Nuraghi Echoes*.

The ambitions of this CD are considerable (hence the weight of my criticisms), the recordings are excellent, but the performer needs to engage her listeners, to whisper, to really yell, to exploit the intimacy of the CD, the lungs, the diaphragm, not just a declamatory head voice. *Runda* shows what is possible. If you're tempted, and you should be (who else is doing this kind of work?), try *Runda* first, but ignore the first two tracks. For Dean on his own try Track 1.9. Then you'll be ready to start at the top. KG

Valentin Silvestrov
Dedication, symphony for violin and orchestra
Gidon Kremer, violin
Münchener Philharmoniker
conductor, Roman Kofman
Teldec 4509-99206-2

This is my CD of 1996, a sublime and unnerving experience from yet another Soviet composer coming into late prominence. It's a lush, romantic homage (you find out to who or what). Part quotation, its emotional linearity is intersected by a spare beautiful vertical modernism—something like the Dutilleux of *Timbres*, *espace*, *mouvement*. Silvestrov is not as abrasive or provocative as Schnittke, but the melodies are as good; not as movie-soundtrack-lyrical, or explosive, as Kancheli (another great find); nor as melancholic as Korndorf with his great chord blocks in *Hymn II* for orchestra; but he shares all of these characteristics while blessed with a more reflective voice of his own. I'm waiting for the Australian release of Silvestrov's Symphony No. 7 for Xmas. And while waiting, I can relish an unusual work by a very different Russian composer, Sofia Gubaidulina, her *Seven Words* for cello (Maria Kliegel), bayan (a Russian push-button accordion played with emotional intensity by the renowned Elisabeth Moser) and strings. Originally composed for organ, the switch to bayan seems to me a more daring and seductive choice (Naxos CD 8.553557 and only \$9.95!). Another 1996 CD high point. KG

Radio

The Listening Room
ABC Classic FM

Monday, December 16, 9pm

Five Easy Pieces was created by Ion Pearce during his recent ABC Radio/New Media fellowship at *The Listening Room*. Derived from workshops in Indonesia and Australia, it's concerned with human bodies in movement, incorporating influences of dance and writing practices. An austere blend of voice, music and mysterious textures, it manages to be both spare and intriguing at the same time. On the same program there's a repeat broadcast of Andrew Yencken's *Carousel of Light*, an aural kaleidoscope of inner and outer, dream and film. JP

Radio Eye
Radio National,

December, Sundays 8.30 pm

Meet The Resonance, a four-part series through December by Sue Anderson and Patrick Gibson made up of 12 minute programs is radio about sound: verb, repetition and resonance; music, noise and language. On December 8: the primal experience of body and sound; December 15: music aided by echo and repetition; December 22: sound and the metaphysical, amplification and the inner world. Also on December 22, a Swedish double: *Lotta and the Englishman*, Lotta Erikson's encounters with English men and her own memories; and Jon Rose's *Swedish for Violin Player*. JP

Shorts

Catharsis, inspiration and hope is promised by **Melbourne Workers Theatre** in their *Little City*, a collaboration with community choir Canto Coro who performed to much acclaim at last year's Brisbane Biennale. *Little City* is a political musical which springs from a frustration with the state of Victoria and its lack of social conscience. This is theatre based on choral music and features a major new musical work devised by **Irene Vela**. *Little City* is directed by **Renato Cuocolo**. Friday-Sunday until December 15 at the **Brunswick Town Hall**, corner Sydney Road and Dawson Street Brunswick Ph 03 9326 6667

Chip on the Shoulder is an artistic response from Aboriginal artists to the recent ugly onslaught of racism. Represented in this show are: **H.J. Wedge, Elaine Russell, Gordon Hooke, Gerard Scifo, Leoni Dennis, Barry Bates, Deborah Breckenbridge, Shane Griffith, Brook Andrew, James Simon, Judy Watson, Michael Riley, Kevin May and Anthony Hickling**. Tuesday to Saturday 10-5. Until December 23. **Boomalil Aboriginal Artists Co-operative**, Ground Floor, 27 Abercrombie Street, Chippendale 02 9698 2047

Young bloods, tats and petrol heads at ACCA December-January. **December 6-20**, visiting curator Claire Doherty presents *Shapeshift*, featuring work by young artists selected from postgraduate programs at Melbourne's three leading art schools. January 24-March 2 **Ex de Medici's** ghostly **Sixty Heads**, a series of life-sized tattoo portraits taken over seven years at her tattoo shop. **Fuel** looks at hot rods and the subculture of car enthusiasts. A Canberra Contemporary Art Space touring exhibition. Also in January **Indelible** an exploration of transcendence and ephemerality in the work of **Ex de Medici** and **Kelly Leonard** curated by Dr Ted Gott from the National Gallery of Australia. **Australian Centre for Contemporary Art**, Dallas Brooks Drive South Yarra.

Call for proposals for Glare Window/Vitrine and **Artspace's world wide website**. Glare Window runs along the front of The Gunny on the corner of Forbes Street and Cowper Wharf Road, Woolloomooloo, and the Vitrine space sits just below the back window of the main gallery space. Artists have previously used Glare as a public window viewed solely from the outside, or as a space which can be

entered, or a combination of both. Artspace also invites digital and internet artists, curators, writers and theorists to submit proposals for their internet site. Proposals should include: a conceptual/theoretical rationale for your project; visual material (slides, diagrams and/or drawings—Glare only); résumé, plans for your use of Glare or WWW; if relevant your URL for your website. No deadline. Information: Kirsten Elsby **Artspace** Ph 02 9368 1899 Fx 02-9368 1705 E-mail: artspace@merlin.com.au URL <http://www.culture.com.au/scan/artspace>.

If like me you think all puppetry is scary, wait till you see the never-less-than-truly-terrifying **Snuff Puppets** (live music, spectacle, dynamic physical theatre and puppetry) in Sydney **December 4-15** with **Scarey**—a theatrical event of spectacular proportions featuring the true story of human life including a number of eerie experiments in atmosphere and scenes you've never seen such as the birth and death of a human being. **The Performance Space** 199 Cleveland Street Redfern 02 9319 5091

BEFORE: Starry-eyed student with a CV full of cafes on King Street, fare evasion, turps cologne with a Munch T-shirt, living off free alcohol and food at openings, pre-HECs Utopia, postmodernism was something you had to look up, fast-tracking young stars with the glimmer of an ongoing career. **AFTER:** Funded bitch sessions with an arts accountant, internet copyright wrangles, real estate speculation, networking, postmortem philosophy, well-thumbed electronic organiser, extensive documentation (tax deduction) frequent flyer points, hobbyist or 12-step program. See what happened in between, the twists and turns of an artist-run initiative when over 80 artists contribute to the **firstdraft tenth anniversary exhibition 4-22 December firstdraft** 116-118 Chalmers Street Chippendale Wed-Sat 12-6 Sun 1-5 Ph 02 9698 3665

The place to be on **Australia Day January 26**. The sixth annual **Survival 1997** celebration of indigenous culture at **Yarra Bay Oval, La Perouse** will showcase indigenous bands and performers, traditional and contemporary music, dance and craft. Parking available or take the #393 or #394 bus from Central. \$10 Adults \$5 Concession, Kids under 12 free. Full program of events will be announced in the Koori Mail January 15. Information 02 9281 2144 (**National Indigenous Arts Advocacy Association**)

The things you have to do to get burns on seats these days. Launching their 1997 season on December 4, Fremantle's Deckchair Contemporary Theatre promises each night of **Sappho Sings the Blues**, a one woman show starring local performer and blues singer Lee Sappho, one lucky audience member will be offered a therapeutic massage from Lee who is also one of Fremantle's top masseuses. The program also includes **I Am Nijinsky** a dance performance work, co-produced with writer **Sally Richardson** and featuring **Stefan Karlsson** as Nijinsky. **Voices**, a new play by **Mary Morris** about a woman's vocal orchestra in a Japanese prisoner of war camp in Sumatra; **Sappho Sings the Blues** written by **Robyn Archer** and **Lee Sappho** with **Angela Chaplin**; and the year finishes with **Waterfront Women**, a play celebrating the women who have contributed to the character and history of the Port of Fremantle featuring singer/songwriter/composer **Kavisha Mazzella** and performed on the docks of Fremantle. During the year, the company will also be developing works with writers **Neil Murray, Katherine Thomson** and **John Romeril** for 1998/99.

The popular season of new short queer performance is returning to **midsumma**, Melbourne's Gay and Lesbian Festival, in 1997. **Software** is currently looking for performers with works from 2 to 20 minutes in length. Drama, satire, comedy, dance and physical theatre, monologue, hybrid arts—just about anything provided the work can be staged with a minimum of fuss. Workers are needed front of house and backstage in all areas: production management, lighting and sound. Volunteers are also needed to help with promotions. Submissions should be sent by November 21 to The Festival Director, Midsumma Festival, 29 Carlisle St, St Kilda 3182 Fax: 03 9525 4779. Performers should send a short submission on their background and a conceptual proposal of work to be included in the season. Front of house and backstage workers should send a brief outline on their area of interest and their level of experience. Contact Jeanti St Clair for further details on 03 9481 7534

Held at Sydney's **Toast II Gallery** in November, **Ten New Music Works** gave ten composers the challenge of performing new works with a ten minute time limit. Although the works were of variable interest and quality, the event itself was a success. A large crowd was lured by the wide variety of musical types, the concept itself, or perhaps the dearth of interesting music in the city. The pieces ranged from mini-scored compositions (Andree Greenwell's *Snapshots*), blends of traditional instruments with live electronics (Stevie Wishart's *Beyond Returning*), sound art (Ion Pearce's *Who Can Resist Us Now*) and electronic collage (Shannon O'Neill and Rick Rue's *To This Moment*). The attention given to the works by an enthusiastic audience suggests there is a space—and a need—for this kind of event in Sydney; hopefully there will be more in 1997.

Sport

TEE OFF

with Vivienne Inch

The greens were awash with talk this month: Tiger Woods was talking up and playing down, the Shark "had a dream" and Karrie Webb blubbed into her Cup. Meanwhile, off the greens speeches ricocheted around the nation. A word from the gallery. Why doesn't that crocodile shooter caddie of Pauline's tell her that etiquette requires that she remove her mouthguard *before* she speaks. And what is her game? The woman's a swiper with a speech. She closes her eyes and whacks at the dirt while others wade into the water traps and bunkers to fetch her balls for her. John Howard plays like a man with no past and no future, a hedger with words, always preparing to tee off, never addressing the ball. Consumed with concerns of personal hygiene, he stamps his foot but leaves no mark. And while he makes small adjustments to his BVDs and tries to keep the grass stains off his new Niblicks, Paul Keating plays through; the dust from Clinton's buggy flies in his face and Noel Pearson holes in one with a clean swing and a clear aim—a better game all round.

TOOTH AND CLAW

with Jack Rufus

The recent controversy surrounding Paul "Gazza" Gascoigne has focussed attention on one crucial issue: how far can a bad boy go and still be picked in the team? Pleading guilty to wife-bashing and consenting to a double dose of therapy, even Gazza was surprised to be picked in the English soccer team without serving a suspension. Only recently, that same team included a drunk, a cocaine abuser, a gambling addict, and a well known thug: is there no limit to off-field abuses?

One footballer to test the limits, on the field, was All Black bad boy Richard Loe. Time and again, international opponents were left battered and bleeding after colliding with his elbow, boot or head. His one mistake was to deal out the same treatment to a fellow New Zealander, resulting in his only suspension. Although he didn't realise it at the time, Loe had reached the limit.

If a bad boy can avoid making this mistake, it seems he will always make the team. A terrorist, for example, causes havoc down the wing, especially if allowed to carry explosive devices onto the field. A flasher will always cause a distraction, a burglar will worry the defence, a hitman commands respect. Even the most heinous criminals, corporate raiders and 80s style entrepreneurs, are welcome. Once they hang up their boots, they can always move into sports marketing.

THE MAP

Sydney Festival & Cultural Precinct Guide

• from page 2

everyday fantastically on its head. Brazilian Stoklos embodies her own performance theory. "Essential Theatre", a "continual test of her own personal resources, relying on a perfect synthesis of the actor's instrument of body, voice and mind". Could be the festival highlight. Amazingly, there's even more festival at the Opera House: pop diva **Lesley Garrett**, **Balé Folclórico da Bahia** from Brazil, the **Gypsies** (from India to Egypt to Spain), the great flamenco singer **Carmen Linares** and, from Soweto, dancing "originating from the mine compounds and hostels during the height of the migrant labour system", the **Rishile Gumbo Dancers**.

Before we leave the Quay, let's not forget the water. The innovative **della Laguna**, a collaboration between arts curator Jennifer Phipps and composer Ross Hazeldine, offers more opportunities for festival immersion. The sum of the events, in venues ranging across Government House, the Museum of Sydney, Goat Island (via Ferry from the Quay) the Old Treasury Building and a tall ship in the Harbour, "layers music performance, imagery and sound, of past and present Venice over the Harbour...questioning notions of empire, trade, power and cultural adoption". Classic Venetian works and contemporary contributions from Luigi Nono and Claudio Ambrosini are programmed with Australian works by Carl Vine, Carolyn Connors, Warren Burt, André Greenwell. **Michael Redolfi's Virtual Lagoon** allows you to listen underwater "through the bones, skin and inner ear" to music and soundscapes of the Great Barrier Reef. Snorkels and goggles are recommended for better listening at the North Sydney Olympic Pool (Jan 15) and at Redolfi's **Sonic Waters**, Nielsen Park, Vaucluse, Jan 11.



Laurie Anderson *The Speed of Darkness*

Moving to the centre

Short of supplies? Where can you get those supermarket fundamentals in the city? The AMP Centre on Young Street. AMP? AMP. Look out for the mock waterfall, take the escalator up, drop into the well-stocked newsagent and the homey sushi bar on your way to, yes, it's a **Clancy's**. Unbelievable, but real, 7.30am - 6.00pm weekdays. Need a stiff drink? Diagonally across the road, **Tokyo Joe's**—beer, steak and sushi, corner Loftus Lane and below **Cilantro's** where you can dine more expensively beneath...a giant slice of a Caravaggio?...shades of *The Thief*, *The Cook*...

You're at the **Museum of Sydney**, 37 Philip St. This is a fine live-in institution built on the site of the original Government House: you can glimpse those foundations, you can roll out tray after tray of historical detritus (domestic, financial, colonial, indigenous) doing your own 'dig'. Immerse yourself in Ross Gibson's dark **Bond Store** haunted with laser disc projections of early Sydney settlers flickering across the space. Take plenty of time, take a seat for its magic to work. The exhibition of the moment (opening Dec 21) will be **Guwanyi, Stories of the Redfern Aboriginal Community**, "the last stronghold of Aboriginal land in inner Sydney". Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal photographers present images of Redfern as a community, not just as a mass media site for public discomfort. The exhibition is formally launched on Sunday January 19 with dance, performance and film, and it's all free, from 1.00 - 5.00pm. Before stepping back into the light and the breeze of the MoS piazza and the buzz of CBD Sydney, take quality coffee, take in the shop—a cultural experience in itself. You can stock up on reproductions of clay pipes and scrimshaw (like the many you've seen in the trays), finely embroidered \$19.95 MoS sports caps (cultural slippage here), MoS mugs (\$10), an exquisite Greg Bell and Michael Keighery Cross Hatch Plate (with text from Elizabeth Macarthur's journal and a talk by curator Peter Emmet) \$95, Ross Gibson's *Tales from the Bond Store* in print, a classy takeaway, a fine hanky I couldn't blow my nose into (a reprint of "Transported for Sedition"—save it for weeping?) and a great selection of books, ranging from the bizarre—David Byrne's



Elaine Kitchener, *Vernon Chilly*, 1984

Strange Ritual—to high theory, local and regional history and novels.

Off Pitt as you head to the city centre, more ephemerality. The CBD. The address is a poem, **corner of Angel Place and Ash Street** and if you follow your nose to **Coffee Roasters**, another awaits. All they sell is coffee roasted daily and a few pastries. Next to Mr. Roberts Shoe Repairs which looks like it's always been there but go carefully because you could miss Coffee Roasters and you shouldn't. It's open from 7.30am to 4.30pm every day.

After the arabicas you could shoot around the corner to one of the city's stranger sites, the **City Golf Driving Range in Pitt Street** (in one of those holes left by 80s developers) where you can drive 50 balls into 75 metres of city block sized astroturf or, once the driving calms down, putt about on the greens. All this for only \$8 (\$5 on weekends) and that includes the clubs and the shoes. If these Japanese ideas catch on we can probably look forward to fishing tanks on top of the GPO. Bizarro!

Or you could breeze up to the **Scots Church**, corner **Margaret and York Streets** where salvation comes in the form of naturopathic consultation, therapeutic massage, foot reflexology and iris diagnosis. Here the December special transcends the Christmas service. A free bottle of Dr. Bach's Rescue Remedy with your first consultation with the **City Apothecary**. Thanks to an art-loving property manager, the church is full of artists' studios. If you stand outside this rare slab of Sydney gothic, you might catch performance photographer Heidrun Löhr casting an eye out over the city.

Do this. You're on George Street, drawing close to Market Street and the State Theatre where Laurie Anderson will perform. Go into the foyer of the **Dymocks Building in George Street**, take the lift to the 8th Floor, past Yull/Crowley Gallery, past the offices of the Sock Shop with a wall of framed socks, chiropractors, solicitors, past Lella O'Toole's Bras and Girdles and enter the **New Guinea Arts Gallery** and Australia's biggest selection of tribal art from Papua New Guinea, Oceania and Aboriginal Australia. A revelation.

The city is alive with little cafes. **Barfly Espresso, Omni** (both in Bathurst Street) round the corner from **Stewart's Secondhand Bookshop** in Pitt ("No-one ever has too many books"). **Coluzzis on Elizabeth Street** and **Il Gianfornale** (in Sky Garden Arcade, off Pitt Street Mall). These are places designed for casual dining—a relief from all those slice, slap and grab sandwich bars. No longer do we scour the city for potable coffee or traipse to Chinatown for Asian—ignore the brutal ambience and try the **Food Hall Basement under the Pittway Arcade**, corner Pitt and Park or one of the best, the tiny **Malay Chinese Takeaway** at 165 King Street (close to the corner of Elizabeth) where barristers dip their wigs in the city's best laksa and secretaries dangle take away handbags of har-mee (mixed noodles in prawn soup). Next door slurp home-made ramen, udon and soba at **Azabujuban**.

Up to **Macquarie Street**. Make a wish as you rub the snout of the Florentine bronze boar in the fountain outside the Sydney Hospital. They don't rake the gravel into patterns in the beautiful Greenway courtyard of the **Hyde Park Barracks** but it's just as tranquil as any Japanese garden. This museum offers itself up as history, shows us its scars. In January you can take in a chronology of women's political action beginning 100 years ago when four kinds of adults could not vote: indigenous men, men in prisons, insane men and all women. In **Women with Attitude** curator **Dr. Marion Stell** presents the evidence of years in ordinary objects—letters, banners, petitions, photographs, cartoons, badges, brooches, publications, There's

material from the Pankhurst Collection, contemporary commentaries from artists like **Rachel Apelt** (see back cover) in three dimensional tapestries commemorating among others the moment when feminist trade unionist Emma Miller took her hatpin to the policeman blocking her march to Parliament House when the writing was on the wall. Writers like **Faith Bandler** and **Oodgeroo Noonuccal** break down the walls. There are desert silks from Emabella and a collection of significant objects from Australian women including appropriately enough a set of shark's teeth from Amanda Vanstone (true). As the suffragettes said "The world does turn".

Reached your coffee limit, palpitating, too unsettled for art? Give it up. Time for tea at **The Tea Centre of Sydney** on the first floor of The Glasshouse on the Pitt St. Mall. The range of teas is astonishing and includes seasonal (First Flush, Autumnal) and regional selections spanning darkest Assam and delicate Sikkim Terai. If your caffeine count is dangerously low, exit immediately right from the Tea Centre to **Vanderwee**, importer of alarmingly good Belgian chocolates. You have to eat so little to enjoy yourself so very much. Stock up and walk on.

On your way to see Laurie Anderson at the State Theatre, you could drop in at **Merivale**, 194 Pitt Street, one of the few places in the city that caters for a life after business hours. In the 60s its Edwardian decor was draped with hippie couture. These days you can buy WA's Madfish Bay by the glass, coffee or lunch and, at night on the ground floor restaurant, select from a menu that seems to cater perfectly for all manner of simple appetites. Try a blue eye in a coat of roesti or the rare tuna with Asian mushrooms ginger and sesame. And watch chef Stuart Kennedy move his caring eye from the scented couscous in the kitchen out and over the diners.

Mollisa Fenley's offering talk as well as dance, and so is **Laurie Anderson** promising an "irreverent and witty meditation on the future of art and technology in an informal evening on keyboards, violin and digital processing". Note the 'informal': this is not one of Anderson's big shows. Relatively intimate it includes a number of familiar pieces, new works and topics the press release lists as, "the recent trend to combine 'work' and 'fun', food as an analogy for information, cyberspace, the role of coffee, web sites and therapies for people who have used too much technology". Tasty. State Theatre, Jan 10 and 11.

A block away, Sydney Town Hall is host to the **Gregorian Chant Choir of Spain** and a **Manuel de Falla** celebration with a concert version of his opera *La Vida Breve* replete with singers Carmen Linares and Maria José Montiel and dancing featuring the local Diana Reyes Flamenco Company, Jan 15 & 17. At the **Pilgrim Theatre** in 262 Pitt Street, local writer-director **Bogdan Koca** presents his plays **Sparring Partner** and **Annette & Annette**. In the **Queen Victoria Building, Legs on the Wall** will make you giddy rapt with **Temptation** (Jan 21-25, 12.00 and 1.00pm). In nearby **St. James' Church, King Street**, you can hear British tenor **John Mark Ainsley** (Jan 19, 2.30pm) and the Australian children's choir **Gondwana Voices**, including a commission from local composer **Michael Atherton** (Jan 25, 8.00pm). The cry used to be not enough venues in Sydney for a festival. Well, it's still true of bigger spaces, but there are smaller venues to be exploited to intensify that walking-distance festival-feel.

To Darling Harbour

On to Darling Harbour, down Market Street, to walk over water on your way to the Maritime Museum for the premiere of **The Sinking of the**

Rainbow Warrior, a new Australian opera to juxtapose with the more traditional *La Vida Breve*. Performer-poet **Amanda Stewart** has written the libretto, composer **Colin Bright** the music. **Nigel Kellaway** is directing. **Roland Peelman** is conducting and **Pierre Thibaudau** designing. **The Song Company** are singing and **Kevin Davidson** is doing the sound. This is an incredibly talented team staging a new work on the water in front of HMAS Vampire at the **Australian National Maritime Museum**, a site designer Thibaudau has previously worked for Entr'acte Theatre. True to the festival's water themes, to the significance given to outdoor performances and to the subject, the bombing by French agents of the Greenpeace flagship, this is an ideal setting. Another festival highlight. (Jan 10-15, 9.00pm).

Wondering about good eating in Darling Harbour? You do. Much has been said of Neil Perry's **Rockpool Restaurant** in The Rocks. But not so much of the little pool, the Oyster Bar where you used to be able to buy freshly shucked oysters and choose from a limited selection of fish dishes at very good prices. But a good idea is a good idea and now at the Rockpool's second venue, the **Star Grill Darling Harbour** you can eat the same oysters and choose from an all day bar menu. And for heady moments, in the Star's main room, the star attraction, the famous Rockpool Lobster awaits you.

Canberra Youth Theatre's Water Stories fuses Vietnamese water puppetry (floating on water) and Australian music and theatre in an exploration "of the similarities and differences of everyday life in both cultures highlighting the essential role water plays in both..." *Water Stories*, directed by Roland Manderson, features Canberra Youth Theatre, the **Song Ngoc Water Puppetry Troupe** and the **Canberra Youth Wind Orchestra** and is playing for both young and adult audiences. This is a rare opportunity for Sydney-siders to see water puppetry and such a distinctive cross-cultural collaboration. **Eastern Promenade, Darling Harbour** (beside Pyrmont Bridge), Jan 14 18, 5.00pm and 8.00pm; Jan 15, 18, 19, 2.30pm. Daytime audiences can walk over to the Maritime Museum and catch *Thalassa*, an exhibition on Greek Australians and the Sea, taking in "epic voyages of migration, country cafes, fish markets and pearling ports".



Canberra Youth Theatre and the Song Ngoc Vietnamese Puppetry Troupe, *Water Stories*

Beyond

Enough walking. The rest of the festival, but not a lot of it, is by car, bus or cab: **Neil Gladwin's** version of Wedekind's *Lulu* as physical theatre at Belvoir Street; and at the Seymour Centre, **Chunky Move's Bonehead**, directed and choreographed by **Gideon Orbarzanek**; and **Wole Soyinka's The Beatification of Area Boy** presented by the West Yorkshire Playhouse (with the support of the British Council's 1997 newIMAGES program) and bound to have a sell-out season with its rich theatricality and tough satire on Nigerian politics.

31 October 1996 - 2 February 1997

"one hundred years of political action"

women with attitude

**Greenway Gallery
Hyde Park Barracks Museum
Macquarie Street Sydney
Telephone 9223 8922
A National Museum of Australia
Travelling Exhibition**

canberra youth theatre

Water Stories



with Canberra Youth Wind Ensemble and
Hanoi's Song Ngoc Water Puppetry Troupe

Sydney Festival Jan 97
Canberra Festival Mar 97



H
HISTORIC HOUSES
TRUST OF NEW SOUTH WALES

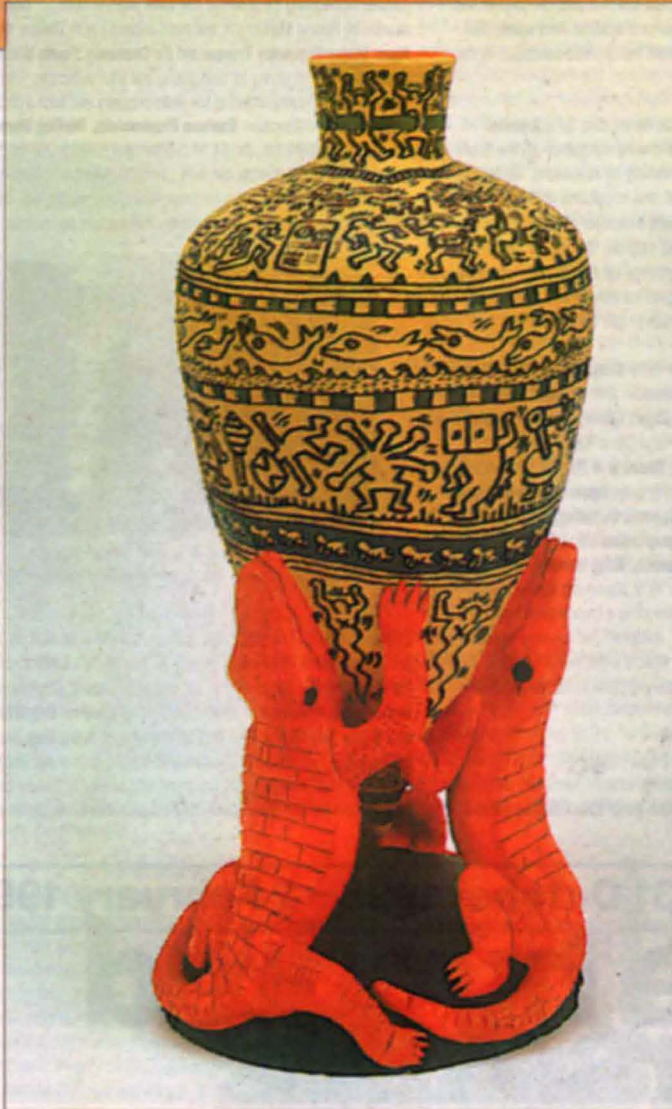


OFFICE OF THE
STATUS OF WOMEN





Keith Haring, *Untitled*, 1985
Museum of Contemporary Art, Circular Quay



Keith Haring, *Untitled (Alligator Vase)*, 1990
Museum of Contemporary Art, Circular Quay



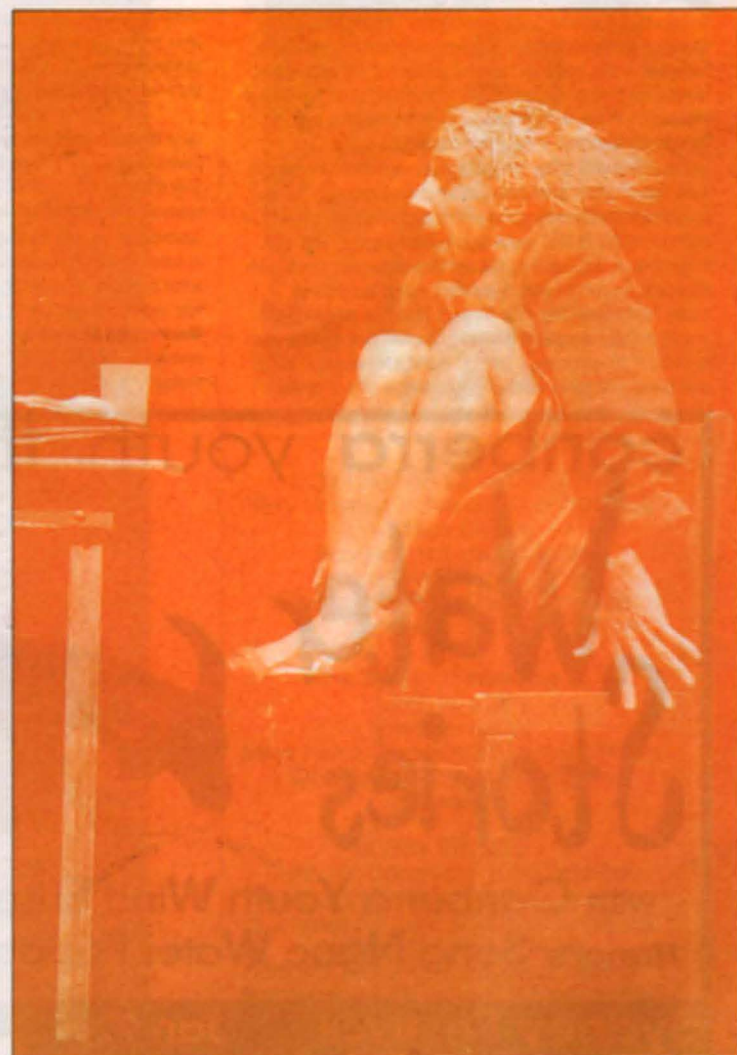
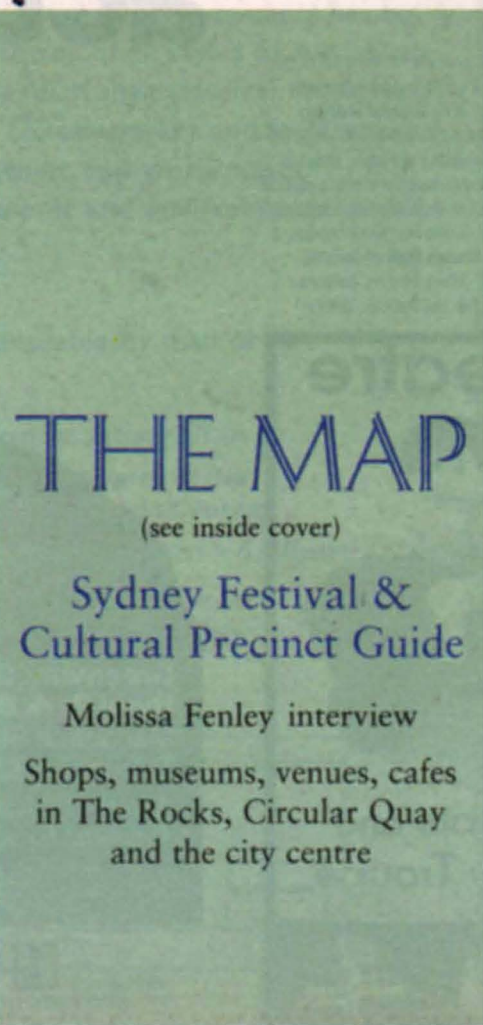
David Mach, *It Takes Two*, 25 metres long, two tonnes
Circular Quay

John McKechnie



Matt Kelso

Rahel Appelt, *A tribute to Murri domestic workers*, textile panel from triptych, 1994
from *Women with Attitude*, Hyde Park Barracks museum



Denise Stoklos in *Casa*
Playhouse, Sydney Opera House

Isia Jay