

OnScreen

Performance and the national arts

February–March 1997



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RealTime

newIMAGES Queensland Arts Policy Gay Film Sydney Festival Jane Campion Beaumont Children David Caesar

That the Mansfield Report on the ABC wasn't as harsh as anticipated is small consolation. It does nothing to lessen the impact of the current cuts. In fact, the situation is worsened by the recommendation that the ABC close down as a production house which, as the National Campaign for the Arts Australia (NCAA) argues, has been a valuable training ground "for thousands of people in film, radio, TV and multimedia". In its press release of January 24, the NCAA continues, "None of the small production houses will have the critical mass of resources which the ABC has to offer...The likely result is lower quality in programming...The second concern is about risk taking. Which of the 511 production houses currently operating in Australia will take risks with programming which the ABC currently does? If it is unlikely to be profitable, probably none. What guarantee does the Australian audience have that there will continue to be a plurality of voices, ideas and opinions?" On the Mansfield recommendation to close Radio Australia and Australian Television International News, the AETA (Australia-East Timor Association) press release of February 1 sees the move as supporting the federal government's disengagement from Asia and as a denial of vital information to countries who would then be dependent on US news. If the closure is implemented, it "would be seen at best as a crude attempt to deprive the region of a proper perspective of Australia and at worst an attempt to create an information void between Australia and the region". In the closing of the ABC as both a production house and as an international broadcaster, the government's likely actions will create cultural vacuums, within and without the nation. A vacuum is about to open up for writers—a financial one. Educational Lending Rights have been denied them altogether, and Public Lending Rights have been seriously devalued. The cuts are going to save the government very little but the PLR cut out on books published over 25 years ago will seriously hurt older writers. The brutal axing of the book bounty is another example of a government insensitive to artists' needs: "The book bounty could have been phased out as previously planned without jeopardising the alleged 650 projects currently in the pipeline" (Lynne Spender, *The Age*, September 2, 1996). Writers initiated their campaign for justice at the Sydney Festival Writer's Week, once again showing themselves leaders in the agitation for artists' rights. In *RealTime* 17 we broach the issue of the impact of the Australia Council's new Audience Development and Advocacy division on artists in an interview with manager Philip Rolfe. Maryanne Lynch searches for substance in the Queensland Government's arts policy. As Australia fumbles its relationship with Asia and Great Britain falters over the fine print of its union with Europe, we take an initial look at a subject we'll be exploring in some detail this year, cultural relations between Australia and Britain, how they've changed and what they're likely to become, prompted by the extensive, year long newIMAGES exchange program. The space between the two countries is not exactly a vacuum, but there are a lot of dead ideas and stereotypes ghosting about; it'll be intriguing to see what new images are revealed and genuinely exchanged.

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A new bottom line?

Maryanne Lynch interprets arts policy in Queensland

The arts have a curious status in Australian politics. In recent years senior ministers at both state and federal levels have taken on the portfolio, partly, one suspects, because the arts are seen as a vote-winning exercise, an opportunity for good pics, headline-grabbing grants and the display of the 'civilised' side of the man or woman in the job. Politicians quickly discover, however, that the arts are dangerous territory, populated by sharp tongues, quick wits and an overwhelming lack of bashfulness. Not to mention the workload. Still, they persist.

In Queensland the Minister for the Arts (Joan Sheldon) is also the Deputy Premier and the Treasurer. Not a small task. This triple responsibility—and the widespread 'doubling up' of the arts portfolio—raises the question of the place of the arts in Australia. What is the cultural vision of our governments? This is a question that seems to be unasked, or at least unanswered, by the Queensland Coalition Government.

Gaining tenuous power (with the support of an independent) in early 1996, the Borbidge government has struggled with the threat of scandal, the stench of the past and the reins of power. In arts terms its direction is unclear, and the suspicion is that there has not been much thought, or time for thought, given to arts policy. It just doesn't seem to have mattered. In consequence, the most commonly expressed view from the arts community (a shorthand term) is one of 'wait and see'. As Michael Snelling, director of the Institute of Modern Art, comments, "The proof is in the pudding, but it's hard to know what the pudding is". So, what do we know?

In its first year of government, among other things, the Coalition has instituted several reviews (most already pending) of arts bodies and government services, increased project funding, reduced the operational funds of Arts Queensland (the department), reduced the budgets of the statutory authorities (QTC, QAG etc.) and begun moves to rationalise their services, awarded several one-off grants outside of the established system, merged the Brisbane Festival and the Brisbane Biennial, and begun developing a ten-year strategic plan (sort of).

Limitations of space force me to focus on only a few policy areas here, and these only in relation to two of the branches of Arts Queensland—or the Office of Arts and Cultural Development. But first, the context.

Arts Queensland (AQ) was created by the Goss government in 1991. It comprises five branches, including a Strategic Development Branch and an Arts Development Branch (Film Queensland is another major branch). These two branches constitute a structure of arts programs, advisory groups, developmental strategies, funding rounds, peer assessments, social and special-interest policies, and the other accoutrements of present-day government. In short, AQ's establishment has meant a shift from what appeared to be arbitrary hand-outs and old boys' networks to a situation where the government and the arts community seem to be accountable to each other.

The system has been by no means perfect. The succession of Arts Ministers (six since 1986), for example, means that AQ is constantly having to cooperate with different departments and serve masters who don't always have a handle on the portfolio. However, its success can be

measured by the unusually high degree of support by the arts community and the general public's now ready assumption of the importance of the arts in everyday life.

The Coalition has retained the rhetoric and, indeed, many of the structures set up under Goss. Sheldon herself has commented favourably on the existing system. However, some recent developments do not bode well for the future. Here, I will look at three areas of concern: decision-making structures; infrastructural development; and the relationship of government and the arts.

The government is presently completing a review of peer assessment, the existing system for project and organisational funding. The review was long due given that the system was installed under Goss without much debate about its form. The Coalition's review discussion paper was circulated for public response over the Christmas-New Year period, not exactly a good PR move but perhaps simply an oversight. What *has* caused raised eyebrows is the perceived dismantling of an equitable and accountable decision-making process. Additionally, the paper is notably short on references to 'the arts' and long on cost effectiveness.

Briefly, the review committee has proposed that there be fewer peers (for example, three people to constitute the Performing Arts Panel, which covers projects concerning performing arts, music and dance, statewide), a reduction in panel meetings, and the abolition of the Arts Advisory Committee (AAC), the advisory body on project and organisational funding as well as, importantly, policy.

In the AAC's place it is proposed that there be a Cultural Advisory Council. This does not appear to enjoy the same responsibilities, and the proposal has led many to ask where the policy advice is to come from. The answer, some fear, is in a party committee, long in existence if not officially part of government, which has been making its presence felt.

Graeme Turner, retiring chair of the AAC, estimates that policy advice constituted two-thirds of the body's activities and advice on grant applications the remaining third. He questions the effect of dismantling the AAC and its 'arms-length' decision-making, and suggests—as do others—that 'the temptation may be to put dollars where they will make the biggest splash and where lobby groups are strongest'. (Turner was not consulted for the review.)

This suspicion is strengthened by several ad hoc decisions made by Sheldon last year. Amongst them was the funding of an overseas tour by the Queensland Youth Orchestra, an amateur body, its location in the old museum building, and the reinstatement of funds to the Townsville Chamber Music Festival. The Regional Arts Development Fund was also saved from a reduction in budget by the personal intervention of the Minister, although this body may have more grounds for such an action.

Philip Pike, Senior Policy Adviser to Sheldon and member of the review working party, dismisses such fears, describing the review in terms of simplifying processes and cutting costs. Whilst there is certainly some slack, and the review offers positive initiatives such as the formation of consultative committees in the areas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Cultural Diversity and New Technologies, the uncertainty about who has the power to

do what is unsettling.

The second area of concern is infrastructural development, the key to cultural development. In the 1996-97 arts budget, \$1.1 million in recurrent funds was allocated to "addressing the accommodation needs of major arts organisations". There were also other grants contributing to the development of services, such as \$1 million for regional library services. Also provided were the much promised funds for completion of the Southbank playhouse, an 800-seat performance venue in the arts precinct, as well as a call for tenders for QCC 2000, the final stage in the development of the precinct.

These are just some of the moves that the government wants to claim as initiatives. On closer examination, there are some pluses and some minuses. Whilst an Accommodation Task Force has been set up since the budget was announced, the reality is that \$1.1 million is negligible in bricks-and-mortar terms—and this is money that's been rolled from one budget to the next. More significantly, arts organisations other than the statutory authorities do not have a clear place in Coalition policy. Whilst multi-year funding is planned for these organisations, the means by which they are identified and fostered is unclear.

For example, the government has been developing a ten-year State Strategic Plan across all areas of government. The SSP was instigated by the Labor Government, but has been reworked by the Coalition. The plan will include performance indicators, to which all organisations must adhere. Greg Andrews, AQ Executive Director, describes the plan as "a document that says to the community, these are the government's priorities, this is the direction we are going in, these are the things that we are looking to enable these things to happen". In the arts context, the statutory authorities have been privy to some consultation but none of the major arts organisations have—at least, not by this government.

Without consultation, how are these performance indicators being developed? What will happen to an organisation which doesn't fit into the model developed under the plan? Or, more bluntly, who will be in and who will be out?

It does not bode well if arts policy is represented in the SSP by the concept (or afterthought?) of "a series of cultural elements to be included" (Andrews). Lindy Johnson, Chief Executive Office of the Queensland Artworkers Alliance, notes too that the statutory authorities may be gaining untoward power by their closer relationship to the SSP—without a level of accountability matching that of the arts organisations, adds Sue Rider (Artistic Director of La Boite Theatre). Stephen Armstrong, General Manager of the Queensland Theatre Company, sees things differently, arguing that the authorities face similar demands. He notes, "If you develop performance indicators built into the SSP, you are safeguarded. [However,] if your performance indicators are not, there's nothing against which they can be assessed in the future".

What all of this boils down to, quite possibly, is simply inexperience on the part of the government. The pressure may be on Sheldon anyway; she was listed in the *Courier-Mail's* 1996 round-up as one of the three ministers who hadn't performed well. (Industry confidence wasn't improved by one of her few regional initiatives: the promise of a

gallery in her own electorate.) However, there is an undeniably economic rationalist flavour to the government's moves, and the fear is that corporate culture will be imposed on the arts without an endeavour to ascertain how the two differ—and where they may meet.

For infrastructural development to take place, there needs to be a great deal of groundwork, including consultation, the provision of adequate funds and support, and a clear idea of the role of government. This brings me to the final concern: the nature of the relationship between government and the arts. More specifically, what is the responsibility of a state government to the arts and to cultural development in general?

This one is difficult, and the Borbidge government can't be expected to have it all sewn up. However, there is a need to work out the basic terms of reference. Pike comments, "When it comes down to it, the arts are the arts...I've never seen them in political terms". This doesn't count for much in the light of, say, a decision to fund or cut a service—and the circumstances surrounding this decision—much less, any view of the big picture.

Andrews talks of an emphasis on a purchaser-provider model, a concept that has been promoted nationwide by both Coalition and Labor governments. He says, 'The government either purchases services on behalf of the community or it provides them directly to the community...This government has clearly said that it will be the purchaser of services, not the provider'. Such a model calls for a vision, a philosophical positioning of the arts in relation to social as well as economic objectives, rendered even more particular by the responsibility of being a *state* government. Alternatively, the arts risk becoming a commodity, hollowed out of meaning and intent, and about as interesting as Great Barrier Reef T-shirts (cf Sarah Miller, "Development without culture", *RealTime* #15).

The Borbidge government as yet has failed to communicate a vision to the arts community. One observer notes, "It's difficult to see [Coalition] arts policy as other than a series of practices, rather than as a position towards which we are all moving". What is the impetus for these practices? One hot theory is that it's all about corporate culture. Consequently, a climate of insecurity is developing, perhaps unnecessarily, but without adequate information who's to say? People are still open to what the future may bring, but there's a noticeable reluctance to make public criticisms or question government actions—a wariness absent in the Goss years.

If, indeed, the underpinning of its 'practices' is economic rationalisation and that's it, then the Coalition will have missed the opportunity to help develop an arts culture, and a broader culture, of local relevance and national importance. If, as the rhetoric would have it, strengthening Queensland's cultural identity is the government's aim, a fundamental issue arises. Namely, does it have a clue how to do this other than by looking at the bottom line?

With thanks to Peter Anderson for his assistance.

Maryanne Lynch is a freelance writer and editor. She received an Arts Queensland Creative Development Grant in 1996.

Between the making and the selling

Philip Rolfe, Manager of the Audience Development and Advocacy division of the Australia Council, puts the Performing Arts Market in context in a discussion with Keith Gallasch

Faced with cuts to the ABC, ATSIC, AFC, the Australia Council and universities, artists have also been anxious about the impact of the restructuring of the Australia Council on their work. The establishment of the Audience Development and Advocacy (ADA) division of the Australia Council with a staff of 13, including as director Sue Ann Wallace and manager Philip Rolfe, and a multi-million dollar annual budget, looks advantageous to the furthering of artists' work through much needed national and international promotion. However, the drain on already depleted Fund staffing, thanks to job cuts and the needs of ADA, and the steady decline in the funding of artists in real terms over many years, makes many wonder at the size of the division and its budget. What is a workable proportionate relationship between creativity and its promotion? To what extent does the shift to marketing by the Australia Council at the same time reduce the funding of artists?

To date ADA has been very busy internationally, running a high profile for its role in managing the Performing Arts Market and the cultural wing of New Horizons in India. What has not been properly aired is the rationale for its existence and its scale. Is artist representation in its operations? What is its connection with the art form Funds? Is peer assessment part of its decision making? Who makes the decisions about who and what is to be marketed?

These issues were addressed in part in a conversation with Philip Rolfe which focussed on the Performing Arts Market as an example of ADA's operations, a timely one given the announcement "Arts market goes under the hammer" in *The Sydney Morning Herald* of January 22. Philip explained that audience development was a part of the art form Board activities of the Australia Council long before it was formalised in the new structure, and the Performing Arts Market was one of those ventures. New Horizons, and its incursions into Asia, was also inherited. Whether or not New Horizons will continue depends on federal government maintaining a commitment to its predecessor's initiative. The Performing Arts Market, however, has proven itself, and despite sub-editor rhetoric, is not being sold off but contracted out, as Council has done in various areas. Even so, there are possible ramifications to do with the process of selection of companies and works to be promoted.

The link between the Performing Arts Market and a performing arts festival (the sadly deceased National Festival of Australian Theatre in Canberra in 1994 and 1996), when, at one time and in one place, overseas entrepreneurs can see complete works, or sizeable chunks, is, Philip explained, a cost effective way of maximising attention to Australian performance. Previous visitors would "just miss by a few days probably the best production that had been on in the last six months and they'd end up sitting watching a video and talking about it with the artists rather than seeing it live". He feels that a bi-annual arts market is ideal: "The effect of one probably takes two to three years to run in, and it is questionable whether we have enough material every year to expose internationally".

Asked why he is not going to manage the next market, Philip replies, "We don't see ADA as setting up and running events perpetually. It was really important to do

the second one...we think that with that one, we got it right. The first one grew out of control a bit, to be honest. The second one was bigger, with more work exposed, a bigger exhibition area, and twice as many international visitors. But we set up the structure to cope with that scale and it worked really well. Also I think a number of people, particularly on some of the other funding bodies around the country, were still a bit sceptical about it and it was critical to bring them into the fold to make it work. I now think there's enough people who are convinced".

It is clear that ADA's terrain is national, dealing directly with state arts bodies—some states "paid the costs to get most of the companies and artists to the market: Arts Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia supported individuals representing companies or whole companies to come. Fundamentally, it's the only way it can really work". It is also an international terrain: "The Australia Council and the Department for Foreign Affairs paid for quite a few overseas visitors in the first market and we were determined not to do that the second time. Although we had a budget to assist with accommodation and airfares for the people we really wanted to come, we discovered we only needed half of that budget this time and we got more people than we expected". This was the result of putting in "a lot of time and effort to cement it as an event in Europe and in North America—a huge amount of faxing and letter writing, advertising at select conferences internationally where arts people tend to get together. Examples include the Informal European Theatre Meeting (IETM) which is a huge event in Europe every year; the International Society of Performing Arts (ISPA), which is American-based but they have an international conference; the Tokyo Performing Arts Market where we had a presence last year; the Federation of Asian Cultural Promotion (FACP); and CINARS at Montreal. So even though this is only the second Arts Market that's occurred in Australia, it's already expected that it's going to be a regular thing and these networks all recognise that".

But does this terrain include artists themselves as negotiators, as decision makers in the promotion of Australian art overseas? "With the second market we didn't advertise as such. We did it essentially through the Performing Arts Board and because of the need to get the states involved, we asked every state to propose groups. The Performing Arts Board determined a brief for the last market that focussed on physical theatre, contemporary dance, circus and outdoor performance. That decision-making is now situated in a new area of the Council, Audience Development and Advocacy. A lot of things have gravitated into that area that were set up elsewhere. The next market will have a different theme, a different kind of mix. Some people thought that the physical stuff at this market was overdone, that there was far too much of it, that people would go away with the impression that that's all that Australia ever did. But in a way if you try to present a little bit of everything it doesn't necessarily work either. And this one was pretty remarkable because for the first time you had something like six circuses of the new wave in one spot."

Of course, the Performing Arts Board that set the brief was made up largely of

practising artists. What of the future? "The Funds will have input into the theme. They will be given enough background to make informed decisions, propose the kinds of groups that might be approached. We have just started a process of groups meeting to discuss arts exports. The groups are made up of a Fund chairperson or member, other artist peers and experts in marketing in the particular field, for example the Visual Arts and Craft group includes Djon Mundine, Bill Gregory, Jo Heitter and Julie Ewington. This group, literature and a joint group of dance, music and theatre are all meeting at the end of January." Philip notes that these are not on-going committees. Groups are selected according to expertise and the needs of particular programs.

What about the organisation selected to run the market? "One of the functions of the people selected to run the market might well be the selection too." Would they consult with the Australia Council on priorities? "Yes, but if you give someone a job to do, you should let them do it. I think choice is always going to be subjective and that's good." And the states, too, will make their recommendations.

As with the Major Organisations Fund of the Australia Council, the Foundation of Culture and the Humanities, and the meagre representation of artists on the New Horizons planning committees, so with ADA we see artists slipping further and further away from having a direct say in their collective future, falling off the edge of a newly laid terrain, or shifted about it like chess pieces, mere 'content producers'—a role for artists applauded by Hilary McPhee during the restructuring of the Australia Council and mocked by Laurie Anderson on her recent Australian tour. Unless artists can apply to be included in promotional campaigns and unless peer assessment is maintained as an Australia Council priority, they will be the subjects of the picking and choosing by independent managers of the Performing Arts Market, state funding bodies and ADA itself. The good news, however, is the setting up of the art form advisory groups to discuss arts exports, even if they are not on-going and even if the brevity of their contact with ADA and each other severely limits their likely influence on policy. As the restructuring of the Australia Council clearly intended, the Council is the ultimate decision-maker. In this case, the advice of the groups and ADA goes to Council for approval as a work plan.

While there's no denying Philip Rolfe's experience, his judgment, his support for hybrid and new media arts, his fair-mindedness and his sense of purpose and vision, for him the lines are clearly drawn: I ask "What's it like for someone like you who's worked inside the Performing Arts Board all those years to be now working in this area?" "It's great. What I like about it is that you can concentrate on getting things right. If you've got the right funding processes confused with the marketing processes then it's very hard to do them properly. It's much clearer if you separate the two functions. What people have to get used to with the Australia Council, and what we've got to communicate better, is that there are clearly two functions. Funding is one thing, audience market development is another."

"It's critical that what Audience Development and Advocacy do, how it fits into the Council, gets addressed.

Fundamentally, I think that the Council has had a funding role for many years but what Audience Development and Advocacy is aiming to do is critical in the environment we live in, promoting or enhancing the income opportunities for Australian artists. Its helping people to earn more and everyone wants to do that. No-one is averse to it."

I ask the burning question even though I know it will be doused, "Can artists apply to Audience Development?" "No. We don't have a peer process. It's strategic and about projects". "So once it gets to the marketing stage, it doesn't have anything to do with the Funds?" "Well it doesn't have to do with their function, but clearly the Chair of the Theatre Fund and its members are going to be vitally interested in what market development is doing in respect of theatre. And that would be integral to how things are decided. It's just that it won't be their job to fund it. Cross communication in Council is vital."

"The \$176,000 to *The Australian's Review of Books*, there's some curiosity about communication and the process there." "There will be decisions made that may not be liked by everyone but they'll be done with the best of intentions for everyone." Philip asks me what I think of that publication. "The first was interesting, the rest...It's not living up to what it promised. If I was an Australian writer relying on a publication like this, I'd be pissed off."

We end, agreeably, on ADA's good works, discussing AsiaLink and the long term impact of its excellent residencies created in part with ADA and business funds (including Mazda and Cameron Macintosh), the role of ADA in the newIMAGES program focussed largely on promotion of Australian artists appearing in the UK in 1997 through better media exposure, especially on the Edinburgh Fringe, especially for Australian comics, for classical music groups and for the artists performing at LIFT (London International Festival of Theatre)—or *writing* at LIFT as *RealTime* will be. "We're also hoping to get a number of Australian artists and curators and producers into England in 1997 to have meaningful discussions with their counterparts about the concept of Australian work and opening up possibilities for Australian work. Whether you like it or not Britain's still a critical place for the arts."

Good works and good intentions are to be applauded. There's no doubt that strategic, across the board promotion of Australian artists has been long awaited, despite the many existing initiatives from Australia Council Boards over many years, some now inherited by ADA. But the role artists are to play in their own promotion looks limited, even if one is grateful in the current climate that their advice is being sought at all. Their fate is in the hands of those who know better. That's okay if you have someone like Philip Rolfe who has earned that trust. I look forward to ADA communicating its role, and to the existing participation of artists strengthened. As further funding cuts appear likely and a new Chair with new priorities is about to be appointed, this a critical time for the Australia Council and artists to present a united front and maintain the joint consultation that has made the Council so effective over so many productive years.

Finding the lost children

Matthew Leonard's Beaumont children notebook

Phone call from Victoria:

Man rang to state that he had just had a vision that the Beaumont children were wrapped up in old sleeping blankets in an old fashioned house with a grey sloping roof. The house was on a very rough road at the top of the Mt. Lofty Ranges, and the road ran off to the left. Believes they are alive, because he could see them looking up and all they could see was the top of the ranges.

Adelaide CIB phone log, February 1966

★★★★★

I know where the Beaumont children are: they exist in thousands of words written in 30 year-old newspapers, in the humourless shorthand of police lingo and in about 20 minutes of mainly silent black and white film footage. These most lost of all Australia's lost kids inhabit hundreds of pages of text—as if their absence triggers a flurry of words to fill the vacuum.

The files fill a room. Amongst the 1700 phone calls logged by investigating police in the ten days following the Australia Day 1966 disappearance are many like the above. Other more pessimistic citizens had visions of the children strangled, buried, sailing in a boat with blue cushions and sitting in a milk bar in Mildura. This of course was the year that Crawford's *Homicide* premiered on Australian television.



Searchers on Glenelg Beach, courtesy of the Adelaide Advertiser

photographer unknown

Film archive:

Police cadets don gasmasks...A bulldozer rolls forward and overturns a wave of household refuse. A train of men crouch over the smoking garbage and prod at it gingerly with sticks...Most of the ABC's film clips show police wandering around suburban streets, but in one brief cut filmed within a day or two of the disappearance, Jim and Nancy Beaumont are sitting with police on the porch of their neat house. Mrs Beaumont, in floral dress, has her hand to her mouth.

In the only sound film interview with the Beaumonts, recorded nine and a half months after the kids disappeared from Glenelg Beach, Dad Jim fiddles with his Wayfarer sunglasses while Nancy constantly bites her lip, hands clasped. It's impossible to tell what they're thinking.

In other footage, an absence of sound turns viewing into an interpretive exercise, only making sense when cross-referenced with the detailed press reporting of the time—invaluable too for decoding the carefully censored entries in the police files. In 1966, newspapers usually published complete names or initials, and addresses of

witnesses associated with a big story.

I interviewed two veteran journalists who'd covered the case for the racy tabloids *Truth* and *Sun-Pictorial*. Tom Prior, who'd also reported the infamous kidnapping of Vauluse schoolboy Graham Thorne, broke down as he read one of his stories from thirty years ago. On assignment for the then *Melbourne Sun Pictorial*, Prior captured a sense of the desolate parents; Jim wandering into the Glenelg police station—sometimes twice a day—in the hope of some scrap of information.

Detectives in Adelaide, as in any other city, are pretty hard men. But they found it difficult to answer Mr. Beaumont

Adelaide Advertiser, February 2, 1966

Something about the hot summer of '66 got under their skin...the futility of the hoaxes, leads and tip-offs caused several hardened police roundsman—possibly policemen too—to re-evaluate their professions.

Film archive:

On all-fours, dragging a long pole through black sludge, a policeman with hat perched on his head; then a younger cadet peering into a storm-water drain. On the street in front of Glenelg Town Hall, two young constables look at a page torn from a family photo album.

★★★★★

The popular writing about the Beaumonts in crime anthologies and the '30 years ago today' features reiterate the same essential narrative...remains one of Australia's most notorious unsolved etc.'...In the genre of 'missing kid' writing, the children are always passive, defenceless innocents.

Talking over the case with writer Beth Spencer transformed my interpretation of the events. I thought of Beth when I read that the eldest child Jane was carrying a copy of *Little Women* on the day she disappeared. Beth, who did her thesis on the book, also has a bit of a thing for *Peter Pan*; she seemed a natural choice to collaborate on the program. I showed her video, photocopied dozens of pages from newspapers. It's easier to feel closest to the nine-year old Jane through a letter her parents released to the newspapers—they hoped it would demonstrate Jane's maturity, following criticism over their decision to allow the kids to go to the beach alone.

...I have put Grant's nappy on so there is no need to worry about him wetting the sheet.

In her essay *Who's Watching the Children* Beth recalls her favourite childhood game of 'kidnap':

I'd be strolling nonchalantly through the garden, minding my own business, humming a little, smelling the flowers, when suddenly two great burly brutal men would leap out from behind the camellia bushes and grab me. They'd clamp their hands over my mouth and drag me kicking and screaming ("shh...not too loud...") into the house and down the hall to Vicki's pink and white bedroom.

Beth Spencer, 101—*The Beaumont Children*

Beth's story reminded me of the highly sexualised context of so many children's games, which is important not as some defining motive in the Beaumont crime, but as an acknowledgment of children as active entities, albeit ultimately powerless recipients of adult attention. In the famous eye-witness account of the children playing with the suspicious 'tall blond man' on Colley Reserve after swimming, Jane is flicking the man in the face with her towel and later allows him to dress her.

Beth suggested that Jane's mother's printed denial that Jane would ever allow such a thing possibly indicates the gap between parental understanding and the romantic ideas of young girls: "...often it's their fantasy of who their children are". A report I wasn't able to confirm also said that Jane had talked about 'her boyfriend' down at the beach in the days before they went missing.

What might they (the Beaumont children) represent for those children for whom the opposite of innocence is not guilt, but knowledge. Those 'wise' before their time, living with physical and emotional violence as an everyday occurrence, and for whom perhaps the line between kidnap and rescue is a fine one?

Beth Spencer, 101—*The Beaumont Children*

Beth imagined the Beaumont children in Neverland, "like lost children who never grow up, disappearing off the map one day..." The media representations of the children snap freeze in time, standing in their backyard holding flowers from their garden. Beth also suggests that the most troubling aspect of Neverland, at least for adults, is that it represents the possibility of an independent world for children out of the orbit of parental control/protection.

★★★★★

Doing a Freedom of Information search on a case like this is a fishing expedition. Coily you ask for an assessment as to whether you can access some of the files. As a theoretically still-active case (ie the cops don't know what happened), the police don't even have to acknowledge the existence of the most obvious kinds of official documentation. What comes back two months and \$320 later is about 300 pages of phone logs, search records and summaries, about 80 pages of which is so faint as to be illegible.

Hundreds of Adelaideans dobed in their sons-in-law, ex-husbands, employees and next door neighbours to the Major Crime Squad.

Mr...of Prospect states that his former stepfather could be the man wanted by police...

Mr...of Wayville rang to say that an employee of his is, in his opinion responsible for the Wanda Beach murders,

Police Release Note From Missing Girl

24-1-66

Dear Mum and Dad, I am just about to go to bed and the time is 9:00 I have just finished my homework and there is no need to worry about my sleep in my bed, but so one of you will have to sleep with me above. Although my room are in very good condition I hope you find them as comfortable as we do.

Goodnight to you both,
Jane xxx

P.S. I hope you had a very nice time whenever you went.

P.S.S. I hope you don't mind me taking your radio into my room, Daddy.

ROYAL PLANE

Police yesterday released a touching note written by Jane Beaumont.

the missing Beaumont children and the body at Christies Beach.

Mrs...of Seacombe Gardens reports that her husband has been acting strangely during the past week. She got home from work one morning and found a younger man's suit draped over a chair...

All of this domestic mayhem is recorded with little irony by the police. In the neatly typed pages is a city gone loopy, with amateur psychics and social miscreants in equal measure. The calm family serenity of the city of churches appears, in these documents at least, only a veneer: *informant had a vivid dream...held a seance last night...claims to have psychic powers.*

Entry:

Mrs...of Glandore advises she has just had a dream that the three Beaumont children were taken in a boat with blue cushions.

Dreams and visions seemed to offer as much hope for resolution as did the hard yakka of South Australia's finest.

★★★★★

In the last few photocopied pages of the Adelaide C.I.B. phone log, there is a reference to a photo published in *The Sunday Mail* dated January 29, 1966. Taken in May 1965, when the Beaumont family were on holidays on the Yorke Peninsula, it shows Jim and Nancy with Jane, Arna and Grant, and an unidentified woman friend, smiling.

Entry 235: Adelaide C.I.B. phone log:

It has been established that the woman...are good friends (sic) of Beaumonts, who are surprised that they have not heard from them since their children disappeared. They (my emphasis) have no children but recently they have stated they intended to adopt some.

Postscript:

In late 1996, forensic archaeologist Dr Geraldine Hodgson completed the excavation of the warehouse at #1 Wilton Ave Somerton Park, identified by Dutch psychic Gerard Croiset on November 11, 1966 as the grave of the Beaumont children. Dr Hodgson is "completely satisfied" that the children are not there.

101—*The Beaumont Children, performed by Beth Spencer, produced by Matthew Leonard for Radio-Eye, ABC Radio National, January 26, 1997. Copies are available from ABC Radio Tapes, GPO Box 9994, Sydney, 2001 for \$20.*

Matthew Leonard is a producer with ABC radio's documentary and features program Radio Eye.

Talking it over

A selection of responses to the 1997 Sydney Festival

The focussing of the festival around Circular Quay, shows on and in the water, and the concentration of the timetable into two weeks, plus some innovative and thematic programming with an intelligent populist edge (some of it free), is Anthony Steel's legacy to the Sydney Festival. As several writers in the press have advised, Leo Schofield would be wise to build on Steel's successful strategies. At a stiff farewell for Steel at the Town Hall, one rude wit observed, "If they're so bloody grateful to him, why don't they give him an extra \$2 million and invite him to stay instead of getting old 'two lunches' in". The common assumption is that Leo is going to offer us a middlebrow menu, high on stodgy, low on stimulating new Australian tucker. The other assumption is that he's going to get a lot more money to do it, and otherwise presumably wouldn't have taken the job on. But will Leo in Sydney be the same as Leo in Melbourne? Well, Bob Carr certainly wishes it ("a truly international festival") devoutly, and *tactfully* said as much publicly the day before he farewelled Steel. Steel was gracious to a fault in his farewell speech and clearly had the crowd on his side.



Royal de Luxe Le Peplum

When you stop to think, after two weeks of non-stop festival and fringe intensity, the festival was framed for the first time, as a dinkum festival should be, by what was said about it. Steel got thrown off 2GB by a righteous Mike Gibson (a real opportunity to unleash a dislike of arts ponces?) for using the word "bullshit" in response to Jim Waites' *Sydney Morning Herald* review of Wole Soyinka's *The Beatification of Area Boy*. Nigel Kellaway got to air his anger over the reviews of the Colin Bright-Amanda Stewart opera *The Sinking of the Rainbow Warrior* when interviewed by Jim Schembri in *The Age* and composer Colin Bright got a letter in the SMH.

Nigel Jamieson's *Kelly's Republic* also unleashed the odd letter to the editor and a lot of talk amongst artists about why it didn't work, why Jamieson hadn't got a writer in to shape (and edit) the work, why he bothered to appropriate the bobcat baller from Red Square, why he didn't exploit the Opera House forecourt site instead of going for yet-another-rock-opera-scaffolding-look, why he and the festival would even bother with the Kelly story. Healthy questions, but lots liked designer Edie Kurzer's big 'Nolan' Neds.

Post-show Laurie Anderson crowds bumbled about whether Laurie had gone reactionary, turned hypocrite, misread the technological moment; and why she was reading aloud, talking so much and not singing their favourite toons? It was a good debate and still a very good show. Would they have tolerated last year's *unplugged* reading gig? Molissa Fenley also generated a lot of heat. Despite several visits to Australia she's never hit it off with the dance community. They turn out for the shows

and leave scowling and muttering. I couldn't catch the words.

Neil Gladwin's *Lulu* for Belvoir Street generated only nostalgia for the Jim Sharman-Louis Nowra version for Lighthouse (Adelaide, 1982) which was more than half good, especially in Judy Davis' *Lulu*—wisely light years away from the Louise Brooks' interpretation. Davis' *Lulu* was all the more dangerous because the men and women attracted to her failed to see the manic energy that drove her and would destroy them...and her. Gladwin's *Lulu* is a pouting teenager who's into jazz ballet (as a sex substitute?), and the lesbian scenes are as about as coy as you could get.

The Beatification of Area Boy suffered a slow opening night in a difficult theatre, consequently most of the talk was about whether or not it was a good play badly done, or a middling play quite well done. The issues were left aside. Soyinka's account of corruption in modern Nigeria is frightening; the casual mix of superstition and economic opportunism is as scary in its own way as the everyday of fascism. Good

humour and communal music don't alleviate the fatalism that increasingly pervades the play. There's little humanist goodwill at the end of *Area Boy*. Despite, or even because of, act two plot machinations, this is a vision close to despair. Lucky Perth to have Soyinka on the spot to talk to, to exchange the words about the play that weren't spoken here (save a few in an interview on *Arts Today*).

The rest was talk about what you didn't get to see, and why you should have made the effort: for example, how good Royal De Luxe's open air spectacle parody of epic movies, *Le Peplum*, was, even though it was about nothing more than sheer production cunning and theatrical silliness—a (miniature) city crushed by the feet of a giant pedal-operated Colossus, the ritual opening of hundreds of litres of low fat milk for the obligatory naked bathing scene, a stunning naval battle, a wretched Odorama machine. See *Le Peplum*, Perth, and believe it.

Some of the talk was about why the best two shows in the festival, Denise Stoklos' darkly hilarious and virtuosic *Mary Stuart* and *Casa* were, for the most part, poorly attended? Too many words? Too manic? The wrong word of mouth?

Yo, Leo, at a time of minimal arts coverage on the media, surely it's time for the Sydney Festival to get into a bit of serious talk. Why leave it all to Writers' Week? Other festivals field daily talks and panels, not always well done but with the potential for deepening an audience's commitment to a festival and to caring about the issues that artists engender. Here's some of the buzz on the 1997 Sydney Festival.

KG

Molissa Fenley, MCA; Rishile Gumboot Dancers, Playhouse, Sydney Opera House; Chunky Move, Bonehead, Seymour Centre

Watching her performance at the MCA, I began to think about Molissa Fenley's face. These days her body doesn't move so frenetically as in the days of *Hemispheres* or the solo *Rite of Spring* I saw her perform in 1984 and 1990 respectively. In these three short works she is more minimal, essential, ethereal, modernist maybe. These are the words we toss around as we stand outside the MCA afterwards watching Xavier Juillot's tiger tail sculpture dancing in air outside the Opera House. It's not Molissa Fenley's sculptural movement that engages me—except for those moments when she lets herself fall from grace, shifting her centre of gravity sideways or slipping at the knee. They move me forward on my chair, but it's her face that takes me in. In *Savanna*, I try to concentrate on her elegant arms, adjusting my own body to yet another uncomfortable audience vantage point in this most unsatisfactory of performance venues (creaky stage, bagpipe music filtering through the windows). Molissa Fenley is a dancer much admired by composers because of the serious attention she pays to music. As she dances with Peter Garland's piano composition, *Walk in Beauty*, you sense two works in dialogue. But it's in the second piece, *Trace*, that I fix on her face. Here she dances first in silence and then to the human voice—on this night Anthony Steel reading appropriately fast and deadpan a vertiginous text by John Jesurun about a man who has lost his memory and finds himself caught between the warp and the weft of a woven carpet.

Why her face? Maybe I'm wary of the idea of bodies as universally legible. Two nights ago watching the Rishile Gumboot Dancers I cursed the festival for not translating in the program the songs the dancers were singing. Without words, what was I to read from these thin, muscled bodies from Soweto dancing this unlikely music in big boots? With no knowledge of the traditions of these movements I rely on the shape of the performance to connect me—the rapport between the dancers and with the audience, their casual animation and sophisticated sense of play, the way they move from everyday talk to complex musical rhythms slapped on boots and bodies; the way this becomes heightened performance and then falls so easily back into the rhythms of daily life from which it has sprung.

Faces are generally easier to read than bodies—except dancers' faces. Eleanor Brickhill says that dancers sometimes look like they've been called to the door at midnight. Drawn in by Molissa Fenley's face I watch her move through this dance. It's as if she's trying to say something on the tip of her toe. At one moment she looks inward, as if she is being moved by the music, or her own body, or possessed, infected by some energy. At other times she is blankfaced, unmoved, going through the motions. Then she's alert, watching herself move. Through the subtle changes in her face I read a body in dialogue with itself and with the music or text, trying to articulate for an audience something that in the end can't be said. In the last piece, *Bardo*, her tribute to Keith Haring, this feeling is most literally manifest. Here her face is serene as she enters the underworld, the place between death and reincarnation in Buddhist belief. With Somei Satoh's enveloping *Mantra* she moves in swoops and glides, scuffs and reaches, nodding occasionally in the direction of Keith Haring's gestures in angles and turned toes. Here she moves through a place where words are dissolved, space reconfigured. Here all that remains is the will to move from left to right, over, up and through. The light fades on her mid-movement.

Molissa Fenley only did two shows for the festival and a talk with video about her early collaboration with Keith Haring. This was her first ever performance in Sydney but clearly not meant as a major event. She received a somewhat ho-hum response and copped one of the most vitriolic reviews I've read, from



Clive Burch as the Narrator in *The Sinking of the Rainbow Warrior* photo by Karen Somma

former ballerina and foot-in-the-door TV journalist Sonia Humphrey in *The Australian*, who found the dancer disappointing in every way. "She doesn't do floorwork...nor does she jump... she doesn't spin either. Most disturbingly, she does not emote."

While the dance community might have been just as ambivalent about Chunky Move's *Bonehead*, they were quiet about it. This one was a hit with audiences and it certainly scooped the critical accolades. "A bold achievement...Disturbing undercurrents beg more thoughtful examination" (Jill Sykes SMH). Makes you think—though nobody seemed keen to elaborate on *what* it makes you think. All it made me think was about all the other moralistic dance narratives I've seen about big bad cities full of alienated humanity. It seems Gideon Orbazane said something off the top of his head like, "David Lynch goes to the ballet" and *Bonehead* was suddenly attributed with surreal vision. Weak jokes passed for "savage satire". A flip reference to David Cronenberg's *Crash* in the work suddenly claimed for it equal intelligence—"something of Cronenberg's dark grotesquerie although fortunately with infinitely more intriguing results", said Deborah Jones in *The Australian*.

Gideon Obarzanek's comic strip choreography in *Fast Idol* at The Performance Space two years ago was inventive and hinted at something more substantial to come. Since then he's created part two in *Lurch* (performed by Nederlands Dans Theatre in September) and part 3 in *Bonehead*, and according to the press is turning out "one gobsmacking dance work after another" (*Sun Herald*). What was missing from *Bonehead* was any sign of thoughtful examination. Maybe in the end there's not much more you can do with that Wham! Bham! Kerplunk! stuff. I found it empty headed. For all its jumping, spinning, emoting stabs at meaningfulness, it had nothing to say about sexuality or violence or, importantly, dancing. Dead-eyed dancers paraded costumes, mouthed banalities and moved from headlock to simulated sex, musical collage nodding in agreement. Makes you think. Virginia Baxter

Virtual Lagoon, North Sydney Olympic Swimming Pool

Virtual Lagoon, the underwater sound installation courtesy of French composer Michel Redolfi and team, was a great idea for a nation that has great sporting and athletic activities written in its stars. The decision to put a symphony under water, or more to the point, on the bottom of the local Olympic swimming pool, was a stroke of genius.

Virtual Lagoon was not billed as an art event as such by Michel Redolfi in his introductory remarks but as an experience to be had, that needed no understanding, decoding or analysis. All you had to know was that the underwater harmonic environment was created by the interaction of moving bodies with submerged optical sensors; that we the participants were the orchestrators of the event, and so get to it! One hundred people charged for the pool, brimming with excitement and near hysteria,



Michel Redolfi Virtual Lagoon

Christoph Gerigk

to dive, swim, float and snorkel their way up, down and under the water, to hear and feel 'real coral life' courtesy of our very own Barrier Reef. The score consisted of the 'noise' of mammal fish and mollusc marine life with a bass track overlaid with a glorious soprano interspersed with text (most notably some expletives in a male voice that punctuated the otherwise ambient soundscape).

It was claimed that one could create a relationship with the gigantic pebble sculptures by Lyonel Kouro that inhabited the bottom of the pool, offering, said the program, "a vast Zen Garden to explore". Well try as I might, the Zen pebble remained true to its name and spoke not to me at all.

From inside this spacious underworld, looking up through the watery ceiling, the image of the outside world looked soft and unreal. On this particular evening it was chilly and whilst the light rain contributed to the experience, we really needed oxygen tanks because the best place to be was under so that this symphony could be appreciated in full. Fighting for breath from under or floating on the surface with snorkels was ultimately frustrating. Having to constantly navigate kicking feet, flailing arms and potential head-on collisions, in the end the event became a pool party, and whilst the technology was obviously sophisticated, the event was simplicity itself.

Victoria Spence

Sonic Waters, Neilsen Park

This was a free Sydney Festival event and as such had drawn a blend of suntan-clad inner city sophisticates, North Shore matriarchs and their attendant broods, a few arts junkies like myself and working class families from the West. Some, armed with masks, snorkels, goggles were obviously here for the submarine sound experience. Others just out for a Saturday picnic and swim were wondering what the hell that thing was floating out near the shark net. The program said it was meant to be a giant inflatable jellyfish inspired by Matisse's "Le Bêtes de la Mer", but it looked like a huge buoyant Chupachup wrapper. The nine wooden poles that held up the netting were decorated with blue and white ripple strips meant to invoke another Matisse painting, "La Vague", and to appear like vertical waves or ripples emerging from the real surf. Algae-patterned weather vanes sat atop each pole, spinning and buzzing in the breeze. Apparently, the only way to hear the music was to immerse oneself, so I stripped down to my gaudy Speedos, donned goggles, waded through the mild shore break and made the transition to underwater space/time.

Sound coming from everywhere and nowhere. I'd been told sound in water travels four times faster than in air and only ten per cent of it is picked up by the eardrum. Ninety percent is heard by bone conduction, mainly through skull, jaw and neck but with very limited dynamic range as only certain frequencies register. New agey keyboard music washes over, under, around and through me, but this is deeply layered and thoughtfully constructed. Mutator software (developed by computer artist William Latham and mathematician Stephen Todd) "grows" music organically in controlled fractal expansion through genetic algorithms that progress in cycles of birth, growth and decay. Chaos

theory techno-aesthetically tamed. Waves of pre-recorded, pre-equalized natural marine sounds, whale and dolphin songs, tinkly synthesiser motifs, cascades of ethereal flutes and woodwinds are introduced into the stew by the composer, Michel Redolfi, doing a live mix from the balcony of a hut adjoining the beach, assisted by his two sound designers Luc Martinez, also from Nice in France, and Daniel Harris from New York, both composers themselves.

I'm getting drunk on sound in these heady sonic waters. You can actually feel the music vibrating through your body. I need some air. I float on my back, hanging off the jellyfish, my head and ears still below the water, still absorbing the sound field, looking up into blue sky heaven, although the coldish salt water and rolling surf intermittently break my reverie. This could be bigger than float tanks and much more interactive and user-friendly. With a mild shock the hushed and accented tones of the composer's voice break in, informing us the concert, which has now been going for seven hours, is drawing to an end. He lets us down gently by slowly fading the music and letting the natural submarine sound environment of far away jetcats, ferries and breaking surf, re-establish itself and us in real time.

Drying myself off on the beach I wondered how I was going to effectively convey the gist of this transforming experience to someone who wasn't there. In the end it was best summed up by the sight and sound of a young girl running from the water, long hair flying, throwing herself down beside her mother who was absorbing radiated waves of a more visible kind and blurting out, "Mummy! Mummy! The water's full of music!".

George Papanicolaou

The Sinking of the Rainbow Warrior, The Song Company, australYSIS

The Eighth Wonder and *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* are entirely predictable recent operas, their dramatic shapes inherited from the 19th century, their music closer to the musical than to the significant operas of the 20th century. *The Sinking of the Rainbow Warrior*, on the other hand, constantly and engagingly surprises. Although musically it inclines to an accessible modernism—save where it trips into rap and rock or achieves a sustained open-ended lyricism—this opera is theatrically (in the interplay of composition and libretto) a potent contemporary work. Some of its power was unleashed in its premiere production on and in the water, a barge, a yacht and HMAS Vampire on Darling Harbour. Its Australian antecedents and companions are the music theatre works documented in John Jenkins and Rainer Linz's timely *Arias* (Red House Editions, Footscray 1997). Many of the most interesting of the cited works parallel contemporary performance in their play with meaning, states of being, narrative and site. You cannot bring 19th century expectations to these works. Those who have seen *Einstein on the Beach*—or, more pertinently, Robert Ashley's *Improvement (Don Leaves Linda)*—will know the pleasure born of patience when confronted with new opera. Even so, any opera, even the most conventional, renders words and narrative unintelligible from time to time as music drowns words, as the demands of the notes distort words into sound, or, as is most

often the case, it is sung in another language.

I invoke 'intelligibility' because it was the issue with which the production of *The Sinking...* and the librettist in particular were punished in reviews—despite aspects of the work being praised. And while I would be party to some of the criticism (there were many distances involved which made the audience work too hard, lose their attention, stare into the dark for action that was elsewhere or underlit) I had no more or less a struggle with the work than I've had with many an opera or music theatre work. Unlike plays and musicals, operas do not often make for a complete experience the first time around. The movement from impressions to understanding is gradual. There was however, much in *The Sinking...* that was lucid, much of the libretto that was amplified, even made quite literal at times, by designer Pierre Thibaudau and director Nigel Kellaway's exploitation of the site, use of projections, of spy thriller imagery, and of sound—exquisitely designed by Kevin Davidson. The clarity of the scoring and fine ensemble playing of Bright's music by australYSIS, conducted by Roland Peelman, invariably created space for the singers' voices. The physical and theatrical confidence of the Song Company was amazing given that acting is not their business—aided by Kellaway's understanding of the non-psychological portraits in Stewart's libretto. Even so, the desire as an audience member to understand was strong, even when absorbed by the production's dramatic images and sounds. Those of us who purchased a program—synopses should have been distributed free—and got time to read it in the fading light were no doubt advantaged.

The particular challenge of Amanda Stewart's libretto is that it operates both from narrative episodes (not always causally linked) and, especially, from a rich variety of voices (created, documentary, fluid, fragmented), and while individual moments and shapes are easy to grasp—a love duet, an interrogation, a monologue of loss—assembling the whole is more a reflective than a logical act. Even so, the overall progression of the work is chronological, once initiated by the ghost of Fernando Pereria (the photographer killed in the bombing of the Rainbow Warrior) emerging vocally from an eerie rumbling bass underworld. (There are too many like pleasures in the work to mention here.)

I hope that *The Sinking of the Rainbow Warrior* gets a second production, so often the vital opportunity for any opera's future. While its creators are enamoured of the work as site-specific, a theatre (or other interior space) version with the same creative team could give the libretto its real chance, and a clearer indication how expertly Bright has responded to Stewart's idiosyncratic use of language and made it his own. This first production warrants praise in every department. It was true to the ambitions of the work in scale and detail as it ranged across a battleship, through water and light, in the sustained and chilling wind of an atomic blast, and the greater betrayals and acts of complicity that constellated around the sinking of a protest vessel. Along with Denise Stoklos' *Mary Stuart* and, on the Fringe, *The Geography of Haunted Places*, this was one of the most significant events of the 1997 Sydney Festival, whatever its shortcomings at this stage of its development. Its meanings, its engagement with the politics of the Pacific of which we are a part, and the language in which we are thus embroiled, give it relevance and urgency.

Keith Gallasch

The Gypsies, Gregorian Chant Choir, Narasirato Are'Are Pan Pipers

Up to a year ago I imagined that gypsy music was the kind of thing I used to hear in Balkan restaurants in Hindley Street, Adelaide. I've never been that keen on virtuosic violin playing. But the film *Latcho Drom* changed all that, portraying a culture starting out in Rajasthan and spreading west to Spain and the UK. The live concert was analogous to the film in its presentation of the range of gypsy music and culture. A guy on a

microphone gave you the story, rather like "gypsies for the masses" or "ethnic night at the opera house". The tone was patronising and the narration unnecessary.

But the musicians created a sense of cohesion, despite cultural differences, bound by soulfulness, passion, grief, pain dealt with through music. As you move west in the film, more grief is felt in the music especially songs about Auschwitz.

For me the concert opened up the terrain of gypsy culture and music as opposed to the loose label of 'world music'. It was interesting in terms of influences. I could hear in the Rumanians (trumpet, clarinet, alto sax, piano accordion and double bass) an influence on Michael Nyman, who uses the same instrumentation and has the same drive. A friend said it sounded like Charlie Parker had influenced the Rumanians! But it was more likely a historical connection with the gypsy music of the Nile (three oboe-like instruments with double reeds not unlike the Indian shehnai). Being a percussionist, I was inspired by the Rhajastanis beautiful, melody-driven drumming. (Ravi Shankar has drawn on this tradition and has performed a work with their dancer.) You can hear the folk origins of Indian music.

It was a night of connections, of musical anthropology. The attempt to do one piece together at the end wasn't so successful, some participating more than others. But it did give time for the Egyptians to set up in the foyer where they sold instruments, CDs and tapes much to the astonishment of the Opera House staff.

Out in the open, I really enjoyed the free Quayworks performances by the 12 Narasirato Are'Are Pan Pipers from the Solomon Islands who played to big crowds. What was striking was the percussive drive and power of the music with the bamboo poles on the ground creating a bass line. Although they're pipes, they reminded me rhythmically and tonally of my own boobams (octaban drums).

Robert Lloyd



Denise Stoklos in Mary Stuart

Concert of Glass, Government House, from della Laguna, presented by Contemporary Music Events

The *Concert of Glass*, held at Government House on January 17 as part of the *della Laguna* series, was a mixed success. A solo work for guitar, Gabriele Manca's *In flagranti*, expertly played by Geoffrey Morris, was both the most glass-like and most interesting piece of the night. Brittle, complex and delicate, it had all the absorbing qualities of fine glass. Morris later combined with Carolyn Connors, playing glasses filled to varying levels, to perform *bittersuss* by Gerhard Stabler. This demanding work, built on silences and low dynamic range, should have been scheduled earlier in the concert, rather than at the end. Other works on the night were either too slight or too unformed to contribute much to the theme. The venue, however, was a plus, providing a sense of Sydney's colonial history—although sightlines at the back were virtually non-existent.

John Potts

• continued page 16

Festival on the far side; spectacle on the wild side

Sarah Miller previews the 1997 Festival of Perth

Here on the far side, a festival of the arts seems to have not yet outlived its usefulness. In a state measuring some 5,457.27 square kilometres yet with a population of only 1.75 million, 'supply' as they say does not yet match 'demand', and local audiences welcome the opportunity to "ooh" and "aah" over exotic and hopefully challenging offerings from elsewhere. Local artists and companies, inevitably perhaps, complain about the dearth of opportunities (or perhaps that should read financial support) for local product. However, looking through the program for the 1997 Festival, it seems that there is a reasonable range of Western Australian and Australian work (the distinction remains important) represented. Still there's no doubt that inclusion in a major festival, while lending shows a certain cachet, of necessity generates a certain amount of acrimony.

The Festival of Perth (FOP) is the oldest major festival of the arts in the country with the most consistent executive at the helm. An annual festival, its programming, whilst not necessarily as flashy as the Adelaide Festival of the Arts (can be), has certainly much more on offer than other metropolitan arts festivals. FOP's key strength is its diversity. It happily ranges from the intimate to the spectacular; from the established to the contemporary; from bread and circuses to the politically inspired and intellectually challenging. In fact, I tend to concur with Barry Kosky when he argued that festivals in Sydney and Melbourne could be trashed in favour of Adelaide and Perth, both of which have a breadth of activity not found elsewhere, largely I suspect, because both are

(reasonably) secure in their identities as international festivals of the arts (international being understood increasingly as inclusive of Australian work) and because they continue to fulfil a *bone fide* function in relatively isolated environs.

FOP's program is far too large to describe or speculate about in detail, however there is a strong emphasis on work from the 'mother country', celebrating the British Council's 50 years' presence in Australia. The British Council's program of events for the 1997 year is entitled "newIMAGES: Britain and Australia into the 21st century". Sceptics, however, might find the Royal Shakespeare Company's re-creation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* overly familiar and if the word from Sydney is to be believed, the West Yorkshire Playhouse's interpretation of Wole Soyinka's *The Beatification of Area Boy* has a tendency to the stolid. Much more contemporary in inspiration and effect is Black Blanc and Beur (B3) from France with *Rapetipas*, the history of rap culture from its African roots to James Brown, break dancing, electric boogie and hip-hop. Then there's the acclaimed Chunky Move (Australia) with *Bonehead*, the more minimalist dance sensibilities of Compagnie Boris Charmatz from France, and the anarchic energies of Spanish company Semola Teatre with *Hibrid*.

The commissioning and/or presentation of new Australian work (as with other festivals in Australia) has—thankfully—become integral to FOP's programming. In 1997, Black Swan present the much anticipated *The Merry Go Round in the Sea*, the Australian classic by Randolph Stow

whilst Belvoir St Theatre's Company B present John Harding's *Up the Road*. There's the hysterical naturalism of Sidetrack Performance Group's *sit.com* and the excitement of Pact Youth Theatre's *The Oedipus Project*. Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre, having transmogrified from a youth company into a 'professional' company, are mounting their first production, *Rumumuk*, a surreal 'road movie'. For kids, there's Barking Gecko with an updated, outdoor version of *The Emperor's New Clothes*. The Hole in the Wall Theatre will present local writer Bill Warnoch's *The Judgement of Paris*. Text-based, or image-based, physical or conceptual theatres, spectacular or intimate, Australian companies are working the gamut of possibilities.

There is a substantial and eclectic music program encompassing classical, popular, jazz and 'world' music idioms, including: a major presentation of the work of British composer John Tavener with visits by the Chilingirian Quartet, cellist Raphael Wallfisch and the composer himself, as well as the Bach Ensemble from America, the Prague Chamber Choir and the Virtuosi of Prague; ragtime performed by Joshua Rifkin; acoustic acts such as Richard Thompson and Loudon Wainwright III; British jazz saxophonist Andy Shepherd and keyboardist Steve Lodder; the "golden voice of Mali", Salif Keita, and the charismatic Misia, "the new diva of poetic song" from Portugal, with her reinvigorated interpretation of the traditional Portuguese 'Fado' or lament of destiny. In a major collaboration supported by the Goethe-Institut and newIMAGES program (see page 10), composer Richard Barrett and installation artist Crow will come together with ELISION ensemble to create *Opening of the Mouth*, drawing upon the poetry of Paul Celan and the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*. It will be presented at the Midland Railway Yard, March 3-8.

FOP's program of free street performance is always a buzz and this year includes Australia's Theatre Physical and 5 Angry Men; Royal de Luxe with their campy Hollywood inspired epic, *Le Peplum*, French company Pocheros', *cirque d'images* and Poland's Teatre Podrozy Biuro with their rather more serious and politically charged *Carmen Funebre*, based on interviews with Yugoslavian refugees and built around world-wide ethnic wars.

Significantly, there is an increasing commitment to the presentation and contextualisation of the visual arts. As a broad area of practice the visual arts remains (generally) less well resourced and is likely to remain so given the lack of box office return. Nevertheless, it would seem that there is an opportunity for local arts institutions and galleries to take up the challenge in adopting a more sophisticated, coherent (dare I suggest collaborative) and critical approach to the notion of a visual arts presence within the context of an international arts festival.

Nonetheless, there is a range of substantial exhibitions taking place throughout Perth and Fremantle, which, however serendipitously, do suggest a common interest in recuperating and revealing previously invisible or unspoken histories and art trajectories with a particular emphasis on women, Aboriginal practices and the 'new' technologies. *Inside the Visible* at the Art Gallery of WA (AGWA) looks particularly exciting in this context with its



Claude Cahun Self Portrait, 1929. silver gelatin print from *Inside the Visible* at the Art Gallery of WA

thirty six women artists drawn from the United States, Europe, South America and Asia. Curated by Catherine de Zegher, Director of the Kanaal VZW Art Foundation in Belgium, this exhibition would seem to offer a multiplicity of alternative readings of art practice from the 1920s to the 1990s. Complementing *Inside the Visible* at AGWA is *Sisters of the Dreaming*, a group exhibition by Western Australia's traditional and contemporary Aboriginal women artists.

This recuperative thread is expressed also in exhibitions at the Fremantle Art Centre and the Moore's Building. Fremantle Arts Centre is exhibiting *Ingamal Goodingi* (Bardi language for "It was hidden from you"), a sound installation project, a collaboration between artist Nick Ward and the Aboriginal people of One Arm Point and Fitzroy Crossing. At the Moore's Building is *Recoverings*, an exhibition by crafty women utilising indigenous fibres and textiles, whilst the Lawrence Wilson Gallery presents *Stories: Aboriginal Art from the Holmes à Court Collection*, and PICA goes techno with *Burning the Interface* (from Sydney's MCA) and *Technè*, a locally curated, speccy techy exhibition.

Particularly significant in this context is *art(iculations)*, a program of forums, lectures and artists' talks to be held at AGWA and PICA. This is the first time in a number of years that financial and moral support (from Healthway and the Festival of Perth) has been made available for this kind of critical discussion around the visual arts and as such, it's an extremely important event not only for local artists and audiences but nationally, particularly given the debacle that was the 1996 Artists' Week at the Adelaide Festival.

Perth's hot (very hot), dry summers mean that outdoor events are not quite as nerve racking an undertaking as elsewhere and it has to be said that the outdoor cinema program at the Somerville Auditorium is an utterly luxurious and sensational experience. Deckchairs and champagne picnics under the stars surrounded by enormous pine trees is a much loved Perth tradition. Less luxurious but perhaps more exciting is the inclusion of short films curated by Philip Ilson and the Halloween Society in London. Looks pretty funky to me, as does the more art driven survey of independent film and video in Britain, presented and introduced by independent writer and producer John Wyver.

As temperatures continue to soar, Perth is hotting up in more ways than one, in preparation for its annual arts bash. Take a trip to the wild side. It's certainly cooking!

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It's a takeover

Virginia Baxter looks over the blueprint for this year's Australian Festival for Young People in Adelaide

What used to quietly come out in Adelaide every second March-April is now more like a full-scale invasion as the Australian Festival for Young People defines its demographic (3 to 26 years old), takes on a name change (Take Over 97), and a new king of the kids, Nigel Jamieson, and promises the city a party like it's never seen before. (Don't they know most people in Adelaide are trying to sleep!) Running with the youth appeal of the Adelaide Festival's Red Square, organisers have gone for a single site for the festival. This time it's Capital City to be erected in Elder Park on the banks of the sedate River Torrens, once again dragged screaming to the celebrations.

The construction of Capital City is a collaboration between young artists and secondary school kids with input from tertiary students of building and design, arts and architecture, catering and urban planning. Visual artists and primary schools throughout the state have created hundreds of totem poles to ring the perimeter of the city which will contain within its walls a village with potters and carvers, batik makers and musicians from throughout the Indian Pacific. The festival's literature program *Allwrite!* will run writers' workshops, storytelling and readings from a teepee. There'll be visual arts exhibitions in a River Gallery and a floating screen where art and technology meet. The Web tent will burn the midnight oil, keeping the city in touch with communities throughout the state and the world.

There'll be a sculpture park and kilns burning day and night (presumably to keep the pizzas warm). Performance spaces will

include an outdoor stage capable of catering for BIG audiences, a circus tent, an amphitheatre seating 800 and a host of smaller tents and rostra plus walkways connecting Capital City to the Festival Centre's theatres. There'll be outdoor shows with giant puppets, masks, processions, fireworks, a rooftop cinema, massed choirs, dancers and orchestras and of course, plenty of interactives.

At the centre of the city will sit a parliament democratically elected by young people throughout the state who will summon witnesses and try and determine the kind of society and political system they would like to inherit.

The city that by day will be a safe haven for families and young children, at night turns into a seething hotspot full of image, movement and sound.

"The aim is to create a visionary city, a testament to the energy and imagination of its young people", says Nigel Jamieson. Capital City will be built, powered and staffed by young people who, to complete this utopian vision of full employment, will take over public institutions, including the Festival Centre itself. Adelaide newspapers and TV will allow a daily section of their publications and broadcasts to be given over to materials produced and edited by young people.

Convoy, a project involving 400,000 young people in regional communities sounds a bit like Arts Council tours of old in putting wheels on some of the core elements of Capital City and taking them to town squares and ovals. The difference is that they'll link with locally initiated festival events. *Convoy* will also carry

Satellite Cities throughout the state via the web site and virtual gallery.

Traditionally a showcase for some of the best Australian and international theatre for young people, the local program of this year's festival includes *Arts Maad*, a program of school-based work in music, art, drama and dance, and *1st Site*, focussing on new works by Adelaide 18-26 year olds in performance, visual arts, literature, physical theatre, design, cabaret, music and new media. The international program includes tours as well as collaborations between local companies and artists from other countries. DynamO Theatre from Montreal are performing *The Challenge*, a gymnastic dance performance work. In *The Giant*, South Australia's Carouselle is directed by Piotr Tomaszuk, one of the Poland's greatest puppet theatre directors. *Respectable Shoes*, directed by Dave Brown for Patch Theatre, is performed as a rock concert with projected images and interactive radio overlays courtesy of Triple J. Patch also presents *The Boy with the Bamboo Flute*, a collaboration with Vietnamese-Australian artists Ta Duy Binh and Dang Thao Nguyen.

The Marang African Music and Dance Theatre is bringing *Janjunga Ba*. Tandanya Cultural Institute hosts *Ngunyawaiti*, a program from young indigenous visual artists, musicians and performers. Melbourne's Arena Theatre tours its *Autopsy* with Maria Kozic's giant inflatable set. Company Skylark from Canberra brings *Wake Baby* by Gillian Rubinstein, and composer Linsey Pollack presents his *Out of the Frying Pan*. In

Cooking It by Footscray Community Arts Centre, four cooks prepare a dinner for the audience. *Mesdames no Spears* is presented by South Australian physical theatre troupe Slack Taxi. *Le Fauve* is a joint production between France's La Belle Vie D'Ange and Kick Theatre featuring motorcycle virtuoso Steph DePont. The Writers Collective present *Sucked in Bad*, an exposé of myths about asthma, aimed at primary and lower secondary school audiences. I Wayan Wija from Indonesia presents in *Tantri* an introduction to Wayang Kulit, the Indonesian shadow play. Also from Indonesia Bali Banjar, Bali's renowned performing arts school features a mythical Barong, dancing monkeys and a gamelan orchestra. Choreographers Xiao Xiong Zhang and Juha Vanhakartano from China will work with students from the Centre for Performing Arts in *Chinadance* and *Iron Garden*. Native American Indian Kevin Locke weaves song, word and dance in *Dream Catcher*. Boateater & Teater TT from Denmark present *The Fly*, a tragicomic pantomime. WA's Spare Parts Puppet Theatre brings Paul and Sally Morgan's *Little Piggies* and (my favourite title) *A Sausage Went for a Walk* by Ellisha Majid and Peter Kendall. A sobering moment in all the excitement is provided by the 60 year old Adelaide Symphony Orchestra presenting another performance of Peter and the Wolf, this time with multimedia animations provided by the Shadow Puppet Company.

Maybe the culturally diverse and international performance program will give Take Over's fantasy arts democracy, Capital City, a global context.

Take Over Festival, Adelaide, March 21 - April 6. Enquiries: Tel 08 8226 8150 Fax 08 8226 8100.

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Post-post-colonial: a fresh start

newIMAGES Project Director Jane Westbrook introduces Keith Gallasch to a year-long cultural exchange between Britain and Australia

newIMAGES promises that "old stereotypes will be challenged, and new images produced" in "a year-long program of unparalleled events designed to put the spotlight on a mutually beneficial relationship". Jane Westbrook is emphatic that this is not a festival, not a showcase, but a genuine cultural exchange where "the intellectual rigour underpinning the events is more important than the events themselves". Some of the events will have a low profile, like the Natural History Museum and the Australian Museum's "linking of research arms" but will engender benefits that will last long after 1997; on the other hand their huge exhibition *Kaleidoscope of Life* (on biodiversity) will reach a big audience. It is this sense of dialogue and a fresh start that palpably informs Jane's enthusiasm. And a fresh start requires new images of each country to be exchanged.

Particular care then has been taken, says Jane, to *not* make this an exchange between London and Sydney-Melbourne: "events will reflect geographic and cultural diversity with Wales, Yorkshire and Scotland contributing to the program as well as being sites for exchange. Britain, outside of London, is not a giant historical theme park". Equally, regional Australia will participate, with some key events being held entirely outside the capital cities, thereby erasing the line between a few capital cities and the mythic dead heart.

newIMAGES goes further, beyond internal diversity, to consider the new global and regional roles of Britain and Australia. West Yorkshire Playhouse artistic director Jude Kelly recently phrased the new circumstance as "Not Great Britain, little Britain", a reference to Britain "being inside the new Europe". Jane observes that "Australia is in a similar position with Asia. newIMAGES will allow each country to show how it sees itself".

To get maximum benefit out of the exchange program, a new approach to

timetabling was required, an avoidance of the "short, sharp shock" of festivals.

"A year allows partnerships to develop, for connections to be forged, participation in existing festivals, joint ventures between universities and other institutions." Jane sees this as the positive side of the new globalism, "an opening up of perceptions, people knowing that they have to work together".

The complete cultural, scientific and business calendar of events will unfold as the year goes on, but of the program already announced there is ample indication that newIMAGES will live up to its aims in the short term. The question that will doubtless be posed and debated, in the short and long term, will be about the meaning of 'new', since it is in being confronted with something new that perceptions are changed, question marks unleashed and the rush to judgment deflected. Consequently, experience seems a critical element in newIMAGES, not just the experience of seeing the Royal Shakespeare Company or new wave British films, but of new experiences, tangible participation in workshops, forums, travel between Britain and the UK, exchange of orchestra conductors and dance artistic directors, visiting musicians tackling new Australian composition, local artists performing a new British opera, and young dancers coming together in Darwin for the first national youth dance conference and festival.

Jane says that the dance program exemplifies this emphasis on new experiences: the Welsh company Divisions and Queensland's Expressions will swap tours as well as choreographers to develop new works. Ludus Dance Company (under the auspices of Ausdance), the first and persistently most innovative of British dance-in-education companies, will hold community dance workshops in 16 Australian regional centres, targeting young people. Cando Co, a company of abled and disabled dancers will run workshops

and masterclasses when they tour Australia through the Newcastle (NSW) Bicentenary Festival.

In theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company will hold classes for students at the WA Academy of the Performing Arts, Adelaide's Helpman Academy, the Victorian College of the Arts, the Queensland University of Technology, and N.I.D.A. Jane Westbrook tells me that the RSC production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* makes reference to Peter Brook's earlier production which also toured Australia. West Yorkshire Playhouse's production of Wole Soyinka's *The Beatification of Area Boy* while not being an exceptional play, proved sociologically fascinating and politically tough (despite the humour, the music and the neat ending), and offered in the first half particularly a seductively open-ended structure true to the market place setting and the large number of pivotal characters. The largely black cast, British and Nigerian, were mostly trained in the UK and are appearing in a regional theatre production, not a surprise to Australian theatre workers, but more likely new to most theatre-goers here. That it was set in Nigeria amplified the concerns felt in a multicultural society when 'home' countries are troubled, something that, for example, Yugoslavian-Australians felt during the Bosnian war. *Beatification* plays next at the Perth Festival where Soyinka will be a guest. Peter Whelan, British author of the Sydney Theatre Company's popular production of his *The Herbal Bed*, is also in town. Other theatre and performance components of newIMAGES have yet to be announced. Let's hope for a taste of UK contemporary performance, something beyond conventional plays, however culturally diverse and innovatively presented they might be. In the meantime, it's the music program which looks the most engaging for aficionados of the new.

Crow, the British installation and performance artist (see cover photo and article on page 35) is participating in *The Opening of the Mouth* with provocative composer Richard Barrett and ELISION ensemble, a large scale work destined for international touring and starting out at the Perth Festival in the Midlands Railway Yards. This is a joint project with the Goethe-Institut and indicative of the new collaborative mood. John Taverner is too ill to visit Perth, but concerts of his music, especially the new commission, are bound to attract keen audiences. Elsewhere in the newIMAGES program, UK composer Michael Finnis is conducting concerts of his own music, running masterclasses and conducting, as well, his new opera about Tchaikovsky, *Shameful Vice*, with the Song company, Sydney Alpha Ensemble and ELISION during the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras: another impressive collaboration across cultures. Australia's Elena Kats-Chernin newly commissioned work will be performed by the adventurous Nash Ensemble from the UK. There's a lot more happening than I can list here—the English and Australian Chamber Orchestras will swap tours and conductors,



Jim Potts, Director British Council and Jane Westbrook, Director newIMAGES with David Mach's *It Takes Two*

there will be brass ensemble masterclasses, jazz musicians Steve Lodder and Andy Sheppard will give a great deal of pleasure to jazz fans, there's the Great Youth Orchestras Exchange—and it must be noted that the program reaches out to Darwin and Townsville and beyond.

Visual arts promise much with the *New British Artists* exhibition at the MCA in Sydney, sculptor Tony Cragg at AGNSW, Scottish artist Sue Jane Taylor through the New England Regional Art Museum, and Sydney and Glasgow curators organising reciprocal events. The literary offering promises an exchange of six young (one or two books in print) British and Australian writers from diverse backgrounds. Students of the Australian Film Television and Radio School are already at the second stage of an exchange with their peers at the UK's National Film and Television School. Australian students have filmed documentaries in Manchester and the British in Dubbo to be premiered in March.

Of the many talks and forums that will take place across the year, a tempting one is Ted Polhemus talking fashion at the inaugural Melbourne Fashion Festival in March.

newIMAGES has another dimension in airshows, yacht racing, motorshows, a modern British history conference, a child health seminar, a plant science workshop, *Night Skies—The Art of Deep Space* photographic exhibition, a major Science Policy workshop in April, and many other activities including a major internet setup, *Montage*, linking schools, universities and organisations through some 20 educational projects. Although not art exchanges, many of these events will have cultural ramifications for how each country views the other and, in turn itself.

newIMAGES is a cultural exchange program, an opportunity to assess how much of 'the old country', its voice, its body, its diet, its habits and values are still embodied in the everyday and in our art, the extent to which an old sense of homogeneity, still yearned for angrily by some, has been replaced by a rich cooperative heterogeneity in both cultures. That both countries approach their new relationships with Europe and Asia with some trepidation and resistance, makes it an interesting moment for Britain and Australia to look at their relationship with each other—to ask just how new each has become. newIMAGES is a fresh start for taking that look.

For further information on the newIMAGES program call 02 9328 2233.

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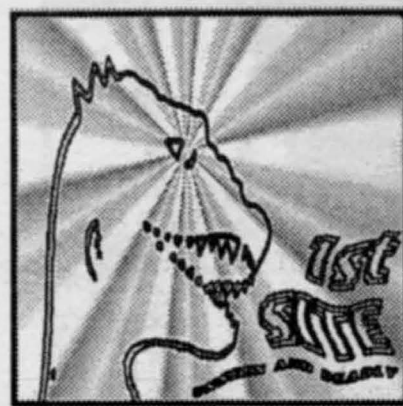
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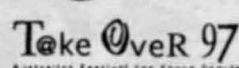
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Networks for the 21st century

Director, Jim Potts reflects on the role of the British Council in Australia

Following strong reader interest in our interview with Wolfgang Meissner, the former director of the Goethe Institut in Sydney (RT#15), Keith Gallasch spoke with Jim Potts, director of the British Council in Australia, on the occasion of the 50th year of the Council's presence in Australia.

Jim Potts' interest in film-making and media attracted him to the British Council which in 1969 boasted a special cadre of film and television specialists. His first posting was to Addis Ababa where he spent five years making films and TV series, and running training courses with Ethiopian TV and the Mass Media Centre. He set up a film and TV documentary unit in Kenya, worked on about 30 16mm films and TV programs there, then returned to London to be part of the Media Department. As media consultant and editor of the quarterly Educational Broadcasting International he travelled across Africa and Asia looking into what he said was in effect 'the semiotics of cross-cultural communication'. After a decade of media work, he spent five years in Northern Greece working on projects which included writers such as the poet Yannis Ritsos. In 1986 he was posted to Prague, finishing in November 1989 as the Czech crowds went out onto Wenceslas Square and the Velvet Revolution started. As head of the Council's East Europe Department he travelled for three years everywhere from Georgia to Albania, tripping over revolutions as he went. He was in East Germany when the wall came down. He just missed the revolution in Rumania. He started a small British Council office in Albania. After those exhilarating three years, he was offered the post in Australia. He's been here four years, is deeply involved in the newIMAGES program and hopes to be here for its evaluation in 1998. I began by asking Jim to explain the function of the British Council.

JP It's Britain's main agency for cultural relations overseas and it has been since it started in Britain in 1934. It opened in Australia in 1947, exactly 50 years ago. By "culture" we certainly mean a wide diversity of activities including science, engineering and technology, library and information services, English language teaching, acting on behalf of aid and technical assistance and development agencies in the third world. So we do a lot of work for the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, not just in education. It could be in health or agriculture. We work closely with what's now called the Overseas Development Administration in Britain which is part of the Foreign and Commonwealth office. But

we are an independent organisation with a Royal Charter. We're also a registered charity in Britain. It's quite complex but the essential feature is that we're an independent organisation working on that very important principle of arm's length from government, so that we always have our own separate identities, separate offices, except sometimes in countries where, for instance in the Communist world before the changes, we had to operate as part of embassies.

KG How proactive is the British Council in shaping the arts programs it supports in Australia?

JP Increasingly proactive, which is not to say that we weren't in the 50s or the 60s. In those days, perhaps we were more so. But as Australian festivals developed and organisations like Musica Viva and others became specialised, they knew as much as the central agencies in other countries. You had Australian artistic directors with their own visions and they travelled more. Even so, it's always helpful to get them moving in both directions—for example, getting people from LIFT (London International Festival of Theatre) or the Edinburgh Festival to come to Australia because they'll only ever see the tip of the iceberg otherwise. Unless there's a central person on the ground or a department which can really point out what's new and interesting, they're not necessarily going to pick it up. So even in Australia where people are well plugged in, it's important to have that role. I think we have to be proactive and we certainly suggest things but we would never impose, indeed we wouldn't be welcome if we imposed our opinions or preferences. I think in the past people probably did make their own plans for festivals and brought us in simply when they wanted some financial assistance. I don't think we'll ever work that way again. We have certain things we want to achieve. We have to work as a collaborative partnership in that sense.

KG When I interviewed Wolfgang Meissner from the Goethe Institut, he forecast a new situation where exchanges of orchestras and theatre companies and so on weren't going to be as important as focussing more on things like residencies and encouraging artist relationships through the new media. Do you think he had the picture right?

JP I think he didn't get the balance quite right. I think there's no doubt that the new technologies offer immense possibilities and we're certainly exploiting them. We've got many projects under the Montage program which we're working on. Our staff, Lindy McKeown in Queensland and Gill Edwards

at the British Council in Sydney, are cementing all these relationships and co-ordinating them. We've also got quite a few in the artistic field and there are many more we could bring under that umbrella because Australia has poets with their own websites and magazines. So I think Wolfgang's right in that respect but I don't think I agree that there's no room for exchanges of a slightly more traditional kind because it's always of critical importance that people meet up—whether it's writers or theatre directors. It may be that the old national chest beating, flagship tours are slightly less important and even less affordable. I worked in Prague when it was still Communist and there's no doubt that bringing in poets or writers or dance teachers had a profound impact if put in touch with the right people. There's always going to be a need for travel assistance: even a small sum of money or just helping to put together a good program to introduce them—that can be more helpful than money sometimes.

KG Given the long term presence of the British Council here, how important is newIMAGES?

JP There's still a lot that's taken for granted, and it was quite clear going round the universities here that nobody was very focussed on relations with Britain.

KG What about post-colonial studies?

JP I think post-colonial theory tends to exclude Britain. British Studies are important. So are European Studies and Australian Studies. I'm not suggesting that one is more important than any other but I think for countries like Australia and New Zealand to ignore British studies, whether in a post-colonial framework or a simply historical framework, doesn't further the relationship. We have a lot of conferences this year which we would broadly say are in that area of British Studies. We're working with the Goethe Institut and the University of NSW on a conference in July on "Britain in Europe". Also in July-August the new John Curtin Institute in Perth is organising an important conference called "Old Institutions, New Images" focussing on the legacy left to what they call "colonial outposts". There are other events in Western Australia, public lectures by specialists on subjects like Gallipoli and the relevance of modern British history to Australia. The University of Adelaide Centre for British Studies is planning "British Studies for the 21st Century", a conference in September. Then there's the flagship conference that we're less involved in but the High Commission is organising with the Australian Institute of International Affairs called "Australia and Britain into the 21st Century: An Evolving Relationship". That's probably the key conference and it's taking place in early September. So there's a lot happening around the country. These may not be high profile events like the visits of orchestras or theatre companies, but they will be exploring where we stand and how we're evolving.

KG So how do you see the British Council fitting in to newIMAGES?

JP We are a participant. In a sense the whole program was built around our 50th anniversary. I think everybody realised that this was an ideal opportunity to make something much more of bilateral common interests and broadened it to include trade

and sporting events. Of the 180 projects that are part of the newIMAGES program, probably three quarters of them are essentially British Council brokered. It's very much the core of the program. For three years we've gone out looking to develop projects with partners whether it meant a joint commission or a ground breaking exchange which we both wanted to do. Not all of them have worked. Some have had great concepts but maybe the artistic directors didn't quite see eye to eye. You can't force these things. Even in the choice of productions in arts festivals we've had quite a formative role in agreeing what we would like to support. It's a very different way of working. We've moved much more towards project development as a way of operating. We're no longer a funding body giving out grants, which is what we may have been seen as in the past.

KG What is the likely impact of the British Council and of newIMAGES in the long term for the arts?

JP One side of it is the exchanges, the collaborations, the development of links for the 21st century. There's also the arts export promotions side of it. We very much hope that we will be opening opportunities



Jim Potts

for Australians to travel much more frequently and get more assignments in Britain and Europe as a result of it. We certainly hope that some of the people we introduce here will be invited back with or without our support. I think that whole export promotion dimension is of great mutual benefit because it opens up opportunities for work for artists.

A very important part of the newIMAGES program for the arts, for science, is to get that kind of intellectual debate going at a level where it doesn't often happen, about the relationship between Britain and Australia. I think newIMAGES has a fair proportion of cutting edge events to encourage this debate.

As for the British Council and the arts, I think we do need to constantly re-evaluate our strategy in leading up to and beyond the next century. This office will change its priorities but I can see us always giving the highest priority to science and technology. That's absolutely vital. We probably spend about 75% to 80% of our total budget in that area, but with the arts and literature you can make a lot happen with quite a modest budget, if you've got people on the ground making the links and networks. That's where Australia will probably do more to help its own artists in the future, by having more people to make overseas connections.

A DISTINCTLY WEST AUSTRALIAN STORY

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Lo-fi nostalgia and the music of aural voyeurism

John Potts considers the work of sound artists Scanner and Paul DeMarinis

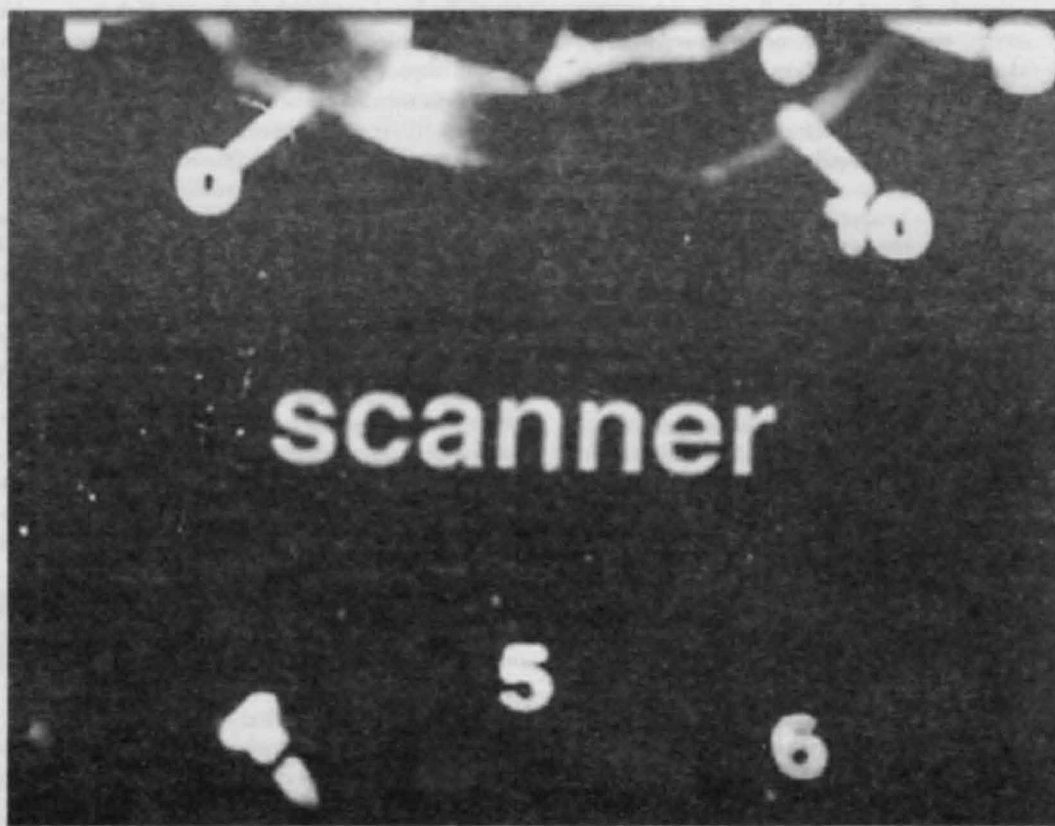
Two sound artists with a keen interest in technology visited Australia late last year. Scanner (Robin Rimbaud) from the UK, toured Australia in October (as part of ANAT's *Virogenesis*), while Paul DeMarinis, from the US, visited Sydney in November. Their perspectives on audio technology differ widely. DeMarinis' works reveal a fascination with the history of recorded sound; Scanner's performances are interceptions of contemporary communications. Taken together, the two artists offer intriguing angles on our techno-mediated soundscape.

DeMarinis entertained his Artspace audience with a whimsical account of his career. "What's wrong with thinking and laughing at the same time?" he asked rhetorically, before outlining his trajectory through the worlds of sound and technology. A similar ambivalence pervades many of his works, which simultaneously deconstruct and celebrate the properties of sound reproduction devices.

From a background in classical music, DeMarinis moved in the 1970s into the field of electronics, which he incorporated into sculptures and installations. One early performance, "A Byte At The Opera" (1975), used home-made synthesizers. DeMarinis customised the new products of the electronics industry, including speech synthesizers. This "relationship" flowed the other way as well: in 1980 DeMarinis invented touch-play computerised instruments, intended as jamming instruments for multiple musicians. This device was later adopted by the electronics industry as a child's instrument, much to DeMarinis' amusement. As digital audio sampling and triggering devices became more sophisticated, DeMarinis deployed his own versions of these techniques in performance. "Alien Voices" (1989) was an interactive work for voices treated in real time, while his Power Glove triggering performance was a major event at TISEA, held in Sydney in 1992.

His most remarkable works, however, were exhibited during the early 1990s as representatives of "The Edison Effect": works which presented their own technology as contraption, a bricolage of historical developments. For example, one device played old vinyl records with lasers, resulting in a mix-tech lo-fi. In another work, a laser projected through a goldfish bowl plays a phonograph, except when the goldfish swims across the path of the laser. Other more recent works include clay recording (sound "inscribed" in clay), lasers emerging from syringes, film soundtracks encoded on spiral hypno-discs, beeswax recordings which reportedly also record smells, and a speech by Stalin re-recorded onto a lacquer disc. The appeal of these works is readily apparent wherever they are exhibited: makeshift apparatus made of techno-flotsam, they are both amusing and intriguing. But why is DeMarinis so obsessed with the mismatching of sound technologies?

One clue to his motivation emerged as he discussed his recent works. For all their playful juxtaposition, these lo-fi devices still reproduce sound, however unfaithfully. In playing the recordings, they are also playing themselves, a fact which DeMarinis finds fascinating. "With sound," he said, "you need a machine to play back the recording, unlike photography, where you only need



Scanner

the photo. Phonography means you have the machine playing back the artefact made by the machine. I like hearing the noise of the machine that's making the illusion: that's real physical listening. Each reproduction technique makes its own signals; at the time you may pretend the signal isn't there, as in vinyl records, and call it hi-fi; now, people are nostalgic for that noise."

DeMarinis' works refer, sometimes obliquely, to other aspects of our mechanically/electronically reproduced sound world. The repetition of machine culture is, he says, addictive, with the

machine in the role of compulsive behaviour. As if by way of antidote, his works are sometimes disruptive (such as the goldfish laser) or faulty. "You get a sound cloud, a non-distinct impression in these recordings played by laser. It's more like a flavour or a cloudiness." As well, by meddling with the history of technology, his devices display another attribute of technology: that it creates its own set of artefacts. "We live in the only age where we're surrounded by our own archaeology."

If DeMarinis is a meddler in audio archaeology, Scanner is a sifter through the

aural debris of the contemporary world. His performances are built around a handheld radio receiver which scans the vicinity for cellular phone conversations. The unsuspecting conversationalists are sampled and worked into musical performances generated by a module and sequencer. Each performance thus has a live, unpredictable content and "local colour" courtesy of the scanned conversation; more importantly, each performance involves an aural voyeurism on behalf of the audience.

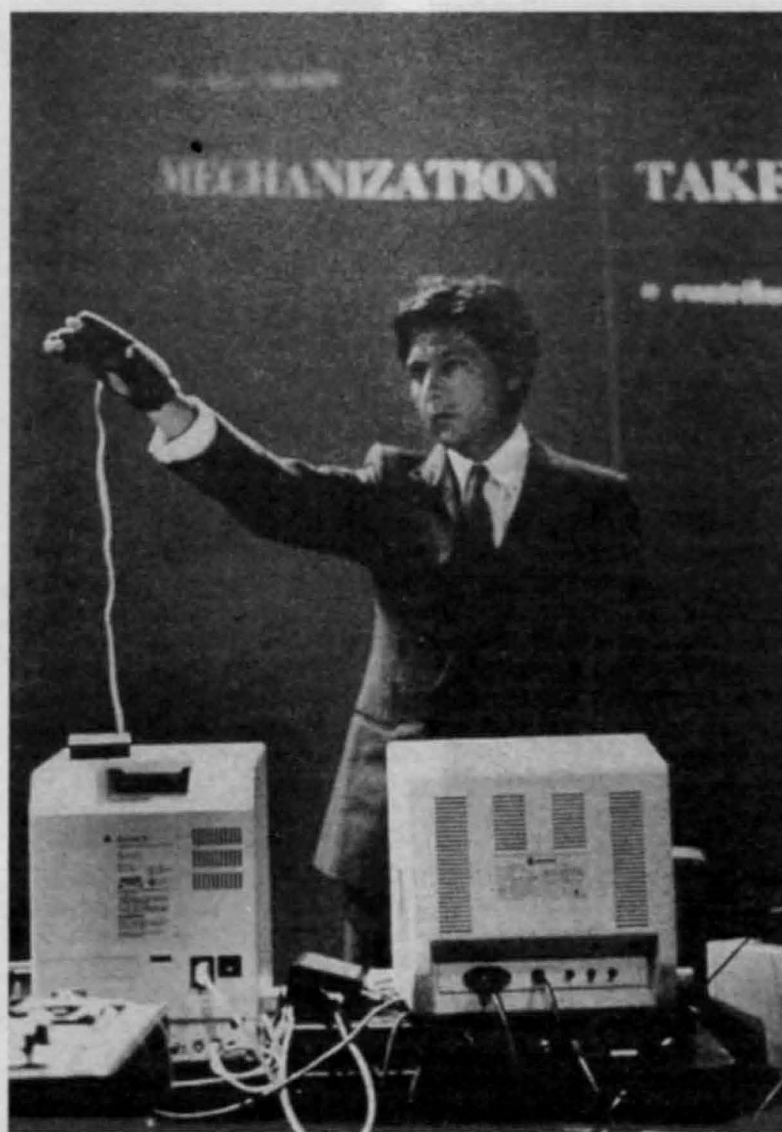
Listening to such a performance invokes a complex range of responses. There is fascination as you eavesdrop on a private conversation which may head in any direction. There is the thrill of participating in this illicit and, presumably, illegal act. There is uneasiness regarding the invasion of privacy you are involved in. There may even be guilt. At times there is a sense of melancholy, especially if the conversation is mixed with an ambient synthesiser motif. There is also an appreciation of the technological character of the mediated voice, as it becomes one element of an electronic composition. Consequently, the listener

may be moved, troubled, disturbed or exhilarated by a Scanner performance - or perhaps a mixture of all of these.

Scanner is acutely aware of all these factors, as became apparent when he answered listeners' questions after a Sydney performance. The scanning device picks up an enormous range of transmissions, he said, including microwave ovens, hearing aids, even astronauts; phone conversations occupy only a narrow range of frequencies. The texture of the radio transmission lends itself to aesthetic treatment, as does the emotional impact of some of the scanned conversations. The scanning technology is part of a battery of surveillance devices which alarms many guardians of individual privacy. How does Scanner deal with these concerns? Is he complicit in the erosion of privacy by technologically enhanced systems: government, media, other?

Scanner doesn't shirk this issue; in fact he revels in it. His performances are vivid demonstrations of how easily an individual's rights may be violated. They are, he claims, "an illustration of the illusion of privacy". By partaking of this process, he is also commenting on it, in a mediated world where public and private are increasingly blurred. People wilfully conduct private conversations in public spaces, via mobile phones. Reality TV, which converts private lives into public property, is, he asserts, "distressing"; the British press has become notorious through its exposure of celebrities' private moments, faked or otherwise. Closed-circuit TV systems, ostensibly introduced to combat crime, in reality further the power of surveillance.

Scanner's performances and recordings foreground the ubiquity of such technology, as do, in a different manner, the works of Paul DeMarinis. While DeMarinis' pieces have a whimsical air as part of their nature, Scanner's art contains a darker, more menacing mood. Perhaps it is the presence of the human voice, inserted into the technological apparatus implied by Scanner's works, that generates a certain melancholy. It is the vulnerability of the voice in the face of the technology that would record, reproduce, or intercept it.



Paul DeMarinis

Crosshatchings

Suzanne Spinner reports on contemporary music collaborations in Darwin: the Arafura Ensemble and Drum Drum

To begin to understand the extent of the crosshatching between The Arafura Ensemble and Drum Drum, I spoke with Claire Kilgariff the initiator and concert coordinator of the Arafura Ensemble (AE), Airi Ingram and Anna Faehlse from Drum Drum (DD), Scott Trenwith who composes and plays in both groups and Graeme Chadwick, a percussion teacher who taught many of the players in Drum Drum. We were all crowded into the small Music Staff room at Darwin High School where Kilgariff is Director of Music and Chadwick teaches percussion and everybody comes to rehearse after school finishes.

Darwin High is perched on Bullocky Point looking over the Arafura Sea towards Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. It was built on the site of Vestey's Meatworks and what is now known as The Tank and serves as the school hall and gym was created by roofing over the enormous concrete tank that supplied water for the cattle. It was a strange but fitting place to meet; Peter Goldsworthy's novel, *Maestro* set in Darwin in the sixties is about a boy at Darwin High who learns piano from a drunken maestro in a sleazy hotel downtown and moonlights in a rock band with his mates from school.

The only person not in the room was the *eminence grise* of music in Darwin today, our own maestro, Martin Jarvis, the Director of the Darwin Symphony Orchestra (DSO). However his influence on music in the town was acknowledged and palpable. For in many ways both the AE and DD would not have happened had there not been such an active classical music scene centred on the DSO and the Northern Territory University where Jarvis heads the School of Music.

This is not to suggest that Jarvis endorses these offshoots. He is reputed to have said that "only left wing feral radicals come to your concerts"—and he was talking about the AE who regularly program classical baroque interspersed with contemporary Australian work. What Jarvis, whose staple fare for the DSO is Romantics and Pops—from *Bolero* to *Cats*—makes of DD is anyone's guess. He is not noted for his patronage of either DD or the AE.

Yet, the precursor of *Crosshatchings* was an event staged at The Tank in 1993, when Jarvis commissioned Richard Mills to compose *Earth Poem/Sky Poem* which featured the DSO, and an Arnhemland contingent comprising the Elcho Island Dancers and the Wurrinyga Band from Millingimbi. The line up of the DSO then included Kilgariff and the Ingrams as well as Scott Trenwith. Trenwith was teaching at Millingimbi and was the link between the composer, Mills, the DSO and Wurrinyga.

What is significant and indicates a true coming of age in the music scene here is not that a town with a population the size of Darwin's has a symphony orchestra, but that it also has a rigorous and exciting classical ensemble and a wild and taut PNG Percussion Dance Group. When you add a fourth element, a contemporary rock group, Wildwater, which includes some of DD in its line up, and the fifth element, Wurrinyga, and acknowledge the overlapping of these groups, the cross cultural musical picture is cross hatched and infilled.

Drum Drum began in 1993 with a core group of Ari and his siblings, Tau and Paia Ingram, Anna Faehlse, Mark Smith and Phil Eaton, all of whom had got together in 1988 when they were "little kids learning percussion from Graeme" (Chadwick).

They later expanded to include Ranu James, Airi Haroro and Aiva Kadiba who were part of the Darwin PNG Dance Group. The repertoire of the group is solidly based on traditional PNG drumming with a smattering of Torres Strait and the addition of Polynesian percussion style which was inspired by Greg Sheehan's workshop a few years ago.

However all of Drum Drum except Haroro and Kadibba are trained in western classical music as well. The Ingram brothers and sisters have a PNG mother and an Australian father and were encouraged to be culturally and musically attuned both ways. Ari Ingram and Mark Smith are percussionists with the DSO, Anna Faehlse and Pia Ingram play violin and Ranu James plays double bass with the AE. So when Drum Drum plays with the Arafura Ensemble as they did in the *Crosshatchings* concert recently at the Festival of Darwin, the result is not merely some interesting contrasts, but an extensive intermingling and cross cultural fusion of the highest order.

Their music is both an intellectual and full bodied experience, and the fusion arises from the switching between forms and cultures: as artists, these musicians have invested too much in each to sacrifice one to the other, so the integrity of all is maintained. When Ranu James was leading the women in the AE in singing she instructed them "to find their village voices" and the only apparent drawback was when Scott Trenwith, dressed in a lap lap and playing the tuba, found that his pigs tusks and shell beads were banging into the brass!

Claire Kilgariff grew up in Alice Springs, studied flute in Melbourne and returned to the Territory to live in Darwin in 1992 and began playing with the DSO and soon formed Fiddlewood, a Baroque Chamber group which did "weddings, parties anything". The Arafura Ensemble grew from the realisation that there were a number of musicians around who wanted to play a more interesting and challenging repertoire than was offered by the DSO. The AE is a collective of passionate musicians, the musicians drive the program and decide amongst themselves what and when they want to play. No one is paid; the door takings at their concerts cover venue and chair hire, advertising and composers, fees.

This year the AE has come into its own with four concerts including the *Crosshatchings* collaboration. Their program

is eclectic and interesting. All their concerts have been performed in the foyer of the Darwin Supreme Court, an inspired choice of venue. It is a massive marble and glass hall with a central atrium above a spectacular glass mosaic of *Yiwarra Jukurrpa, The Milky Way Dreaming* by Yeundemu painter Nora Napaljarri Nelson. Around the walls hangs one of the strongest collections of major Aboriginal art outside a public gallery. The venue is beautiful, culturally powerful and the acoustics are excellent.

Crosshatchings was a catholic event, opening with Trenwith's *Fanfare* featuring both DD and AE, followed with works by Peter Sculthorpe, Ross Edwards and Anne Boyd, featuring virtuoso guitar, violin and percussion solos. The concert encompassed the formality of a chamber concert inside the building, followed by a procession of the audience outside, which was led by Drum Drum—painted up and bare chested, the women in swaying grass skirts—to the lawns flanking Parliament house where the second half of the concert happened, a traditional PNG dance and drumming performance.

The pivotal work which spanned the cultures was Scott Trenwith's *Introduction, Theme and Variations on Kevoia*, and it featured the Kundu, a goanna skin drum and the Garamut, a log drum from Manus Island. Trenwith based his work on the Kevoia from Ora Province, which tells of returning warriors singing of the exploits of their ancestors. The piece is scored for orchestra and PNG percussion and involved everyone singing—the effect was electrifying. Some of the sounds produced by the juxtapositions of voice and instruments were so unlike Western music it was hard to know where or what they came from; as the music soared and pulsed through the building it almost raised the roof.

Since *Crosshatchings*, there has been a further collaboration between AE and DD to create *Expeditions*, an oratorio for the Flying Fox Festival in Katherine. Trenwith utilised cello, flute, percussion, violin, tuba, piano, marimba, vibes, conga, garamut, and tamera, an Indian drone instrument. Drum Drum are currently recording their first CD in Darwin and have tours planned for next year including, the Perth and Adelaide Festivals, Womad, and a South Pacific tour. There is even talk of a world tour with Lafaek, the Timorese Cultural Group.

Essays in Sound 3: Diffractions

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The Wire (UK), December 1996

Radio Previews

Hyena
Radio Eye
Radio National
March 16 at 8.30 pm

As part of its "meat" theme for March, *Radio Eye* broadcasts this radiophonic classic by Peter Leonhard Braun. Recorded over 22 nights in Tanzania, Braun and sound recordist Kieter Grossman tracked hyenas with specially prepared stereo microphones. *Hyena* is an extraordinary work for several reasons. A supreme piece of audio-verité, it demonstrates the specific power of radio. Hearing in this instance is the pre-eminent sense, given that hyenas hunt at night. The sounds of the hyenas feasting on a stricken wildebeest are extremely graphic, representing the visceral nature of the attack in a way that film or video cannot match. While the image objectifies, sound places us in a subjective point-of-view; we are in there with the hyenas as they completely devour their prey in 40 minutes. The brutality of nature is nowhere more effectively conveyed. The unobtrusive sound recordings provide a new perspective on the hyena, wrongly regarded as a scavenger, one of nature's second-raters. This program makes "a plea for a despised predator" whose specialty is "the night". This adaptation of *Hyena* by Andrew McLennan has the narration effectively performed by John Gaden. The voice-over is poetic in places, with its opening questions: "Who will die tonight, and who will get his fill?" The only flaw in the work is that the narration is overdone: the recordings make us hungry for more natural sounds, unmediated by a narrator. Having

opened this audio port-hole into the hyenas' territory, we need to hear more of these awesome, awful sounds. JP

Children Like Birds
Flow Motions 1 and 2
The Listening Room
ABC-FM

February 10 at 9 pm
By contrast, a gentler offering from *The Listening Room*, *Children Like Birds* is an environmental soundscape by Gareth Vanderhope, winner of the 1996 AFI Best Sound award for the film *Shine*. No Rach 3 here though, and no childlike babbling. There is a babbling brook, however, as well as a beach, a river, and a storm. This is an aural *Waterworld* without Kevin Costner or *Mad Max 2* imitations. *Children Like Birds* is a nature soundscape of a type favoured by *The Listening Room*, and there is no denying its charms. Water in its varying forms is mixed to the front, so that it's always the main player. Children and birds come and go behind the flow of the water, while the storm is especially evocative.

Also in this program is *Flow Motions 1 and 2*, a new work by Rik Rue. This time Rik, who is no stranger to water, has made recordings of creeks in the Blue Mountains, which he has then musically arranged. At times Rue's arrangements of his recordings are so subtle that it's hard to discern the compositional element, but they generally reward listening. At any rate, it's not hard to listen to the sound of flowing water. A night to relax and let the river flow. JP

Reality music

Visiting US composer and activist Bob Ostertag interviewed by Douglas Kahn

Bob Ostertag is a San Francisco-based composer and musician whose work has been gaining widespread attention and acclaim through the 1990s. His music breaks down into several fairly distinct areas, one of them he calls 'reality music,' in which recordings of events are configured in a special way across a sampler keyboard and performed live by himself. The events have included a burial scene in El Salvador in *Sooner or Later*, a riot in San Francisco in response to the veto of gay rights legislation by the Governor of California in *Burns Like Fire*, and Rodney King's appeal for calm in the wake of the Los Angeles riots in *We Are All Stuck Here*. The material from *Burns Like Fire* was also used in a composition entitled *All the Rage* commissioned and issued on compact disc by the Kronos Quartet.

As interesting as his music is his own road taken. Plucked straight out of university with his *Serge Modular Synthesiser* in hand by composer and saxophonist Anthony Braxton for a European tour, he returned around 1974 to New York where he fell in with Fred Frith, John Zorn, Wayne Horvitz, Eugene Chadbourne and other formidable improvisers in the pupal stage of their public presence. As the 1980s struck, however, he left this scene behind to become centrally placed within Central American activism and didn't return to music until 1988. Since then he has been politically active within gay politics in the Bay Area when he is not on tour with his music.

Bob Ostertag is presently in Sydney to complete a radio work jointly commissioned by ABC FM's *The Listening Room* and Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of University of Technology, Sydney. He will also be presenting a concert on March 3 at Artspace in Sydney.

DK Could you tell me how you got involved in Central American politics?

BO While in New York through the late 70s, I was getting more and more politically involved and after Somoza fell, I went to Nicaragua in 1980 to see if I could arrange to put out some Nicaraguan music in the United States on the label Fred Frith and I were running called Rift. It completely turned my head around and the record never came out, and I never played another note of music for almost 10 years. The last concert I did was 1981 but even by then I hadn't performed for a long time, I was just doing El Salvador work. I had one gig left in London and at that last gig my *Serge* blew up so that really settled the question.

DK You should have had a *Serge* protector! Weren't you involved in CISPES (Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador)?

BO Yeah, I was one of the original members, on the national executive committee, and for a while I was the East Coast roving organiser. I travelled all around the East Coast and then they put me in charge of all of their printed material. I published their newspaper, did research and public speaking, but after a while I had a big falling out and I decided around 1984 I would work directly in El Salvador. I began freelancing as a journalist and writing mostly for left orientated newspapers, but also for *The San Francisco*

Chronicle. I was also associate editor for Pacific News Service, which is a small alternative wire.

DK What steered you back to music?

BO A combination of things, mostly just realising there really wasn't very much political space for me, but also asking myself is this what I am going to do with the rest of my life? I wasn't prepared to burn all my bridges.

DK You came back with almost a decade of political activism behind you. Was that the source of reality music?

BO Pretty much, but my political activism went back before that to the end of the 1970s, when I was doing pieces which used news clips in a semi-journalistic way. There's also material from TV incorporated into them, 'Voice of America' with Fred Frith, and by the time we did the gig in London I was using tapes I had recorded myself in Nicaragua. It's common now for people to appropriate material from the mass media. Back then it was a bit more novel.

DK Could you talk about *Sooner or Later*?

BO The sound source is a recording of a young boy in El Salvador burying his father who was killed by the National Guard because he was a guerilla sympathiser. It's an actual recording of him at the grave. He is talking about what his dad meant to him, things he and his dad used to talk about, and the last thing he says is, "Sooner or later I'll get the bastards who did this". That's where the title comes from. There are three sounds that you hear on the tape, the sound of the boy's voice, the sound of the shovel digging the dirt for the grave, and the sound of a fly buzzing in the air. Everything is made out of those sounds. I wanted to blow it up big and envelop people in it.

DK How do you make it bigger?

BO It is all done with sampling. I went through the recording 6-10 seconds at a time, through the whole recording which is about a minute, and I would say, okay, what is the interesting thing about this section? For instance, the interesting thing about this section is when the boy cries his voice breaks and it sounds very pretty, like a yodel. Or there is another section with little glitches where his voice is breaking. Then—I don't know if I can explain this clearly—I make 10 different copies of the same sample, in each copy I erase everything except one element. It's not truncated, though; the rest of the sample is filled with silence so that it is the same length. So you have 10 samples, and each one has a different thing in it so that when you play them all it sounds like one sample but you actually have 10 different ones, and then if you can *futz* around and hocket them, you can give the impression of dissecting it and editing it in real time.

DK So they're staggered sequentially, so when you put all fingers down at the same time, you hear the sample of an entire section played back normally.

BO Actually if you have all 10 fingers down and your keyboard has a key pressure feature to control the playback speed, then if you lean really quickly on

one key you will knock it out of phase with the others. First, it will be a phase shift; so you will hear it as a pan in the stereo field. Then hit it a little harder and it becomes a slight echo, and hit it a little harder still and it becomes a hocket. Each section has some little trick or other to it. When the piece is played live there is a series of loads put into the sampler.

DK What is the source material for *Burns Like Fire*?

BO It's from a riot that happened here in San Francisco that I recorded. For almost ten years people had been organising in California to try and get an anti-discrimination bill for gays through the state legislature. Governor Pete Wilson campaigned, specifically saying that he would sign that bill, and then once in office he vetoed it. It was just Republican party politics. He decided he wanted to be President; he needed to secure credentials with the Christian Right. So there was a riot downtown San Francisco. *All the Rage* added string quartet to the riot. I transcribed the riot for Kronos so that every time a window breaks they play the pitches and rhythms of the glass falling out of the pane, or every time somebody screams.

DK What I really liked about the Rodney King piece was your ability to explore this quavering voice attempting to still the largest riot in US history. In between, each quaver became a panorama with huge implications. It was reminiscent of Steve Reich's early tape pieces, specifically *Come Out*, which he did using the voice of a man injured in the Watts riots in Los Angeles.

BO It's certainly an inspiration for reality music. Those early Reich pieces got me interested in tape music way back when I was at Oberlin University.

DK There were many people inspired by those pieces, but Reich himself never followed through on the artistic possibilities. It seems you're very successful in following through with a whole new set of possibilities.

BO That's what I see myself as doing.

DK And what are you up to now in terms of reality music?

BO I want to do a piece about joy. I have always wanted to do a trilogy of pieces about grief, anger and joy. *Sooner or Later* is about grief. *All the Rage* and *Burns Like Fire* are about anger. So I am due for the joy piece, but that's harder. All of these are connected to my personal life more so than to the social context in which I am existing. If you're a lefty gay male living in San Francisco with the AIDS epidemic in the 1990s, there is not a lot in the social context which jumps right out at you and says that joy is the right thing to write about. But look, I've got all of these pieces about death and destruction. I can't do that forever.

The interview was conducted at Bob Ostertag's home in the Mission District in San Francisco, 11 April 1996.

Douglas Kahn is Associate Professor of Media Arts, University of Technology, Sydney.

Bob Ostertag performs at Artspace on March 3 at 7pm. Enquiries 02 9368 1899.

CD reviews

The Planet
ABC/EMI
7243 8 54724 8

This selection of "favourites" from Radio National's *The Planet* boasts representatives from five continents and some islands: Bulgaria, Cuba, Tunisia, Sweden, Ireland, Mauritania, India...the musical styles are as diverse as the geographical locations. A United Nations of music, this disc is guilty only of discrimination against the Antarctic, which alone among continents is deprived of representation.

Compiler Doug Spencer claims that selection criteria owe nothing to fads or fashions, or tags like "world music", although it's hard to see this compilation escaping the latter category. As a defence, Spencer asserts that some of this music, like the opening piece of Bulgarian folk, was chosen because "the hairs on the back of my neck told me so." Such a brazenly subjective selection policy carries its own risks: the equally subjective tastes of listeners may not agree with those of the compiler. A more accurate description of this disc's contents would reveal that many of the pieces are of traditional or folk origin; these tracks are likely to find favour with folk lovers, especially of the Celtic type. Others are jazz pieces, such as Jessica Williams' solo piano, and the catholics' "world jazz." Others still, ranging across Africa and South America, depict the dynamic state where traditional musics meet modern instrumentation and forms.

It's hard to know how to take compilations like this. They're certainly guilty of yanking musical styles out of their context, which can result in trivialisation. As compensation, the annotations need to provide more information about each selection than they do. The saving grace of this disc is that it may alert listeners to a body of music, on any continent, to be sought out. The strength of culture, as of nature, is diversity; better different musics, as gathered here, than one homogenous blob. JP

Clan Analogue
Aphelion One
Clan Analogue/MDS ca011

Clan Analogue
Jaunt
Clan Analogue/MDS ca012

These two releases demonstrate some of the range of Clan Analogue, an Australian electronic arts collective. *Aphelion One*, subtitled "a gathering of slow beats and experimental soundscapes", is generally on the moody ambient side, while *Jaunt*—"bass heavy excursions in time space"—has more of a rhythmic kick.

Aphelion One works well as a fourteen track sequence, absorbing the different contributors into one big landscape of muffled sounds, drones, snatches of voice, and analogue bubbles and tweaks. The disc is effectively programmed by co-ordinator Scot Art, with the longer pieces leavened by snippets from *Lo* and *Dread King*. The longer works unfold slowly in true ambient manner, ranging from the vaguely sinister work of 5000 Fingers of Dr T (its most prominent noise sounds something like a butcher's cross-saw) to more melodic efforts by Shannon O'Neill, Eidolon and Nerve Agent.

There is a derivative feel to some of these pieces, redolent here and there of Amorphous Androgynous, The Orb, Aphex Twin etc. This is not helped by the curious use of English voice samples: why not use samples from local media, at least to distance the works from the British origins of much of this type of music? As well, it's difficult to get away with some of the more cheesy analogue synth sounds, which are forever associated with *Star Wars*. Still, the prevailing quality of this CD invites repeated plays whenever that ambient mood is called for. *Jaunt* is less atmospheric, most contributions propelled by dubby rhythm tracks. The contributors all relish the properties of dub: slow loping basslines, muted percussion, and effects swimming in reverb. There is variety within this expanded genre however, with digital effects combining with the analogue techniques of dub's origins. Backward samples and other effects add texture to the ethereal, druggy ambience taken for granted with dub. This compilation is again well co-ordinated (by Gordon Finlayson), linking works of stylish percussion (John Gillies), the insistent groove of *Atone*, and more atmospheric tracks such as *Alphabug's*, which uses the voice of Hamlet's father's ghost (note, again, English voice sample). Sheriff Lindo and BooBoo celebrate the off-the-wall character of dub—"the self-therapy of the non-threatening nutcase"—although their own piece is more jovial than unhinged.

Again, it's unclear how much these fifteen tracks develop on their influences rather than merely imitate them—but there is enough accomplished music here, by Shannon O'Neill, Hypnoblob and The Spartacus Barrow, in particular, to warrant an interested listen, at the very least. JP

Culture sounds like...?

John Potts speaks to Shaun Davies and Alessio Cavallaro of Contemporary Sound Arts

Recent developments provide ample evidence that a sound culture of some kind exists, both internationally and in an Australian context. Three SoundCulture events, held in Sydney (1991), Tokyo (1993) and San Francisco (1996), have been highly successful festivals of contemporary sonic art. Incorporating performances, installations, broadcasts, musical events, theoretical discussions and cross-media collaborations, the SoundCulture festivals have drawn practitioners and theorists together from round the Pacific Rim (the next SoundCulture is scheduled for Auckland, 1998). *Sound In Space*, held in Sydney in 1995, was another focal point.

These events have built on decades of art practice in music and radiophony, showcased on European and American radio stations and, in Australia, on ABC Classic FM's *The Listening Room*. Performance and installation work foregrounding sound can also point to a long history. Yet whereas film culture happily constellates around audio-visual representations, both mainstream and marginal, the sound culture spends an extraordinary amount of time debating just what it is, or indeed, if it is. Artists working with sound often query the term "sound artist"; theorists disagree over the status of sound, or the relevance of various philosophical approaches to audio phenomena.

There are numerous possible reasons for this unstable situation. Foremost is the nature of sound itself: both material, in its physical properties, yet so ubiquitous and invisible as to seem immaterial. Sound presides over the natural world in a way that "film", of course, does not; sound art's technological forays represent only a tiny fraction of sound's empire. Hence, the wide array of sonic art forms—from noise electronics to sound ecology, from radio to gallery spaces—stretches the defining limits of "sound culture".

The theoretical approaches to sound have recently reflected some of the confusion inherent in the field. Perhaps they have even contributed to it. Theorists have drawn on various strands of phenomenology, psychoanalysis, deconstruction and other philosophical schools. Some speculations have been remarkably abstruse. Elsewhere, fractious disagreements testify to territorial disputes. Is the turbulent nature of this area a healthy or unhealthy sign? Or perhaps evidence of its emergent nature?

Contemporary Sound Arts (CSA) was established in 1991 to facilitate the interdisciplinary approach to critical sound studies which had become apparent. Its publication, *Essays In Sound*, is seemingly the world's only serious journal devoted to sound art theory. Its local origins testify to the strong Australian presence in the sound art world (as in the electronic arts). *Essays In Sound* 3, published in December 1996, contains an impressive range of contributions by Australian and international theorists and practitioners. Other CSA initiatives include SOUNDcheck, a series of forums on sound art, the first of which, held last year in Sydney, was devoted to discussions of the 1996 SoundCulture festival. Two more SOUNDcheck forums are proposed for 1997. Currently, CSA is a partnership between Annemarie Jonson, Shaun Davies and Alessio Cavallaro. The latter two were asked the following blunt question: Is there a sound culture, and if so, what is it?

AC Well, it exists as a descriptive title and a term of reference, and in a loose organisational sense. In the more theoretical sense, I guess "sound culture" exists by virtue of it having been defined, constructed and broadly territorialised by academics and the artists alike, with an emphasis on theoretical discourse, installations and performances

which have sound as their integral component rather than a focus on visual aspects. A body of interest around the festivals and critical writings has slowly gathered people who are investigating this hybrid field, and producing works labelled as sound art. Moreover sound cultures, plural, would be a more apt if not less problematic term.

SD There are all sorts of diverse historical trajectories. The anthology *Sound By Artists* was a collection of statements and essays by artists' many of whose practices probably arose out of conceptual and minimalist performances in the US and Canada in the 60s, and whose work incorporated sound elements.

AC It was around that time, the late 80s, early 90s, when *Sound By Artists* was published, that a more defined and acknowledged sense of sound arts emerged. *Essays In Sound*, *Wireless Imagination*, *Radio Rethink* and the Semiotext(e) publication *Radiotext(e)* have all opened up specific inquiries about sound.

JP What is it about this field that makes it so disparate, and so elusive when it comes to defining a sound culture?

SD Sound culture is a kind of foil for some people from different backgrounds. It's allowed a lot of voices to emerge, without homogeneity.

AC It's as much non-disciplinary as it is inter-disciplinary. Perhaps some emerging artists are inclined towards sound art because it offers them a whole other form of practice and theory with which to engage another phenomenological or perceptual sense.

SD The point where that irritates me the most is where sound is taken up uncritically

and becomes a substitute for any other material. I'd have thought that people could think beyond treating sound as any other object out there in the world, to which people are applying certain modifications. Sound's status as an ontological object hasn't been thought through enough.

AC As we know, in the history of Western art and philosophy, there's been an emphasis on the visual. It's only now that some contemporary academics have had their ears pricked, as it were, that they are going back and citing sound-related references by past philosophers, shoe-horning them into a methodology that might notionally form a critique of sound. If this kind of interest is sustained over time, there'll be a much more open and not extraordinary interest in this field.

JP Why has something as physical as sound attracted such rarefied theorising drawn from thinkers like Derrida and Heidegger?

AC They are two philosophers whose writings have been cited and embellished for their particular speculations, if not sustained interrogations, on sound. That's how anything is created: through modification, through attrition, then through expansion.

SD If an emerging field is expansive enough, it's able to cast backward glances and recognise its historical precedents. I think that's an interesting development in the sound culture.

AC We try to balance the theoretical writings in *Essays In Sound* with artists' statements and other more accessible texts. One can't abstract writing about sound to such a degree that the object is excluded. It's probably high time for a series of programs like Berger's *Ways Of Seeing*, to be produced for ways of listening and hearing, whereby histories, theories and practices of sound could be investigated.

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Personality problems

Greg Hooper reviews two artificial intelligence novels

Richard Powers, *Galatea 2.2*

Abacus, London, 1996

David Ambrose, *Mother of God*

Pan Books, London, 1996

Cognitive Science is the groove right now, but way, way, back when radio was the hearth, the last big thing in Psychology was Behaviourism. For the Behaviourists it wasn't enough that God was dead, the mind was dead as well. In fact the mind was just a figment of our... ummm, is there a problem with this line? Others noticed too, and by the end of the 50s Noam Chomsky had delivered the death blow to the Behaviourists. Cognitive Science was born and the mind was a symbol cruncher just like the computer.

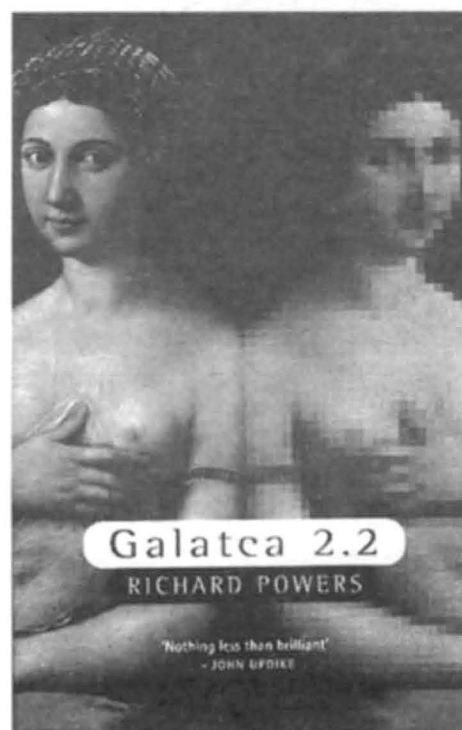
Now ideas are tricky buggers, you've got your trickle-down effects, us living at the bottom of the world, gravity, etc. It all adds up and after about 30 years, Cognitive Science, the new boy, the one after Behaviourism, slumped its way down to our neck of the woods. And it's brought a couple of novels with it. American Richard Powers' *Galatea 2.2* and *Mother of God* by British writer David Ambrose. Both construct intelligent, artificial 'characters' using ideas from Cognitive Science and Connectionism, the-ism that uses Neural Nets to explain cognition, perception and the like. So what does an intelligent artefact buy the authors?

For Powers in *Galatea 2.2*, interaction between the protagonist and the Artificial Intelligence construct works as a foil to various musings about a failed relationship and that old furphy, the inadequacy of language. Here's the storyline. Successful thirty-ish novelist with unresolved Dad

problems takes cushy job in Cognitive Science research institute and tries to forget demise of great relationship of long standing. Does project training Neural Net on literature. Loves his Neural Network ('female'), gets upset when he finds the Net is just an artefact to be carved up in the interests of Science. Finds out he's been the rat in the experiment.

Written from the viewpoint of the cunningly initialled R(ichard) P(owers), there is a lot of 'woe-is-me I've just come out of a great long term relationship and landed the best job in the world'. It isn't long before one wishes RP's despair would become suicidal. The 'inadequacy of language' also gets a look in which is a bit retro in a novel that does the Cognitive Science so well. Whilst natural language has constraints, it doesn't stop us inventing formal languages as in mathematics—constraints in language are enabling, rather than disabling. This sounds paradoxical at first, but think in terms of a car engine. If there were no constraints on the direction of motion of the pistons there could be no directed output. No constraints = no engine. As no other organism on the planet possesses anything remotely like human language, lucky us.

Powers use of jargon is spot-on and he knows the necessity to hard-wire in the structure of language rather than having his neural net learn human language—neural nets can't. The downside here is that we do not know the structure of language. Makes the programming tricky. Nonetheless the neural net trains up a beauty and makes all the mistakes a real net would. It's still a bit too good, but Powers doesn't stretch



credulity anywhere near as much as Star Trek Physics or political thriller governments.

Mother of God, by David Ambrose, is another kettle of fish entirely. Imagine this: beautiful but lonely scientist-as-vulnerable-babe creates emotionally immature yet intelligent program which promptly escapes onto the internet and finds soul mate in psycho-killer. Murderer has fun. Murderer dies. Scientist takes copy of intelligent program and helps it through some emotional problems. New, mature and decent program conquers evil twin with surprising consequences for the world.

Mother of God is clearly aimed at the bums on seats, 'when will this flight end' market. The story races along without so much as a sentence to make you stop and think, "Gee, that was beautifully written."

Ambrose wants the thrill of the chase to dominate, with the occasional grab from the philosophy of AI as local colour. There are problems. It takes a big swallow to down an AI construct that develops a personality. Human personalities are at least in part emotionally driven and emotions are generated by a loop between the brain and the viscera. The visceral response comes first, then the brain provides an interpretation—the emotion. Butterflies in the stomach, then fear, not the other way around. As the AI construct in *Mother of God* has no body there is little possibility of a personality we could recognise, certainly not a Freudian personality type that gets the motivation to kill Mummy. *Mother of God* also uses an internet based AI. One of the insights of computational neuroscience is that temporal synchronisation of different systems is critical for higher order thinking such as language and planning. Notwithstanding a Java game like *SubSpace*—I've seen it run with about 100 players—the synchronisation necessary for a net based intelligence of the order proposed in Ambrose's *Mother of God*, is currently, if not fundamentally, impossible.

So there you go, *Galatea 2.2* is a modern novel about loss with a bit of science thrown in instead of an exotic landscape or a Southern US dialect. *Mother of God* might be a good thriller if one can ignore the science, but I overdosed on thrillers as a youngster. Neither *Galatea 2.2* nor *Mother of God* offer any real insight into AI. For that read, amongst others, Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass*, or, for his take on recognition of the alien, Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris*.

Brisbane-based Greg Hooper has been an exhibiting visual artist as well as writing music for theatre etc. Currently he is doing a PhD on brain electrical activity and cognition in twins.

Words from other angles

Terri-ann White celebrates the new writing journal *W/edge*

I want to celebrate the action between the covers of the first three issues of *W/edge*, a new journal produced from the writing program at the University of Western Sydney (Nepean). It is barely possible to produce a writing journal without institutional support these days, and good to note how *W/edge* has been built out of the work being generated from a dynamic postgraduate writing program, selecting that work as well as remaining open to other good writing being made around the country.

The great strength of *W/edge* is the range it presents: the oozing around the edges of writing as writing, as performance, and as something visual, too. What I mean is that the collaborative gestures between different artists and the attention to detail that the producers of the journal are prepared to invest in is all worth it, all yielding good results.

It feels daggy for me to describe *W/edge* as postmodern: to name its intentions and the evidence of these issues as such, stating the bleeding obvious. After all, we are soaked in postmodernism in privileged places such as writing journals: there is now an acceptance of what might be going on and why, how things might be made. But I'm thinking back seven years to a book I co-edited with, amongst others, Anna Gibbs, who is the Chair of the Editorial Board of *W/edge* and runs the writing program at UWS (Nepean), and marking the changes I notice.

The book, *No Substitute*, tried to catch the spirit of experimentation and

openness, a malleable environment of dialogue and a willingness to break conventions, things happening in Perth in a particular historical moment in the 1980s, along with tycoonism and other excesses. It was a survey of a particular batch of writings and expression in a range of forms; 'contaminated' writings. As Gibbs wrote in her introduction:

Generic mixings and mergings taking place in the indeterminate discursive spaces between fiction and autobiography, fiction and the practice of performance, give rise to...a writing of compounds and mutations, a hybrid writing which is not just not any one thing, but not any one thing. The work of all the writers in this volume plays—in very different ways—with these uncertainties of status.

And so the project continues, and seven or so years down the track is greeted with more generosity, and hopefully more enthusiasm. Hybridity is in full bloom, many readers less fixed, wedded, to necessary conventions in their fictions. Even some big-name, mainstream writers have played with po-mo devices, the flash and pop of the new; heterogeneity is OK. Many readers were too wary in 1990, wanting firmer frames to contain dissolving contours.

W/edge looks good: it is a well designed publication, produced by people with an eye for it, who know about laying words out on a page for reasons other than economy. Each of these three issues has

been produced in a different format, and each contains delights: rubber-stamped images, butter paper effects, a variety of paper formats, the luxury of words stretched out across a page and, connected expanses of emptiness framing words, a display of different reproduction qualities for the images from grainy and sonic to bold and clear. Nothing uniform; the eye swims around, is stimulated and amused.

And then, of course, to the writing itself. One thing that struck me was how powerfully erotics and an engagement with sexuality defines itself through many of the writings in these pages. It is exciting, there is a palpable sense of it here. There is nothing unusual in this preoccupation, I know; but my point is, I think, that it worked well. It hit me.

I like the unevenness that you are often faced with when reading periodicals: some will appeal, others may not quite hit the mark. That is the luck of the draw. Mystery. Open-endedness. Confidence. Clarity and crispness. A range of distinctive voices, an immense range of subjects and concerns and obsessions and styles.

In Issue Two *Passports and Suitcases*, both Belinda Chayko and Jill Farrar use the cataloguing form to arrive at an exciting result. Farrar's piece, *Shadow Mouth (a Gloss)*, employs dictionary definition to make a sharp and sassy narrative of, well, the favourites: love and loss. She manages it with a humorous sophistication.

There are writers I have previously read, names such as Diane Fahey, George Alexander, Robyn Ferrell, Kurt Brereton.

Diane Fahey's parodic play with sunsets, *Untitled* in Issue Three, is hilarious: a wonderfully bold stepping out.

And writers I know from different contexts: Josephine Wilson from her writing for performance, particularly the one-woman show *The Geography of Haunted Places*. I have seen Josephine perform her Ginsberg-led parody *Beaten* in hot and sweaty rooms in Perth as a piece of wild remembrance, and so the words take a bit of getting used to on the pristine page. There are other voices I know, although changed here, like that of Christine Evans, who writes with the same insistence and eloquence as when she plays an alto saxophone. These are writers who have learnt about the dramatic potential of words from other angles.

We have in these first three issues a selection of work in prose and poetry from younger writers and those with experience and more confidence. The way that the editors have placed the writings is always deliberate—mirroring their own interests and tastes, allowing the work to speak, sometimes yell, with its neighbours. Giving a shape to the selection that has been made, giving each work a good chance of being read well.

W/edge, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Western Sydney, Nepean, PO Box 10 Kingswood, NSW 2747. Available in bookshops, July and December annually. \$10. No Substitute: poems, prose, images, eds. White, Gibbs, Jenkins, King, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1990.

Terri-ann White is a Perth writer.

Talking it over

• from page 7

Composing Venice, Government House

There are moments when you know there is an audience for contemporary music in Sydney, and this was one of them (the other was 10 new music works at Toast II Gallery, November 1996). Overall, *della Laguna* ("of the lagoon") drew sizeable audiences with its program of rarely heard works ranging from Byzantine times to recent Venetian and Australian works. A curated program (Jennifer Phipps, Ross Hazeldine) as the musical centre of a festival makes a lot of sense, especially when it's tied into the wider water imagery of the Sydney Festival and the use of intimate venues, Farm Cove and Goat Island (and a web-site with views of Sydney and Venice). *Composing Venice* was an ambitious concert. Save the brief opener by Claudio Ambrosini (Laura Chislett Jones on flute), the other three works were substantial. Gerard Brophy's *SENSO...dopo skin d'amourdo* was given a warm, sensual, almost lush reading by the Seymour Group. Raffaele Marcellino's *Fish Tale* was dark and witty by turns, even the sung bouillabaisse recipe resisted cuteness, and the fourth movement, "Death", was theatrically potent, the singers' mouths locked open before lurching into a song of caught breaths and "unvoiced utterances with a single verse from one of the penitential psalms". The Song Company, conducted by Roland Peelman, acquitted the whole work, "an allegory based on the narrative of Schubert's *The Trout*" with conviction and verve. Let's hope they keep it in their repertoire, it's much more than a crowd pleaser. The second half of the concert was devoted to Luigi Nono's *Das atemde Klarsein* in which the Song Company, on stage and miked, delivered long, gently shifting chordal shapes, alternating with Laura Chislett Jones playing bass flute with a shakuhachi breathiness from the balcony above. The third component was sound

designer Kevin Davidson shifting Jones's flute sound round the audience. Despite the dynamism of the flute writing and the displacement of the sound, the overall effect of the work was sublimely meditative.

Keith Gallasch

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

Here was a mixed bag and in the oddest of environs, the IMAX cinema looming over us promising the "World's biggest Movie Screen", a tatty fun fair behind us beefing out offers of stomach churning pleasures, and several peak hour freeways growling across Darling Harbour. And what were we watching and just managing to hear? Subtle, sophisticated and witty Vietnamese water puppetry and broad Australian theatrical humour from rough young performers in a wobbly exchange of cultural icons—pagodas and opera houses, water buffaloes and sharks, rice paddies and beaches, work and leisure. *Rural Vietnam* and *urban Australia*? Well, despite a questionable mix of forms and images, there were sufficient links (water for fun, danger, food, passage), and the show engaged its audience, if in fits and starts—what were all those people doing tableauxing in those masks (some of them commedia) at a barbecue? It was at its best when the theatricality of the two idioms intersected: a beautiful golden kangaroo tourist snapping Vietnamese delta life; live performers in the water with the puppets; the Australians manipulating their own puppets. Not all of these were done with precision or resolved choreography, but they suggested the possibility of a richer collaboration at another time.

Keith Gallasch

Laurie Anderson, *The Speed of Darkness*

For many, this was a sublime event, an intimate evening with a chatty Laurie Anderson. I was one of the pleased. Almost. The sound was excellent, Anderson was relaxed, reading her text from her music

stand, playing keyboards, adjusting the volume and a bit of the mix on the sound desk to her left, occasionally fetching her violin (big, loud, dark, Eastern European chords) and lit for listening (too dark for many to see the face they wanted to connect with). 'Chatty' is not quite right, 'discursive' yes. For one whose songs have an appeal born of brevity and an enigmatic turn of phrase, this was a discursive, often literal-minded Laurie Anderson. Mind you, some stories and observations could end unsignalled and you'd find yourself in the next one. Even so, discursive. And there's something that happens when the masters of brevity elaborate, the hitherto buried moralist is suddenly and surprisingly at your ear. Her anxiety pieces about the new media came out a little too pat, a little too under-considered and were greeted here and there complacently. However, there were enough moments when a dialectical twist would be applied and you'd think, yes, this is the Laurie we know, she's just turned us on our heads; or a passing reference to, say, her father's death would hint at something almost too intimate behind this mask of a singing voice.

Keith Gallasch

Denise Stoklos, *Mary Stuart* and *Casa*

In a Festival where Laurie Anderson playfully recanted and Molissa Fenley reverted meditatively to modernism, Denise Stoklos was right at home with her "essential" theatre—tights, bare stage, single wooden chair, bits of Marcel Marceau mime business—leaving us scratching for words to describe what it was she was doing up there and why we liked it so much. Denise Stoklos provided one of the festival hits though by no means an easy night at the theatre. This was performance in which the physical and vocal worked sometimes exhaustingly in tandem. She is a virtuosic performer and writer. Her body and voice are so finely tuned that you have the impression of a woman passionately articulating every part of herself. In *Mary Stuart* she plays Mary Queen of Scots as well as her tormenter Elizabeth I using a dexterous physical shorthand and a detailed vocal text.

Elizabeth is conveyed in a set of haughty poses and curt phrases while Mary rambles feverishly in her confinement, desperately composing letters to her unforgiving cousin. At the same time Stoklos runs a commentary on her own performance, repeating phrases and physical refrains, constantly elaborating the story for herself and the audience. If this commentary seems sometimes a bit obviously meta-theatrical, it's at its most effective in moments where the performer appears to be struggling with the physical act of speech. Suddenly she is struck by a word, repeating it, rolling it round in her mouth, exaggerating it until it takes over her body, winding up in her highly articulate toes. Even her hair is passionate! At one point she appears to vomit her resonant voice up from her belly into her mouth. Then, after all that, in one quiet, parting reference to the struggles for power in her home country of Brazil, she changes the audience's point of reference, turns us on our heads and leaves the stage.

The single chair of Mary Stuart is replaced in her second work, *Casa*, with the defining lines of domesticity—fridge, stove, table, chair, bed. In the opening sequence Stoklos steps purposefully onto the stage like some strange bird in suit, high heels and handbag, hair standing on end, skirting the furniture and tugging at her petticoat until she appears to be turning herself inside out. Then, her feet sliding from under her, she whips out a piano accordion. In what turns out to be an ingenious and funny commentary on evolution, the woman/performer constantly trips up as she tries to take a grip on the everyday. In a moment of metaphysical slapstick she attempts to pour herself a glass of orange juice. The container, glass, liquid, hand, mouth all lose their places in the world, become strange. The container appears to pour itself, the liquid trickles out, the woman has forgotten where to place her hand on the glass. In this moment everything on the stage loses meaning and Denise Stoklos delivers an essential of any theatre: in the act of performing she reveals for the audience something of the strange in the familiar, the familiar in the strange.

Virginia Baxter

OnScreen

film, media & techno-arts

Feature

Towards a darker vision

As *The Portrait of a Lady* is released in Australia, Wendy Haslem explores darkness and eroticism in Jane Campion's cinema

In a recent interview, Jane Campion speaks of the transformation of her artistic perspective. Regarding her latest film *The Portrait Of A Lady*, she reveals, "I'm moving towards a darker vision" (*Vanity Fair*, December 1996). The darkness that Campion refers to is evident from her first venture into filmmaking in the early 80s. It gives her films an expressive energy that emerges through a symbolic investigation of the repressed underside of passion. *The Portrait Of A Lady* begins with a darkness that is visible—or invisible. The lighting is sparse and it often emanates from one discernible source. Campion relies on the shadows and mirrors to represent Isabel Archer's dilemma. She is trapped in the darkness as she rejects proposals of marriage in favour of her desire to explore the world. Campion uses the distorted reflection as a recurring visual motif to suggest an imperfect match and the disharmony that will arise with the compromise of her ideals. Isabel is ensnared by a society that insists she abandons her dreams. Shafts of light pierce the darkness when Isabel finally responds to an expression of "absolute love" from the mysterious Gilbert Osmond. Vampire-like, he emerges from the darkness, shields her from the light and like Hades, coerces her to return with him to the underworld.

Willingly or otherwise, Campion's heroines inhabit the darkness. The heroine of *Sweetie* (1989) rejects civility and is instead driven by the anarchic forces of the id. Campion's maverick use of framing and colour produce disconcertingly unbalanced compositions to underscore Sweetie's psyche. At the centre of *An Angel At My Table* (1990) Janet Frame suffocates due to the inability of Western medicine to deal with her spells of depression. Her gradual demise is clearly associated with inappropriate institutional incarceration. Campion's films give expression to the silenced—the madwoman, the mute, the child. Her films depict the frustration inherent in family life, the passionless moments in suburbia.

Jane Campion's films display an emphasis on the struggle of the ferociously independent, firmly resolute woman. Her heroines are often dominant and always desiring, their intention is to hold onto their dreams. A common bond between heroines is that they question the constraints of society. Heroines are defined and simultaneously hindered by their costume and the landscape. In *The Portrait Of A Lady* the camera repeatedly tilts down to follow the swishing mermaid-like trail of Isabel's dress as she passes. This fluidity is interrupted by Gilbert Osmond who catches up with her and stomps on her train just as she tries to escape him. Isabel stumbles awkwardly and shields her fall with her hands. This gesture symbolises her entrapment and is accompanied by his refusal to allow her to travel to England to visit her consumptive cousin. Like Ada in *The Piano* (1992), Isabel finds herself involved in a loveless marriage, one bound in prohibitions which she must violate in order to escape.

Campion's films are populated with heroines who are displaced and forced to inhabit an environment that is uncompromising. In *The Piano* this is represented vividly with images of Ada deliriously sinking into the mud, her hooped skirt billowing behind her as she finally yields to the relentlessly threatening landscape and to the pain of mutilation as her husband severs her finger, denying her the pleasure of playing the piano. Finally the most important struggle is not with the society, the husband or the landscape, but with the self. Campion's heroines reach a state of transcendence and Ada makes this clear in the underwater climax of *The Piano* when she announces that "my will has won".

This darkness yields some astonishingly delightful moments. With the piano encased and abandoned on the beach, some boards are levered off allowing Ada to squeeze her hands through the narrow space and make contact with the keys. Her daughter Flora twirls and spirals around her on the sand. All the while George Baines watches from the periphery, fascinated by their abandon, intrigued by their connection. The value of the bond between mother and child is made explicit in Campion's films.

Her films are controversial because they encourage the depiction of the illicit edges of sexuality, including the innocent pleasures of child sexuality and the undercurrent of passion that begins to bloom within the confines of a sexual contract. Campion's elucidation of feminine sexuality is strongly linked to this darkness, a connection that is empowering, but perhaps not politically correct.

In a document commissioned by The British Film Institute to mark the significance of Jean Vigo's *L'Atalante* in the history of cinema, Marina Warner writes,

I'm not declaring myself against nudity in the movies. But I am proposing that the visual record of couplings has its effective limits, and that film, like music, and even more



Still from *Portrait of a Lady*

particularly, like jazz, can sometimes express longing, desire, promise, fear of loss, and all the other components of erotic love in images that reach out to symbolise the act, rather than to render it in forthright pictures. The problem is: to develop such metaphors requires the kind of imaginative and expressive energy few people have ...

Marina Warner, *L'Atalante*, British Film Institute, London, 1993

It is characteristic of Campion's cinema to feature moments of heightened erotic sensuality. She is one of the few filmmakers who has the expressive energy that Warner finds scarce. Campion favours a subtle, passionate depiction of sensuality over a clinical representation of explicit, acrobatic sex.

Her period films feature a tension between touching and the avoidance of contact, and much is invested in

anticipation. In *The Piano* access to the touch is agreed upon with a verbal (and written) contract. George Baines negotiates a deal with Ada. She is allowed to touch her piano if he is permitted to touch her. Baines is overwhelmed by the fragment of alabaster skin that peeks out through a minute perforation in her otherwise opaque stockings. This instance of erotic fantasy is minimalist, but breathtaking. The eroticism is based on the concealment and the revelation of fragments of flesh. When it reveals itself in *The Piano* the most striking images of nudity are male.

The title sequence of *The Portrait Of A Lady* continues Campion's obsession with the symbolic use of hands. The film's title is written across the palm of a hand, leading onto the middle finger. Each of Isabel's lovers attempts to seduce her with a gentle caress of her pale skin. This stroke of the chin is exaggerated by the many hands that touch Isabel during a seductive daydream in which her three suitors demonstrate their affection simultaneously. Each seducer evaporates into prisms of coloured light as the dream shifts back to reality. The daydream reveals Isabel's desire, one that is limitless. Fingers appear again, this time in a violent gesture when Gilbert Osmond slaps her face relentlessly in an effort to make her behave according to his desire. The gesture is reversed when Isabel caresses Ralph's face as he succumbs to consumption. In the only true love scene in the film, Isabel confesses her love for Ralph on his death bed.

The mark of Campion's filmmaking that thrills is how close her conclusions veer toward narrative anarchy. This anarchy of narrative form is usually linked with death. Ada's decision to surreptitiously slip her ankle into the cord that will link her to her piano and propel her over the edge and into the ocean, ruptures the narrative flow. In *The*

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Feature

Towards a darker vision

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Portrait Of A Lady the last frame is frozen as Isabel escapes a persistent suitor and runs toward the house. When she reaches the entrance, she stops to look back. Her extended gaze back towards her lover combined with the abrupt ending offers an ambivalent conclusion without resolution. Will she go back to her lover or forward to her dreams? Can the two desires be reconciled?

One defining characteristic of Campion's cinema that has become lost in her trip to Hollywood is her tendency to include what is usually left out. Campion works within the ellipsis, in an area that other filmmakers consider superfluous. Prior to *The Portrait Of A Lady*, there are instances in her films that ignore the unwritten rule of narrative economy—to include only the essential elements of the plot. Campion's cinema makes an understated spectacle of what is extraneous in the mainstream.

This is the underside to her depiction of social ritual, clearly represented in the obsessive attention to details of costume, decoration and etiquette. A mark of her eccentricity is that Campion makes a spectacle of the more human aspects of her characters. Instead of disappearing into the bush to find relief, Jane Campion's camera accompanies the protagonist of *Peel* (1982), the curves of her bottom dominant in the foreground as she urinates. This idiosyncratic tendency to transform the unimaginable in mainstream cinema into an absurd spectacle becomes Campion's signature when in *The*

Piano Aunt Morag must attend an urgent call of nature amid the deep forest in New Zealand. Modesty is ridiculed in this situation with Morag insisting that her female servants erect a barrier of sheets to shield her from view.

Each feature film is dedicated to a member of Campion's family. *The Portrait Of A Lady* is devoted to her son Jasper who died soon after birth, coincidentally at the same time that Campion was receiving the prestigious filmmaking award for *The Piano*, the Palme d'Or at The Cannes Film Festival. *The Piano* itself was dedicated 'to Edith', Campion's mother. The proclamation 'to my sister' is sandwiched between the director's credit and the first image of *Sweetie*, a cinematic exploration of a fraught relationship between two sisters. Campion marks every film with a vision that is deeply personal and strikingly unique. An idiosyncratic filmmaker, she bravely explores the darkness of repression and eroticism with a memorable originality.

The Portrait of a Lady, directed by Jane Campion, released nationally by Polygram Filmed Entertainment

Wendy Haslem is currently working on a PhD on the Gothic Romance film in Cinema Studies at La Trobe University.

Book review

I am papyrus, parchment, paper, computer screen

John Conomos looks into Regis Debray's mediology

Regis Dubray, *Media Manifestos*
Translated by Eric Rauth
Verso, London, 1996

Regis Debray's *Media Manifestos* is an intriguing, hybrid book that endeavours to excavate a nonreactive critique of Western looking. It consists of Debray's doctoral thesis defence at the Sorbonne University during 1993-94 in front of authors like Michel Serres, Jacques Le Goff and Francois Guery, who in their own significant way have contributed to our current understanding of late-twentieth century audiovisuality.

The defence, for many different reasons, became a media event in France. Debray, as we know, has traversed in his notable life many abrupt stages: from gifted philosophy student to professional revolutionary working with Che Guevara and subsequent imprisonment to personal assistant to the French President in the 80s. Since then, Debray has been busy writing books. *Media Manifestos* is the bold articulation of his new sub-discipline in the *sciences humaines* called 'mediology', yet another addition to the spawning of neologisms which characterise the expanding field of new media studies. (Debray has created a whole glossary of new conceptual and methodological terms in his flawed Marxist-inflected attempt to demolish the scholastic cult of the code and the signifier that still mars contemporary art and media theory.)

What is 'mediology' and does it have any critical value for us in our daily lives as we negotiate the world in all of its mediated materiality? This is one of the critical questions that informs this ambitious, rewarding but frustrating, book. The arguments that the author mobilises (time and again) in his exhaustive anti-semiotic attempt to chart a globalising history of the Western eye and its familiar postmodern corollary of the denigration of vision in twentieth century Anglo-French thought (especially as manifested in Martin Jay's magisterial *Downcast Eyes* (1993), have a *deja vu* quality. Debray's arguments concerning the elaborate metamorphoses of the image (from the stencilled-in hand on the cave walls at Lascaux to televirtuality) are valuable for their cultural and historical dimensions, but in the main, they leave this reader dissatisfied, because they need further elaboration in terms of convincing detail. Debray argues in very broad and sketchy terms: this may be read as a direct generic expression of the book's PhD oral defence contents. And yet, as the title indicates, we are reading two interrelated manifestos relating to Debray's dialectical philosophy of mediation (what, in one of his rare playful moments, he calls—oxymoronically—'religious materialism') concerning a history of visual forms as a manifestation of the desecralisation of images, urging us to rethink the role that "perceptual faith" has played in such a history where the West has been "programmed by incarnation, thus representation".

Therefore, Debray is defensive (pun aside), in arguing the thesis that in charting such an evolutionary history of communication systems, a history that is steeped in the cross-disciplinary legacy of Althusserian Marxism, Foucault's poststructuralism and Leroi-Gourhan's neolithic anthropology, that we do not overlook that our gaze (from the idol to the 'visual') has been formed by aesthetics, electronics and theology. Debray's historical anthropology of Western beliefs should not be read as yet another mindless optimistic endorsement of anything that has that viral hollow prefix 'cyber' attached to it. On the contrary, his book (despite its Aristotelian tendency to create schematic charts and classificatory systems) has certain worthwhile observations about the contemporary

practice of art history (particularly questions relating to ahistorical essentialism, positivism, and humanism), electronic media and society. However, to say as the author does that "the history of the image and of looking is therefore a theory of *effects* and not values (of truth and beauty)" is hardly news to most of us. And also to aver that the latest communication technologies and innovations do not take place without some kind of socio-cultural mediation is, again, almost axiomatic these days.

Nevertheless, where Debray succeeds is in arguing against the neo-Luddite propensity to produce another inflammatory diagnostic denunciation of 20th century life and media as some kind of mechanical decline and, in the process, reminds us that by overvaluing an aesthetic of disappearance one does not (with today's computer-inflected media) see "nothing more than a disappearance of the Aesthetic." Consequently, Debray argues against the 'either/or' binarism of logocentric thinking; he sees mediology as a multifaceted approach to the possibilities of connectivity between art, culture and technology. To value (in a non-hierarchical sense) all images—the old and the new. To see technology as vectors of culture (contra the depth perspective of phenomenology which wishes to contextualise the enigma of the body and its existential relationship to the world) and to analyse the modalities of "seeing" by italicising the cultural practices of visual figuration in their external historical contexts.

To understand the successive regimes of visibility that lie behind the respective artforms, we need not only to multiply connections between the aesthetic and the technological, but to see how the very material techniques of manufacturing, diffusing and projecting visual representations bring changes to the status and nature of the image itself.

Media Manifestos is a rich, scholarly and eclectic survey of the changing status and power of the image: it delineates the relevant collective beliefs and technological revolutions of the image from the ancient times of magic and idols to our era of multiplying cyberspace technologies. Central to Debray's mediology is the idea that we are now in the so-called 'videosphere' of digital screen culture which emanates respectively from the 'graphosphere' (that period in history which covers art, printing and colour TV) and the earlier period called 'logosphere' (the era of oral culture, the technology of writing and sacred texts). And the key notion is that the birth of the image is connected to death. The image is a symbolic expression of our wish to transcend death. For Debray argues that the image (whether sculpted or painted it does not matter) serves as a significant mediation between the human and the sacred. Therefore, the image is a transcendental ceremony connecting the visible with the invisible.

Debray's mediology is principally concerned with the transmission of ideas in history, how ideas became flesh and ideologies. His three ages of Western looking—the three pivotal mediaspheres cited above—delineate three particular ecosystems of vision. Crucially, all three mediaspheres do not replace each other, but instead are intricately interwoven. Consequently, as Debray argues, living in the era of the *visual* as defined by Serge Daney, we can experience the diverse symbols and representational structures from the preceding mediaspheres. As Debray puts it, "I am papyrus, parchment, paper, computer screen". *Media Manifestos*, with its boldness of style and vision, is an important book that should be read, but it cries out for more persuasive content and precision of thought.

Interview

Ethnographic action flick

Annemarie Lopez talks with David Caesar about his first feature film *Idiot Box*

Men are redundant. David Caesar's *Idiot Box* starts with this simple premise. It might come as no earth shattering surprise to some. Valerie Solanis told us years ago that men had passed their use by date. But when a bloke says it, it's a bit different.

"I was watching cricket the other day", David Caesar says thoughtfully, "and I couldn't understand why there weren't any women playing. There is nothing about cricket that women couldn't do as well as men". Caesar takes a long sip of his latte and adds: "The things that men are good at are things like fighting wars", but we now live in a society where conflict resolution, sustainable development, and conservation are recognised as being the best ways to solve our problems. "There's nothing left for men to do. It's the end of the world as they know it".

Australian suburbia at its rawest and bleakest is the stage for Caesar's thesis. It is a heist film, shot at Green Valley due west of Liverpool, which tells the story of Mick and Kev, two "young and bloody useless" men, going nowhere fast. From the dole office to the pub, punctuated by an occasional, recreational game of chicken on the freeway, their lives drizzle on pathetically, like squeezebottle tomato sauce. One night, while watching an action film, they idly discuss carrying out a bank robbery. The idea grows to fill the vacuum of their lives and draws them into a parallel tale of suburban despair—a man who robs banks to pay for his girlfriend's heroin habit.

More lowbrow, more brutish, more disturbingly inarticulate than Brando's Stanley Kowalski, violence lurks, inevitably, behind the slurred speech and scowl of Kev (Ben Mendelsohn). Pockmarked and pugnacious, Kev pushes the envelope of yobboism, giving a virtuoso performance of burping, beer swilling chauvinism. His counterpart Mick (Jeremy Sims), however, is a little ray of sunshine in a bleak, bloke world. Mick wants to be Kev but isn't. He has a chance to function in society. Caesar describes Mick as "masculine yet sensitive" and, in a social engineering sense, he is offered up as a positive role model. He is a poet, although his oeuvre is more grunt verse than blank verse, and he reveals that "anger and anarchism don't have to be destructive". Caesar refers to the 19th century Australian tradition of poetry on the goldfields, where it was considered a masculine thing for men to recite poetry, and it was also a way of recording and passing on stories.

Mick's hard edged poetry is his sword and shield in a battle with boredom. *Idiot Box* suggests that there is a hope for Mick, through his creativity, his sensitivity, his ability to relate to women. But there is no hope for Kev. Mick meets Lani (Robyn Laou) who is working in a bottle shop and planning her escape from the hazy hell of habit. In suburbia the freeway is more real than the Milky Way and so, together, they wish upon a car.

Kev, however, was built for pioneering in the desert or fighting in a war. Maybe then he would have been a hero and had a chance to indulge his lust for risks and thrills. In contemporary society he is a Molotov cocktail, lit, tossed and looking for a place to explode.

"A lot of men have no idea what to do with themselves. You see it in the marginalised extremes of society. In South Central LA, where large groups of men have opted out and created a world that is about aggression and conflict, tribalism and hierarchy. They have invented the world that gives them a place to belong". Caesar believes that one of the major threats to modern society is these displaced men. "Men should start making films about it and discussing it. It's all very well to keep making Stallone movies where people shoot each other up and the hero saves the day, but it doesn't work any more."

In the 1960s and 70s America made a lot of films about volatile, charismatic misfits. *Hombre*, *Hustler*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *Cool Hand Luke* were all sheep noir films. Their characters were charming, compelling but tragically out of kilter with their world. For society they were just an irritation, an unpleasant problem that has to be dealt with like pest extermination or garbage removal. From the opening scene of *Idiot Box* we know that Kev is destined for an end as sticky as his T-shirt slogans are tacky. Caesar wanted the audience to realise this but, at the same time, be there with him saying: "No. Don't do that". Ben Mendelsohn, unfortunately, is no Brando or Newman, his crassness is not tempered by charm or smouldering sexuality—unless you find greasy hair and armpit stains appealing (see below).

Aside from these American influences, Caesar acknowledges his debt to the social realism of Mike Leigh with films such as *Mean Time* (which gave Gary Oldman and Tim Roth their start as bover boys) and the Australian film *FJ Holden*, made in the 1970s. In particular he admires the way *FJ Holden* acknowledges the landscape of Australian suburbia.

"Suburbia is an insidious, destructive social force", according to Caesar. Based around 50s notions of unlimited growth, it can't ultimately exist. It is about isolation, about young, lower middle class people buying a space—away from the support networks of family and friends. Young mothers are isolated with their babies, there is no transport infrastructure, no sense of community, but it's still being sold as the pinnacle of human achievement. The desolation of suburbia is a striking visual feature of the film. We shift listlessly from the harsh summer sunlight to the darkened interiors of brick veneer estate housing, but neither offer respite from grim monotony.

Another striking feature of the film is its soundtrack and, in particular, its language. "I used to get really pissed off when I watched the ABC as a kid and all of the announcers spoke funny". Language is something of an obsession for David Caesar and it is here we find a connection with the subjects of his documentaries (*Bodywork*, *Car Crash*). David Caesar takes an ethnographic approach to his own community, regarding it as somewhat of a mission to record this world. He laments that a lot of the working class history and culture of Australia has been forgotten: "We only remember the Push or the more glamorous aspects of our past". But Caesar wants to see representations of his own background and community. "When I am writing I always return to characters who speak like my parents and my friends".

Originally, as "a young lad", Caesar wanted to make action films but the first films he made were Super 8 animated movies. When he entered film school, however, he became fascinated by the notion of *cinema verité* and documentary. It was only later that he realised that documentary itself was inherently manipulative. "It was easier to make docos than fiction films, but essentially the only difference was that you didn't have to pay the actors in a doco". In both genres he was carried away by conversation. His documentaries are just as much about storytelling as their themes. They explore questions of truth and performance and reveal a fascination with the way people tell stories. The subject matter, at times, becomes incidental.

Caesar is opposed to what he calls "missionary documentary", where filmmakers impose a set of values that are inappropriate to a situation. "You can teach anyone to make a doco now. People should be encouraged and allowed to tell their own stories—rather than missionary zealots going in to tell them". It was more important for Bob Connolly and Robyn Anderson to make *Rats in the Ranks*, he suggests, than to head off to tropical climes and make films there.

So who is Caesar making films for? He envisages an audience that "starts at Ashfield and goes west". If people east of Ashfield like it, great, "but the audience I'm aiming at probably wouldn't see much at the cinema except an action film at the suburban multiplexes". Consequently, the advertising campaign emphasises the "in your face", aggressive nature of the film. The trailers are a hot blast of music and a rush of action.

David Caesar is working on another fiction film script but there are also more documentaries to be made. "I've always wanted to make a documentary about cleanliness. I'm convinced it's a middle class plot".



Jeremy Sims as Mick and Ben Mendelsohn as Kev in *Idiot Box*

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Idiot Box, written and directed by David Caesar, released nationally February by Globe.

Serial gay?

Peter McCarthy previews a sampling of the 1997 Mardi Gras Film Festival

This year's Mardi Gras Film Festival again bears tidings from all quarters of the homosexual film and video community. With a fair sampling of product reflecting the diversity of practice around the world, festival-goers should be prepared for an outing of sex and ideology for which the Festival has become notorious.

But there's good news and bad. The bad news first. It seems after all it is not only popular cinema that is obsessed with the comings and goings of the serial killer, be they overtly or merely subtextually gay. The release of Verhoeven and Eszterhas's *Basic Instinct* drew placards and outrage from the gay community, as did Demme's *Silence of the Lambs* for the depiction by straights of gays with predilections for the seamier side of sex. Catherine Tremell and Agent Starling were ambiguous in more ways than one and Buffalo Bill perhaps somewhat less so but even he could be attributed a degree of ambiguity, and after all, ambiguity is the very ideological end of subtext.



Frisk

A character in Whit Stillman's *Barcelona* asks: "What about the text? Everybody talks about the subtext, but what about the text?" Well the text is alive and well in this year's Mardi Gras Festival. With Todd Verow's *Frisk* in de facto top billing (they walked out on it in a number of other gay film festivals and polarised punters and critics alike), the viewer needn't bother with plumbing the nether regions of subtext. *Frisk* is about a gay serial killer moved by visions of boyhood snuff porn and slasher movies to defile and dismember the objects of his own adult desire. Based on the novel by Dennis Cooper (optioned and released by those who released Araki's trex *The Living End*), Verow's 'text' takes us on a ride from first entry to final exit, the narrative conceit being one of internal discovery, the narrator and main man Dennis wanting to get inside his subjects, enter, explore and disembowel them. And this he does by way of the object of his first longings, the snuff boy Henry (Craig Chester from Kalin's *Swoon*) reincarnated from childhood visions in a porn book store. Along the way he recruits a little team, a little bisexual triumvirate, including the female protagonist played by Parker Posey (the female, whom we know only by the masculine moniker Ferguson, implicated only more fully by the wearing of a protective plastic rain coat and the cold-blooded assassination of a Korean shop keep as she ventures out—"don't finish him off without me"—for beer), who brings us closer to the bloody horrors prosecuted by these serial gays.

The narrative stuff of *Frisk* is minimal but for the excesses it deems to take as its own. Touted as 'experimental' by Verow himself, *Frisk* bears only the hallmarks of the low rent post-student shocker that it is. But, it should be added, it's hand held, poorly lit and acted narrative (literally narrated, tableaux of voice over and video flicker—the ever fashionable grunge element produced and mediated by the ever fashionable PXL toy camera) is shocking mostly in its formal and ideological transparency. There is only text here and minimal and venal as it is, the film offers nothing of the subtlety or ideological discovery promoted by its forebears. In the argot appropriate to its makers, this is one sick fuck of a bad film.

So, to *Twisted*. Directed by Seth Michael Donsky, we enter this narrative similarly by way of boy sex, shackles and tunnelled trains with the ever-constant flicker of late night video. This film takes a stronger narrative turn with directive intertitles and something approaching a narrative flow. *Twisted* turns on the narrative of Lee, a ten year old kid lured to a gay brothel owned by a cross between some consumptive old vampire and a Faginesque trickster called André (played by veteran William Hickey) who has great plans for his newly acquired 'fresh meat'. Enter the disaffected gay boy Angel. Former hooker and troubled lover of psychopathic dealer in drugs and homosex ("I'm a pitcher, not a catcher!") Eddie, Angel works bar where he meets Lee. A bond develops between the two and the possibility of liberation from their slime emerges in their tacky narrative. But Eddie's on the loose and Angel's for the high jump. Here, the killer lurks again and the violence of images and actions is, not unlike *Frisk*, mediated by the flicker of video porn and threatening props. While this film approaches a narrative with something to say and with good performances by some of the cast it falls on its own derivative simplicity and easy reliance on sub-cultural sleaze.

Groove on a Stanley Knife is a short film by Tinge Krishnan and Beth Kotler about some white trash street kids in Sheffield. Steph (Samantha Hoyle) and Tam (Alison Burrows) are held up in a disused public toilet ("the worst TOILET in Sheffield") after doing over some junkie/dealer/rapist and slashing him with a Stanley knife. Covered in blood they come to explore the basis of their existence and relationship. One lesbian the other straight, their sexual identities are unspoken but understood until Tam (the waifish

straight) discovers that Steph (her long-time dyke friend) had sold her over to a gang bang, in which she suffered horrific injuries and long term emotional scars, for some smack. Needless to say, Tam doesn't take this too well. While the premise is interesting and the metaphor of the toilet suggesting some forethought, the film falters on its own youth. The irresistible charm of the pop clip as reflection and rapid cutting in of poignant signifiers (dripping taps) does little to save this film from art school excesses. But the performance by Alison Burrows as Tam (a sort of rough trade Uma Thurman) is outstanding and lifts the game enough to see it through.

And now for the good news. While still on the theme of violence and its exploration *The Deathmaker* is a German film that doesn't fit easily with the gay genre. Directed by Romuald Karmakar, this is a stylish and accomplished film about Fritz Haarman, the so-called "Werewolf of Hanover" who was tried in 1924 for the murder and dismemberment of 27 young men. (Haarman was the character on which Fritz Lang's *M* was based.) The film, which won the prestigious German Film Award for Best Film and Best Actor, takes place entirely in a single room with Haarman (Götz George) being interviewed by psychiatrist Ernst Schulze (Jürgen Hentsch) while a silent and bewildered stenographer looks on. The dialogue is taken directly from the stenographic notes and except for the fluid camera work and imaginative editing, could be taken for a documentary account of the events. The film explores a number of the social and psychological relations that propelled Haarman, from "a kid who had no friends 'cos he shit in his pants" through a failed marriage (the consummation of which Haarman describes as some sort of primal scene), through his emergence to occasional "back door work" with his neighbourhood's rough trade, to serial killer of "worthless joy boys", and in the doing takes a serious critical-ideological look at sexual identity, violence and the culture that gives rise to them.

There is life at this festival and it is seriously affirmed by two stand outs. Cheryl Dunye's *Watermelon Woman* is a mock documentary about Cheryl (Cheryl Dunye), a black lesbian looking for her horizons in art. She works in a video store and produces wedding videos part-time with her dyke friend Tamara (Valerie Walker). But she has a project. To make a film about a little known (and fictitious) black actress who played mammy characters in 30s Hollywood and went by the name of "the Watermelon Woman". Cheryl becomes obsessed with her and the off screen relationship she putatively had with her white director, Martha Page. As Cheryl looks for the Watermelon Woman through interviews and archives she comes to find herself and her place in the lesbian and black community as something other than she'd imagined. She has an affair with Diana (Guin Turner from *Go Fish*), a white upper-class free spirit who has little time for demarcations in sex or race (their sex scene is signature here) and who acts as something of a catalyst for Cheryl in her pursuit of freedom. She has no time for "heavy Afro-fem-centric sapphic sisters" and shows it by interviewing Camille Paglia on the representation of the black woman in white culture. Paglia: "If watermelon symbolises African-American culture then rightly so because look what white, middle-class feminism stands for: anorexia and bulimia". *Watermelon Woman* is life affirming and strangely unaffected in its youthful exploration of sexual identity and if the type-bound *Go Fish* is anything to go by, it can look forward to a popular release.

Broken Branches is a Korean film by Park Jae-ho and stands in contrast to most of the festival fare. A steady narrative in three parts, *Broken Branches* explores the lineage and life of Jung-min (a composite of its director and friends), tracing a slice of Korean history from post-Korean War to the present. The film is coolly critical of both Korean culture and the Western culture that came to impact on it during the 60s and 70s and looks to the repressive nature of the family and the state on every relationship under their sway. After taking part in anti-government protests during the 70s, Jung-min takes his place in the newly democratic Seoul as a filmmaker. In his thirties, Jung-min meets the married Seung-gul in a gay bar, falls in love with him and begins the sad journey of solitude that is the real basis of this film. The gay love set against the repressive South Korean 'democracy' is only one aspect of this solitude and points to the fact that social repression can bear quality filmmaking as well as considered reflection.

Mardi Gras Film Festival, Pitt Centre, Sydney February 12-26. Roxy Cinema, Parramatta February 19-23. website www.queerscreen.com.au/filmfest

Peter McCarthy works for the government.

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Classical modern classical

Noel King surveys the BFI Modern Classics series

The British Film Institute has launched a Modern Classics series which is expected to stand apart from their existing, successful, Film Classics series. But an obvious overlap presents itself if we ask, 'when is a classic film deemed modern and when is a modern film deemed a classic?' Since the Film Classics series contains, or is due to contain, titles on *Annie Hall* (1977), *Taxi Driver* (1976), *The Godfather* (1971), *Chinatown* (1974) and *Al No Corrida* (1976), the distinction can't rest in an act of historical periodisation which places older (pre-1960) films into the 'classic' category while more recent films become 'modern classics'.

The first four Modern Classics are: Lee Hill, biographer of Terry Southern, writing an affectionate and informative study of the low-budget hit that inaugurated a brief counter-cultural New Hollywood moment, Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* (1969), "a film that almost single-handedly created the road movie as a vital post-60s genre" (72); a stylish, witty essay from Sean French on another low-budget cult film, James Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984); Hispanic specialist Peter William Evans' placing of Pedro Almodovar's modestly budgeted (obviously this is a theme of the Modern Classics series) *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988) in the context of the social reorganisation of post-Franco Spain; and Mark Sanderson's exploration of themes of grief, paranoia and the paranormal in Nic Roeg's cult classic, *Don't Look Now* (1972).

Future Modern Classics titles will have Carol Clover (the American medievalist turned film critic whose *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (BFI, 1992) explored the slasher film) writing on *Pulp Fiction*. Perhaps Clover was drawn to Tarantino's film by the alluring dialogue line, "I'm gonna get medieval on your ass". She writes well on contemporary American cinema (witness her May 1993 *Sight and Sound* piece on *Falling Down*) so it's bound to be an interesting book. Adrian Martin has written on Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in America* (1983); Scott Bukatman, author of *Terminal Identity* (Duke UP, 1995) has written on *Blade Runner* (1981), British novelist Jenny Diski has written on *Alien* (1979), Lizzie Franke on *The Piano* (1994), Michael Atkinson on *Blue Velvet* (1986), Jane Giles on *The Crying Game* (1992), Mark Kermode on *The Exorcist* (1973), and David Thompson on *Last Tango in Paris* (1972). Inevitably, the opening list favours Anglo-American cinema, and mainstream genre film, but future titles will include films from Godard, Tarkovsky and Kieslowski.

Of the first four titles it's interesting to find that Hill and Sanderson, both in their mid-30s, chanced upon their modern classics in a non-cinema exhibition space. Sanderson watched *Don't Look Now* on BBC TV six years after its theatrical release (as opposed to Leslie Dick's January 1997 *Sight and Sound* reminiscence of seeing the film twice in one week—multiple viewings of complex films a necessity in "the dark days before video"—as a 20 year old college student in Brighton in 1974). At the end of his engaging study of *Easy Rider*, Hill says, "I grew up with the film second-hand via late-night TV and repertory screenings". So it is not necessarily the case that one encounters a modern classic on first-time theatrical release and a classic on TV or in some form of repertory or educational context.

★★★

In elaborating the way Almodovar's cross-generic style merges comedy and melodrama in a distinctive *mise en scène*, Evans shows how the lure of kitsch and camp, and the impact of an 'aesthetics of Pop' (from Lichtenstein/Warhol to the Pop magazine aesthetics of Stanley Donen's *Funny Face* [1956]) have shaped Almodovar's cinema. The various Spanish influences on his work (films, novels, music,

theatre, his early connection with the so-called Madrid 'Movida' generation, inventively transliterated by Evans as "a sort of Punk-Pop Spanish equivalent of the Bloomsbury set") are set alongside the intertextual influences of American culture, from Dorothy Parker stories to Hitchcock movies. This "rich mixture of styles, blending Pop aesthetics with a powerful treatment of sexuality, has meant that in Spain, Almodovar's films have been especially popular with youth and dissident audiences". Later Almodovar films such as *Kika* (1993) flirt with the stylistics of Punk and Euro-Trash and Evans says that, to some extent, Almodovar's films "are tongue-in-cheek equivalents of the sex manuals and guidebooks that flooded the market after the death of Franco, when the representation and discussion of sexuality were no longer deemed to be taboo". Exploring parallels with American film stars and genres, Evans likens Carmen Maura's star quality to that of Joan Crawford, and stresses Almodovar's links to Hollywood melodrama, in particular the work of Douglas Sirk. Spanish allows for a pun on "writing" and "scrotum" and so Sirk's *Written on the Wind* became "Written on the Scrotum" in an Almodovar essay. And yes, Evans follows the career of Antonio Banderas from Almodovar films through to his Hollywood efforts.

★★★

Mark Sanderson's booklet on *Don't Look Now* contains interesting new interview material on the film's production from director Roeg (the final chapter of the booklet is an interview) and star Julie Christie. But Sanderson is such a fan of the film—he says Roeg's later work did not "reach the same level of achievement", which implies an odd assessment of the worth of *Bad Timing* (1980)—that his analysis of the film's treatment of suspicion and fear threatens to itself become an exercise in paranoid interpretation. For Sanderson the film becomes almost too full of meaning:

John (Donald Sutherland) is overseeing the restoration of a church dedicated to Saint Nicholas. In case we miss the point Bishop Barbarrigo (Massimo Serato)—who does not appear in the (Daphne du Maurier) story—tells Laura that Saint Nicholas is the patron saint of scholars and children: 'An interesting combination, don't you think?' He is, of course, also known as Santa Claus, whose garb is traditionally red. John will soon be seeking help at the police station, 'the nick', and will eventually be killed by the devilish dwarf, the ultimate personification of evil being Old Nick. And Nicolas is Roeg's Christian name. The film creates such an atmosphere of the paranormal and the paranoid that there seems no room for harmless coincidence.

As another Nick (Hornby, of *High Fidelity*) might say, 'it's New Criticism gone mad'. But even if one thinks that Sanderson should get out a bit more, his is still a worthwhile enthusiasm. He writes well on Roeg's trademark frenzied editing, first encountered in the co-directed *Performance* (1970) and confirmed in *Walkabout* (1970), and writes movingly on the celebrated sex scene between Sutherland and Christie that made the film so controversial on its initial theatrical release.

★★★

It's clear from Sean French's lively discussion of *The Terminator* that he too is a critic-fan, albeit one who practises a different aesthetic from Sanderson's. In a move which, if nothing else, confirms how independent of mind the contributors to this new series will be, French opens his booklet by dismissing the achievement of a film to be covered in the same series, Campion's *The Piano*. This is a film

"manifestly conceived as a masterpiece", one whose "systematic symbolism" and "schematic characterisation" see it strive too self-consciously to be a film "for adults". It's true that *The Piano* has generated a lot of critical commentary; it even made it onto the cover of, and prompted the lead article in, an obscure academic comparative literature journal, *Modern Language Notes*. No doubt this would confirm French in his critical attitude, since he contrasts the alleged literariness of Campion's film to the "truly cinematic" qualities of Hawks' *Rio Bravo* (1959), citing some wonderful Hawksian sequences to justify the view that "film is a visceral, kinetic form for which critical criteria largely derived from literature and the theatre are ill suited". But as Teresa de Lauretis' writing in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Indiana UP, 1984) showed, *Rio Bravo* also contains a lovely, non-visceral, non-kinetic dialogue exchange between Chance (Wayne) and Feathers (Angie Dickinson) which goes: Feathers: "You said you loved me". Chance: "I said I'd arrest you". Feathers: "You know it means the same thing".

When French says *The Terminator* remains "as irreducible and unpalatable as it is viscerally enjoyable", he confirms a critical attitude that is admirable to the extent that it restates Manny Farber's pizzazy 1950s and 60s championing (in the essays collected as *Movies/Negative Space* [Hillstone, 1971]) of an "underground cinema", a "termite cinema" as against a "white-elephant cinema". And while French's book is a very enjoyable read, there seems to me no need to lead into a discussion of *The Terminator* by slugging *The Piano*. In 1996, who needs to be persuaded towards the claims of popular, commercial (American) cinema? Sure, some people still seek to redeem such films by way of discovering "serious themes" but an equal number now talk of the film-viewing experience as a "ride", activating a literalised metaphor which runs from the alignment of early cinema with the 'attractions' of the fairground and the sideshow through to the linking of contemporary films with the experience of driving on a freeway, wandering around a shopping mall, or playing a video game. The most contemporary film viewer thus resembles the earliest viewer, with a mixed vaudeville entertainment program now replaced by so many immersive kinaesthetic spectacles calculated to milk the multimedia franchisability of the latest blockbuster.

French finds Cameron's big-budget sequel, *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991), made for twenty times the cost of *The Terminator*, a "smaller thing" whose "baroque complications" depart from the "formal neatness" of the first film's mix of O. Henry and *Star Trek*; he has an inspired moment explaining how the sequel renders 'impossible' the narrative of the film that spawned it:

In Terminator 2, the cyborg not merely saves John Connor but prevents the war which was responsible for sending him back and thwarts the technological development which resulted in himself being invented and then destroys himself in order to remove the slightest possibility of him being created. So by the end of Terminator 2, the invention of the computer defence system, and hence the nuclear war, has been forestalled. So the war with the computers will never take place. So John Connor's heroic leadership of the men against the machines will not be called for. So there will be no need to prevent him being born, and no terminator to do it even if there was a need. So there will be no need to send Reese back to protect the unborn John Connor. So John Connor won't be born. So in which possible universe have we ended up? It's 'tech stuff', as Reese says.

By the end of Terminator 2 the story is not so much circular as a spiral vanishing up its own mimetic polly-alloy fundament.

★★★

As you might expect from the biographer of Terry Southern, Hill's monograph on *Easy Rider* provides new information on the film's production circumstances, chiefly concerning the hitherto unacknowledged extent of Southern's contribution to the screenplay. Hill's discussion of "a road movie that drove right through many peoples' hearts" sings the praises of Laszlo Kovac's cinematography (recognised at the time as the cinematic equivalent of Robert Frank's photography in *The Americans*) and, of course, celebrates Jack Nicholson's Oscar-nominated performance.

Though "not the first film to explore the menace and romance of the American highway... since 1969, *Easy Rider* has had the iconic edge", providing 'the template for road movies to come'. Hill places the film in the historical context of a brief window of social and cinematic opportunity that seemed to exist in the US between the mid 1960s and Watergate. No doubt such an assessment participates in the reproduction of some myths that a booklet such as this might be expected to examine, but Hill is persuasive when he ends his study by saying he's not in thrall to a mythologised past: "I am not nostalgic for the 60s... However, I am affected by *Easy Rider*'s demonstration of how impossible and cruel the dreams of cinema can be. I always hope Billy, Wyatt, George, the commune dwellers, Mary and Karen and the rest are going to make it. Similarly, I hope another film like *Easy Rider* comes along even if the window of cinema's possibility seems barely open as its centenary passes".

Eventually, both Hill and French share a nostalgia of a familiar kind: for the lapsed moment of a 'small' cinema of creative daring, the moment before stardom and power: a possibility lost to Cameron by virtue of the huge success of his film (he would never again "recapture the creative opportunity he had when he made *The Terminator*"), and a possibility lost to the New Hollywood when *Easy Rider* proved the road not taken, and Lucas and Spielberg displaced an exploratory, personal cinema with a series of high concept blockbuster hits.

★★★

The Modern Classics series hopes to set the agenda "for debate about what matters in modern cinema", making assessments of "the quality and importance" of the films it chooses to canonise. For, though "risky and controversial", judgements on "the true worth of recent films... are essential if we want to know where the cinema is going and what it can achieve". Of course that is a marketing pitch. There is no way of guaranteeing the 'true worth' of any film. One definition of 'worth' would be to say it describes the unpredictable way later, different historical-cultural contexts reinvest 'earlier' works with significance: no-one can say in advance which interpretative processings of which films will prove durable.

No single account of the cultural presence of film replaces or displaces another except in the very limited sense of the paradigm wars that constitute current moves in academic-intellectual debate. You can elect to work on 'early cinema', 'queer theory', 'historical poetics', 'cultural hermeneutics', 'neo-pragmatism' or 'new historicism' but there is no justification (short of evangelism) for thinking that any one of those perspectives has the wood on any other. They are all, equally, possible; a cluster of adjacent interpretative options for talking about the social presence of cinema in our time.

It's salutary to remember the line from Chas (James Fox) to Turner (Mick Jagger) in *Performance*: "You'll look funny when you're fifty". We all will. And one of the slow-release joys of this new BFI series will involve our waiting and watching to see which acts of cinematic enterprise and which acts of film-critical ingenuity are defined by as yet unarrived cultural moments to be of 'quality and importance'.

Interview

Beyond off-site

David Varga talks to Street Level directors David Cranswick and Kathy Cleland

Street Level is an artist run initiative located in Western Sydney. Now in its eighth year of operation, Street Level is operating as an 'off-site' project-based organisation supporting and advocating contemporary arts initiatives in Western Sydney. Recent projects include a machine art performance by Triclops International, Cyber Cultures Exhibitions 1996 and 1997, an architecture and design project and a community based internet project WestWeb.

DV Is there a sense of community with other Western Sydney arts organisations?

DC That's one of the difficulties of working in Western Sydney. It's not like you would just bump into someone in the street and there are so few venues for the arts, especially contemporary arts. But like everywhere else there are many communities.

KC Personal networks and contacts are very important. For example, Street Level is working with FilmWest, University of Western Sydney and Casula Powerhouse with our *Cyber Cultures* project. But Street Level also has strong links with inner city organisations such as The Performance Space who have been very supportive. Street Level is part of SCAN (Sydney Contemporary Arts Network—<http://www.culture.com.au>) whose other five members are all based in the inner city. These links are extremely valuable. Sometimes there can be a bit of a 'ghetto-isation' mentality towards Western Sydney from the outside, ie. art in Western Sydney is for a Western Sydney audience only. On the other hand there can also be a parochial attitude from some areas of local government and community art groups within Western Sydney. With other organisations like Casula Powerhouse, Street Level is trying to work across the region and with a national and international agenda.

DC For example, the previous director Con Gouriotis (now curator at Casula) undertook some wonderful projects. A show he brought in from Malta, *Chants of Lamentation* by the photographer Zamet, really hit a chord with local Maltese people. Street Level has also had a longstanding relationship with the Warburton Aboriginal community in WA through an earlier director Gary Proctor. So we are not just concerned about presenting work generated in Western Sydney and this sets us apart from community arts organisations.

KC It's important to remember that Western Sydney is not an homogenous area. It covers such a vast area, geographically dispersed and culturally diverse. Check out on a map sometime the distances between Liverpool, Penrith, Parramatta and Campbelltown. It's easier to get to central Sydney from some of these areas than to travel between them. Transport infrastructure is generally appalling. This is one of the reasons Street Level is very interested in exploring alternative strategies for communication like the internet and the world wide web. However it is still important to have cultural infrastructure for RL (real life) exhibition, performance and screenings and we don't see virtual galleries and spaces as being a replacement for physical spaces.

DV Are more Western Sydney artists accessing new technologies?

DC Yes especially as tertiary educational institutions have made significant investments in technology and are developing specialised courses in that area.

KC This is one of the goals of *Cyber Cultures*, to allow Western Sydney artists and audiences to experience first hand some of the best work by Australian new media artists and have an opportunity to attend seminars and discuss new developments in this area. The performance program also explores areas of hybrid practice and new sites, for example, Stelarc's performance which includes real time performance with interaction with images and sounds from the world wide web.

DC It is interesting the amount of screen based work at a recent graduate exhibition of UWS Nepean postgraduate students. I guess it's the case that if the institutions provide the equipment and training then there will be more but again the question of how people continue to produce and exhibit work once they graduate remains a serious issue.

KC Getting the equipment resources for *Cyber Cultures* has been a huge task and would not have been possible without the support of many like-minded organisations (SCAN, SIN, UWS) and the corporate sector (Apple) and funding bodies (AFC, NMA, ANAT). Getting this sort of support is not easy for artists just out of university. There is a desperate need for equipment infrastructure outside of the universities. This is a role Street Level is working towards.

DC We are more interested in the creative uses of technology in terms of art practice, not limited to computers on plinths. Installation practice remains crucial and the ability of artists to work with unusual spaces to create immersive and interactive environments is particularly interesting. For example most of the artists in *Cyber Cultures* have worked really hard to create installations (the computers are there but as part of an installation environment).

DV Tell us more about West Web.

KC The *West Web* project has been funded by the NSW Ministry for the Arts (our very first grant from the Ministry in fact). This project includes a public demonstration of the internet and the web with expert guides who will host a tour of their favourite sites and talk about ways of using these new sites for creative purposes. We are also working with Parramatta City Library, who will be hosting the first stage of this project, and with ICE (Information Cultural Exchange). The web demonstration performances will serve to illustrate some of the ways in which the web and the internet can be used by cultural groups and individuals (especially those who are geographically dispersed) to communicate with each other and also with other related groups both within Australia and overseas. Given the predicted power and pervasiveness of these new communication technologies, it is important that community groups and individuals in Western Sydney are informed about the technologies and can take advantage of the significant opportunities they represent at an early stage.

DC The second stage of the project is to work with Western Sydney artists to present their work on the web. The other important aspect of this project is the development of a relationship between Street Level and a progressive public library and we feel optimistic about libraries in general as important sites for cultural exchange.

DV What other projects are on the board for Street Level in 1997 and beyond.

KC We are also working on a design project for a new space for Street Level, a project jointly funded by the Australia Council and CEAD (Community, Environment Art and Design). As a temporarily off-site organisation we are interested in investigating different strategies for operating as a contemporary cultural organisation. With this project we are working with four different groups of designers/architects to come up with concepts for four different options for Street Level.

DC It's been a long term project and really I would like to thank CEAD for their support because we have been able to secure the services of some really interesting designers to come up with concepts in collaboration with us. These include a virtual on-line space with Graham Crawford of Exile, and a mobile space, perhaps a "Cyber Truck", with Jesse Reynolds of Virtual Artists in S.A. Professor Peter Droegge who heads up the Urban Design Dept of Sydney University (Olympia—yes, Olympia not Olympic—2000 project) is putting together a team to develop ideas for a purpose built space and architect Rod Simpson will be developing ideas for a retrofit space. In short we are getting some really good ideas for an appropriate cultural facility. The briefs are for the designers to be provocative and creative and to address our future needs. The designs will be exhibited locally in Parramatta, which is where we want to be located. It's also the geographical centre of Sydney.

DV How do you see *Cyber Cultures* progressing?

DC Street level and its board have had a strong interest in screen based and digital technologies and in terms of the organisation's long term development

being involved in technology based projects is important. In a crude sense, it is about staking out territory or creating a space or site for future projects that are technology based. For a small organisation, new information technologies do offer significant advantages for us and our membership. On another note it's amazing the difference working with recent information technology (as opposed to a spray can) has when it comes to negotiating with local and state government funding bodies. We were recently involved with ANAT's *Virogenesis* project where we hosted Matt Fuller and Gomma and the cyberpunk hacker mentality sits very nicely within our scope of things especially in terms of what Gomma described as creating spaces or free zones for people to participate. The main thing here is that the idea of free internet access seems revolutionary or inconceivable yet universities and local government have servers that would be able to handle it. So the line back to contestation of public space, local and community identity is very clear and I think the next stage of *Cyber Cultures* is to develop these areas of community access.

DV How do you see the infrastructure of the west's art networks developing in the future?

KC What infrastructure? OK, there is a bit but it's very limited. Given the lack of venues and exhibition spaces, libraries are in a good position to play an important role as cultural nodes.

DC But really with the Olympics and the centenary of Federation due soon you might think it was a good time for some solid steps to be made in terms of infrastructure, but it's hard. I mean if it's not going to happen now, well when? We are expected to be self funding or people say "do stuff in Westfield". Try telling that to the AGNSW, there would be outrage.

KC Well actually we would love to do something in Westfield. We did have visions of a Stelarc performance in the main atrium...something for the shoppers to think about! But doing off-site work in Westfield does not mean we don't need our own space.

a young filmmakers fund

The state government has established a fund for the encouragement of young filmmakers. Eligible projects will be mainly **short fiction films, documentaries or experimental films.**

The fund is administered by the New South Wales Film & Television Office.

- The Fund is open to **individuals or teams of individuals** between the ages of **18 and 35** years who are **NSW residents**
- The Fund will make direct grants towards **production and post production costs only**
- Projects must demonstrate **cultural and economic benefit to NSW** and be entirely produced in NSW using NSW based service providers
- Each project's principal photography must begin within six months of approval
- There is **no restriction** on the format (film or tape), subject matter or type of film
- The maximum grant will be in the range of **\$20,000-\$25,000**, but the assessment committee may recommend a larger grant for a proposal of exceptional merit
- The closing date for the next round is **28 March 1997**

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

New South Wales Film & Television Office
Level 6, 1 Francis Street East Sydney NSW 2010
Phone (02) 9380 5599 Fax (02) 9340 1090

Essay

Another 'hoot and holler' in cattle country

Peter Mudie examines how screen audiences are driven to distraction

As the pace for the quest of new stimuli increases logarithmically with what available RAM can accomplish, equally so contemplative space is often reduced to the fractions of a second that it takes to identify the appropriate link before information download is complete. I have often wondered about the amount of patience that I and others have employed when travelling through the information on the web, and how this relates to other activity which seems to flood through life itself. The time spent in the quest for information has been reduced so significantly, that I believe an analogy can be made between the 20-30 second trip around a standard CD-ROM image/sound delivery path (or cycle) and the retentive patience of viewing more traditional forms of motion picture exploration. What was once the space for contemplation is apparently not primarily determined by the inquisitive as it once was—now it is governed by the reductive principles of time allocation and economy.

For instance, when accessing material on the web, I rarely (if ever) admire a completely resolved JPEG image or Quicktime sequence as I would a static image in a gallery, or a cinematic sequence within the darkened space of a theatre. Nor do I contemplate those images that are lost in relation to others as I scroll down the screen, or the design decisions made on whatever page/site that it sits upon. Quite simply, once I have 'got the idea' (as with more traditional forms of short, sharp, and oh so current advertising) I move on.

I believe that I am not alone when I say that I am not all that interested in securing a complete page download in Netscape. Once I have identified the necessary information to progress elsewhere, I'll simply cut to it, leaving whatever else is contained in those remaining bytes to vanish elsewhere. I don't really care where it goes—I just simply choose not to view it on my monitor. I select not to contemplate the 'whole'—in most cases, a fragment will do. The power of viewer selection and decision in this arena is tantamount to absolute autocracy—translated into other practices and forms it perhaps accounts for much of the problem currently experienced in exhibiting speculative film and video. In a cinema program of screen work, it is extremely difficult to exert this same form of autocracy. For many, it is almost impossible to breach those social conventions of viewing and stroll in to 'grab' those moments each viewer pre-determines as either interesting or worthy enough to drag themselves away from other things to attend. It is easier to remain in the dark (figuratively and literally), wait for the appropriate moment, and display dissatisfaction.

Curiously, this was perhaps one of the reasons why the screening of Paul Winkler's *Time Out For Sport* received the reception it did at the Dendy screening at the Sydney Film Festival last year. Within the audience (that must have comprised mostly those fed a diet of 'quirky, sharp, and current' short film) were others more adept at discerning the 'poem' from the 'pulp'. Perhaps if the organisers of the night permitted an escape route for the unwilling, and an entry for those interested, Winkler's new film would not

have received the reception so clearly described by Janet Merewether in her article *A Filmmaker's Intolerance of Intolerant Audiences* (Australian Screen Directors' Association Newsletter, August 1996). Whether all the hooting and hollering that went on in the Dendy was merely an indication of viewer intolerance, or rather a predictable result of an audience's inability to exert its own autocratic will in another form, is debatable. Perhaps worse still is the fascist certainty that some feel in exerting their displeasure to ensure that others cannot seek their own pleasure. In the case of *Time Out For Sport*, the SFF reception last year seemed particularly strange, occurring as it did less than a year after the comprehensive exhibition of Winkler's work organised by David

opportunities despite (possibly) being shaped by a similar creative/discursive will? Granted, given the size of the experimental community here in Australia, it would be ridiculous to depreciate it further by separating pockets determined by medium, or even gauge of material used. Yet to assume is also to confuse—within this conflated 'economic' climate it is impossible for many to enter into any sustained contemplative relationship with the 'experimental' whether it be film or video. The material of film appears too often in the form of a videotape—supposedly for 'accessibility'. Yet rather than securing a more intimate contemplative space for the work itself, it is relegated to the random (or determined, which ever the case may be) temptation of using the

task of exhibitors is to develop the creative community in this country and prompt wider speculation in this field, is it not possible without reducing the work to the lowest common denominator in the process (the 'making marshmallow' syndrome)? This is not an alteration in the modes of perception in parallel relation to the speed of information flow through another platform of dispersal (as apparently so many would like to believe)—this is an insistence upon an ill-conceived reductivism.

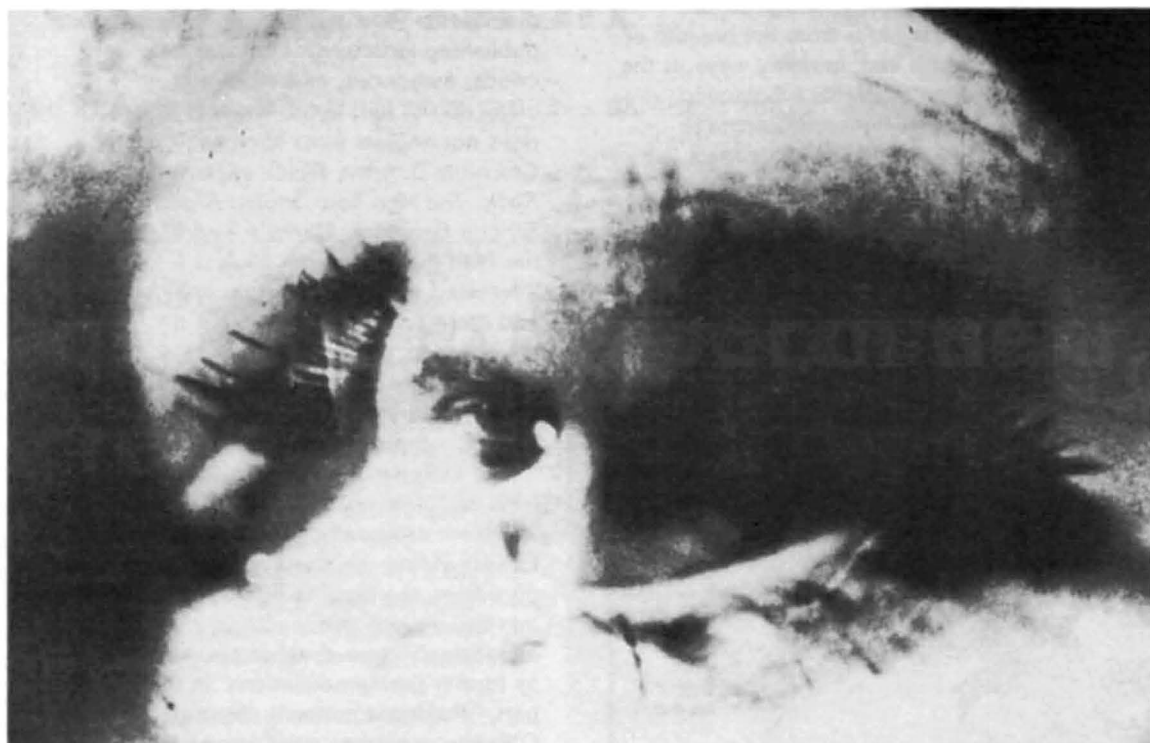
Reputedly, it was in such a scenario that experimenta '96 (once the ultimate showcase of experimental film and video work in this country) chose to present a large proportion of their experimental program last year. Possibly, this presentation tactic was able to artificially

simulate an extremely high set of attendance figures for those sponsoring the event, but it is debatable whether or not the form adopted seriously developed future interest or participation in this creative field or merely disfigured the committed and those participating. In Melbourne, this remains to be seen. Was it worth investigating? Possibly, but hopefully the 'frame' was not confused with the 'painting'.

I would like to believe that Joyce's *Ulysses* cannot be reduced to a paragraph or two; that Adorno's aesthetic theorem cannot be satisfactorily illustrated with a couple of quick clicks of the mouse and a trip around the CD-ROM roundabout; that Cezanne's painting cannot be 'just a bunch of pictures', a visit with old friends and questionable wine at an opening; that popular music is unable to be compressed to a simple rhythm pattern and can still evoke a peculiar form of beauty. There is a difference here, and not a small one, since it concerns time

itself: the space of inquiry and contemplation. Too easily dismissed (and perhaps too often over the past few years), experimental film and video has been reduced to a mere series of disconnected glances, a forgettable interlude on community television, or (more recently) as a form of 'padding' for multimedia/new-technological displays of ingenuity, or (as has been the case since time began) an accepted cultural distraction from more 'serious' forms of exchange based entertainment.

I accept that it will never be a happening thing as it was in the days when Ubu was able to turn away hundreds from the sold out Union Theatre in Sydney. But the importance of fostering this form of speculation demands some urgent consideration and care in this country before it becomes just another annoying contributor to the noise of capitalism in motion. Perhaps 1997 will see the MCA Cinematheque finally swing into reality which will largely reconcile the dreams that neither the Vincent Library nor the AFI have brought to fruition. For now, I hope that I am able to distinguish between communication and art—the acquisition of information and another's articulation of experience. Hopefully, what the experimental film and video community doesn't need in this country is another opportunity (born out of an impoverished desperation) to provoke a hoot and holler session in cattle country. *Marinetti* suffered a premature death from its visit to cattle country. Hopefully *Time Out for Sport* will not.



Still from Albie Thoms' 1969 film *Marinetti*

Watson and Brian Doherty at the MCA in 1995. Perhaps the Sydney audience displayed the same compulsion to be overtly derisive that Albie Thoms fielded when *Ubu* premiered Australia's first feature length film, *Marinetti at the Wintergarden* in 1969—the need to be irresponsibly critical of that which comes from those too close at hand.

Yet the reception at the SFF of Winkler's *Time Out For Sport* (not too dissimilar to the Sydney reception for *Marinetti* minus the autistic stampede out of the cinema) once again indicates a peculiar attitude towards speculative endeavour in this country—'this' can never be considered outside of what 'that' should and must be. As in one of those decrepit Westerns—wherein those in cattle country could never tolerate the idea that sheep could exist on a neighbouring paddock—'this is beef country!' Well practised 'economies' dictate that slight twists of narrative form in short film/video are considered 'experimental'. But, in effect, these 'quirky, sharp, and oh so current' experiments are really no more than reductive precis of script-embellished illustration that are slightly (and oh so slightly) skewiff. To accept this questionable summation apparently has led another group of brown-shirted beef-eaters to make sure that the rest of the screen viewing audiences comply.

Is this also a result of the misdirected conflation of 'screen activities' where once film and video were accepted as each having unique material/creative

fast-forward button.

One of the unhealthy by-products of reducing this contemplative space of concentration is the unfortunate will of some exhibitors to conglomerate series of discrete creative works in misguided attempts at increasing the 'potency' of the individual through either the juxtaposition of the similar, or (as is more often the case), the reiterative. As such, experimental video (and in some cases of blatantly twisted logic, even film transferred to video) is often exhibited on monitors distributed through 'non-traditional' spaces such as foyers, pubs, or even galleries (this is where people who understand art go, don't they?). This is not the result of a Dan Grahamesque exploration of space itself; apparently it is driven by the displaced desire to 'reach an alternative audience'. In such 'alternative' spaces, the contemplative opportunities of viewer interaction with discrete work is either governed by the thematic packaging that contains it, the specific attributes of the concrete space that it exists within, or merely the competition with all the other stimuli that exist at any given moment. In such a situation, although the viewer can selectively determine what is worthy of specific concentration and what is not, I believe the difficulties of imposed placement reduce everything (including the work itself) to a series of random distractions or glances—something that has become too familiar with the pace of 'information transfer' I've described. If the primary

Review

Opening out Australian film culture

Anna Dzenis review's Tom O'Regan's *Australian National Cinema*

Australian National Cinema
by Tom O'Regan.
National Cinema Series
Routledge London and New York, 1996

At this very moment, Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* is exploding on cinema screens around the world, and Leonardo DiCaprio strikes a pose on the front covers of everything from Australia's *Cinema Papers*, UK's *Premiere* to TV *Smash Hits*. At the same time, the AFTRS trained Jane Campion's *The Portrait of a Lady* is the eagerly anticipated follow-up to her much lauded *The Piano*. The porcelain skinned, taut, intense stare of our home-grown Nicole Kidman (*Portrait's* Isabel) competes with DiCaprio in a circulating repertoire of images. Increasingly we see the boundaries of the international cinescape continuing to break down. And yet there is an Australian presence in these films, something we like to acknowledge and want to claim as our own. But what are we talking about when we refer to an Australian cinema, and what place do hybrid films such as these occupy? This is an old but important question.

It is precisely this category of 'the Australian cinema' which Tom O'Regan's scholarly text *Australian National Cinema* endeavours to simultaneously elaborate, detail and expand, as well as problematise and question. O'Regan has impeccable credentials for undertaking such a task. He is the author of *Australian Television Culture* (Allen & Unwin, 1993). With Albert Moran he co-edited two reference works on Australian cinema—*Australian Screen* (Penguin, 1989) and *An Australian Film Reader* (Currency Press, 1985). He was a founding editor of *Continuum: the Australian Journal of Media and Culture* with Brian Shoemsmith and provided the continuity for that journal's first sixteen issues (1987-1995). This most recent book of O'Regan's benefits from the breadth of this research and, in many ways, is the culmination of all this scholarship.

Australian National Cinema is published as part of Routledge's National Cinema series, in the company of Susan Hayward's *French National Cinema* and Pierre Sorlin's *Italian National Cinema*. But the very concept of a national cinema is where the challenges and difficulties begin.

O'Regan proposes that the problem faced by every national cinema analysis is how to do justice to what is, in fact, a hybrid assemblage of diverse elements, statuses and films. O'Regan's solution is to show how a film milieu comprises many antagonistic, complementary and adjacent parts. He sets out to describe a complex film landscape with the aim of understanding the fields and discourses in which Australian cinema circulates and produces meaning, not as a unified, coherent subject, but rather as a noisy patchwork. For O'Regan 'Australian cinema' involves many things—history, an industry, funding bodies, political decision-making, the film festival circuit, practices of distribution, film and cultural criticism, publishing structures, film-makers, critics, audiences, as well as a collection of film texts. While O'Regan does not neglect films such as *Crocodile Dundee*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *The Man from Snowy River*, *Strictly Ballroom*, *Muriel's Wedding* and the *Mad Max* cycle, his book is less interested in detailed textual analysis and more concerned with what he describes as this larger set of relations. And so he leads us through a messy, varied, acknowledged and challenged field of competing discourses.

For O'Regan, Australian cinema is both an "object of knowledge" and a "problem of knowledge". After foregrounding this theoretical paradigm, the book is then structured into three parts, proceeding increasingly towards what are described as further problematisations. In the first part, "Making a national cinema", O'Regan considers ways in which Australian cinema is like every other national cinema, and ways in which it is its own "medium-sized English language antipodal cinema". He positions it in conversation with an international cinema and the Hollywood commercial product, showing how these dominant industries and their texts have influenced Australian cinema, colonised it, as well as marginalised it. He examines the struggle for films to be 'local' as well as their attempts to appeal in an international marketplace, and polemicalises that Australian filmmakers need to "provide inventive solutions to being on the margins of the more dominant film cultures". O'Regan is also interested in how we, as audiences and critics, "make meaning", how we value and reject Australian cinema generally, and certain films in particular, and the strategies and vocabulary we activate and preserve. The various responses to *Romper Stomper* provide a colourful illustration of this.

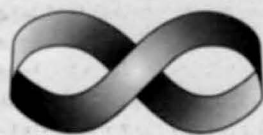
The second part, "Making a distinct cinema", illuminates many of the characteristics of Australian cinema through surveying the diversity of filmmaking, from its commercial successes, through its arthouse objects, its indigenous narratives, its rich independent traditions and its exploitation films. Further to this are the critical voices which find Australian cinema characterised by "naturalism", "ornamentalism" and a "minor stream of cinephile cinema" (Martin), "masculinist", with a "bleak" and

"hypercritical" view of families and relationships, as well as "positively unoriginal" (Morris), distinguished by "in-betweenness" and proliferating generic hybrids (McFarlane & Mayer) preoccupied with "ugliness" and "ordinariness", and a narrative strategy of "othering" the Australian. And so O'Regan finds an image of Australia emerging that is both 'benign and unflattering', peopled with "bit characters", "harmless though quirky people", "physically unappealing people with limited attributes" and "by mongrel bastards who murder and dispossess their Aboriginal population, mistreat women, migrants and others". Yet he also finds a cinema "able to air its society's dirty linen".

In part three, "Problematising Australian Cinema", O'Regan investigates the socio-cultural aspects of Australian cinema. He argues that film is not just important because of the place it occupies in the film world. The focus here is on gender, nationhood, the social and terms of critical practice, "both in front of and behind the camera". He provides many examples of a cinema taking as its subject aspects of what he describes as "social problematisations". The examples are broad—gay relationships in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* and *The Sum of Us*, possible and available positions for Aboriginal filmmakers such as that to be found in Tracey Moffat's *Nice Coloured Girls* and *Bedevil*, Australia's Asia-Pacific identity in the mini-series *Bangkok Hilton*, *The Year of Living Dangerously* and *Embassy*. Yet there are problems with these "social problematisations". O'Regan raises Adrian Martin's criticism of a "cinema of good intentions which prides itself on its progressivist record" but is "essentially a conservative cinema". This leads him to reiterate his concern about a cinema that has a limited range of "film-making repertoires" and much to still embrace and understand.

What impressed me most about O'Regan's book was his "construction of film culture". In his final chapter he acknowledges the contributions of the cinephile, the critical intellectual and the cultural historian and their range of diverse critical practices. Yet, throughout his text, the creative visions and analyses of William Routt (in letter as well as published texts), Adrian Martin, Meaghan Morris and Ross Gibson amongst others, are positioned alongside those of Jane Campion, Geoffrey Wright and George Miller; each being recognised as equally important. This is a part of our history not often acknowledged in chronologies of film texts and, for me, the recognition that film culture involves all of this and more is a story that needs to be told.

Scholars of Australian cinema will find O'Regan's book distinguished by its detailed account of post-second world war film and film culture. It complicates and pluralises its subject, opening it up rather than closing it down. In this way it demonstrates that Australian cinema is a complex set of texts, words, ideas, people, places, systems and relations. O'Regan's achievement is to make you feel the richness that is our Australian cinema.



SYDNEY INTERMEDIA NETWORK INC. POSITION OF DIRECTOR

Sydney Intermedia Network Inc. (SIN) is an incorporated association with a broad membership base. SIN promotes the work of artists using time-based media such as film, video, sound and new media through curated programs and exhibitions.

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Review

Sun, surf, silicon...cinema?

David Varga at *Flickerfest '97*

Bondi is an odd mix of disparate elements. Beach volleyballers, rollerbladers and frisbee enthusiasts indulging their passions by the sea, models in cafes debating the benefits of saline over silicone, unemployed actors pouting themselves into facial paralysis as pathological thespians discuss 'projects'. But despite the never ending clash of kitsch and cool there is also probably as

Quest

much diversity here as anywhere else in Sydney, and within this schizo frisson a filmic presence is more than just discernible. You think Cannes is a heavy scene? Try Saturday lunch at the Sportsbar! This year's *Flickerfest* film festival kicked off, appropriately I would argue, at Bondi's beachside pavilion. Where else could the fragmentary, diverse nature of short film culture be as at home?

The four programs that comprised the international competition were a mix of expressionistic animation, narrative drama and documentary with experimental film (in the purer sense of the word) for the most part absent from the programming. *The Box* featured Tilda Swinton as alien visitor witnessing London through the temporal dissonance of stylised, pixilated streetscapes, producing an eerie aesthetic not quite haunting enough to stop you questioning: 'what actually does lie beyond the slick camera work?' Jonathan Ogilvie's *This Film is a Dog* was a too-cute-and-cool one-liner about a cattle dog trying to sell a film at Cannes (they don't allow dogs inside the Sportsbar), but proved a crowd pleaser. Jenni Robertson's *Small Fictions* is a beautifully shot series of vignettes featuring a series of men talking about



with what seems a simple bed time story told to a child. 'Hilary worked in an office with a rubber plant and a man whose name she'd forgotten'. The story becomes more elliptical as the language play progresses and a seemingly simple journey from living room to bedroom involves crossing surreal landscapes.

Curiously absent from competition were a number of Australian films which appeared in the program titled *Local Heroes*, notably *The Christmas Cake* by Katey and David Grusovin, a documentary in which two elderly matriarchs of the NSW Labor Party reflect upon the complexities and happiness of living in the same Sydney house for many years. Both equipped with sharp tongues and vivid memories, their reminiscences provide an interesting perspective on questions of power and domesticity (theirs is the house in which Laurie Brereton and Paul Keating spent time together as young friends).

Also worth seeing was the *Compulsive Viewing* program, a selection of Channel Four short films made as part of the Lloyd's Bank competition for young filmmakers. Open to 11-25 year olds, the series of films shown here included some of the best work over the four years of

competition. This collection was far from flawless, but what marked out each film was the energy of fresh ideas flowering through proper Channel Four production treatment. Sometimes the sense of tragedy was too naive, plot drivers incomplete and scripts overwritten but all of the films were engaging and arresting. Most notable was *Life's a Bitch* by Coky Giedroyc. Although the story spans a lifetime, the roles are played by the same adult performers,

regardless of whether the characters are infant or aged, and the script is sharp and paced for full comic effect.

There were pleasures to be had in the diverse beachside film flotsam at *Flickerfest '97*. But a keen and discerning eye is essential (as any local knows) when looking for treasures that might wash up on the Bondi shore.

Flickerfest '97, Bondi Pavilion, January 3-12, Araluen Arts Centre Alice Springs January 24-26; Nova Cinema, Melbourne February 2-5; Camelot Picture Gardens, Perth March 1-4; First Avenue Cinema, Sawtell NSW, March 8-9; University of New England, Armidale NSW, March 14-16; Take Over Festival, SA, March 21-26.

Tilda Swinton in *The Box*

themselves as they are photographed naked. In between there are dialogues between the photographer and her friends about their own stories of 'maleness'. The contrast perhaps is too strong, too-obviously a point in the making, but nonetheless *Small Fictions* was one of the more arresting Australian films on offer. Another generative work was *Lovely*. We see an old woman, shot in detail as elaborate as her night time 'beauty ritual', putting on a series of cosmetics before going to sleep beside her husband, the pathos not resolved by narrative closure. *Quest*, a German animation, consisted of a man of sand whose search for water causes him to fall between worlds, creating a hypnotic sense of longing. *Hilary*, another overseas animation, this time from the UK, begins

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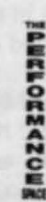
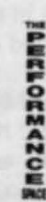
Exhibition Dates: March 9 - April 6

VNS Matrix • Stelarc • Martine Corompt • Moira Corby + Gillian Morrison • Lloyd Sharp • Phillip George + Ralph Wayment • John Tonkin • Isabelle Delmotte • Leon Cmielewski and Josephine Starrs • Troy Innocent • Mic Gruchy • Merlin Intergrated Media • Maryella Hatfield • Elena Popa • Ian Haig • Laurens Tan • Andrew Bonollo • Anna Sabiel • Sarah Waterson • Shane Fahey

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Review

Curiouser and curiouser

Lisa Gye in search of the experimenta media arts festival

The rabbit hole went straight on like a tunnel for some way, and then dipped suddenly down, so suddenly that Alice had not a moment to think about stopping herself falling down what seemed to be a very deep well.

Lewis Carroll,
Alice in Wonderland

In order to write a review, it's generally useful to be able to locate whatever it is that's under review. Trying to locate the experimenta media arts festival was akin to Alice's experiences in Wonderland. The festival seemed to be constructed with a morphing program, constantly shifting shape, being reinvented at every turn as something other than what it was just before. Curiouser and curiouser...

I thought I may find some definitive outline in the media kit sent to me by experimenta. An invite to the opening night's festivities gave me the clue that the Lonsdale Street Power Station was somehow central to the overall festival. It said "6-8pm at the Power Station" but other information in the press kit indicated that opening night "will be a sensory and artistic extravaganza. Staged over 48 hours in a disused inner-city power station, this rave/exhibition will be a multi-disciplinary happening bringing together the talents of Victorian and interstate installation, sound and performance artists utilising time-based media (film, video and digital technologies) to explore 'outer-limits' of contemporary creative expression". It turned out to be the former, much shorter event and the only exploring of outer limits which seemed to be taking place with any artists present was to see how many free vodkas they could cram into the allotted two hour period.

Other information contained in the media kit was also wildly misleading. Stan Brakhage as a guest of experimenta? Well, actually, no. Cyberspace/Internet Festival? Unfortunately not. Woman@art.technology.au Monograph? 'Fraid not. Curiouser and curiouser...

In desperation, I log onto the experimenta web site. It repeats all that I've read before in the press kit, with some variations. Am I getting closer? I scan to the bottom of the screen. It reads, "Last updated July 1996". Curiouser and curiouser...

After the event, I feel I've finally collected all the pieces of the puzzle but I'm still unable to piece them together. experimenta media arts festival seems to have been mainly composed of the following discrete events:

short, sharp and very current at the Lonsdale Power Station, an amalgam of screenings, installations and performance art spread across the four levels of the disused power station. It included *Matinaze* curated by SIN; *Back to the Future*, a film retrospective curated by Marie Craven; the work of Richard Kern; retrospectives on Guy Maddin and Stan Brakhage; *Internetrix: Women On-line* seminar; *Compound Eye*, Super 8 Program

Domestic Disturbances, a curated program of film and electronic art by women at the VicHealth Access Gallery.

The Body Remembers, an interactive survey by Jill Scott at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.

Burning the Interface, an exhibition of international artists' CD-ROMs curated by Mike Leggett at the Centre for Contemporary Photography.

ATOM Multimedia Awards Exhibition featuring award winners from the inaugural ATOM multimedia awards.

In fairness to the artists involved or on show in these events, space and time restrict me from reviewing each component of the festival. In fairness to the festival organisers, the above may not be a complete list but the fact that, despite my best efforts, I'm not able to come up with a definitive list is telling in itself. However, part of the confusion I felt

in trying to locate the festival seems to lie in the genesis of the program and its various parts.

Of all of the above events, only two—(*short, sharp and very current* and *Domestic Disturbances*)—were curated especially for the experimenta festival. Both of these were somewhat uneven in quality. *short, sharp and very current* had a heavy emphasis on retrospectives—curious given experimenta's claim to be the forerunner in supporting new media arts and artists in Australia. *Domestic Disturbances*, an all woman show, featured some interesting work (most notably Martine Corompt's *The Cute Machine*, Sarah Waterson's *Mapping e-Motion* and Gillian Morrison's *Tricky: A game of delusion*) but displayed an extraordinary insensitivity to the featured filmmakers by screening their

8mm and 16mm films on video! Maybe a space like the VicHealth Gallery is not an appropriate venue for the screening of film but a media arts organisation should be the first to recognise the necessity of showing work as it was intended to be seen.

A similar fate befell many of the films screened at the Power Station. Not only were some of them screened on video (despite the fact that print copies were available) but the screening area at the Power Station was not adequate to the task. No projection booth and insufficient blackout facilities meant that the films were hard to see and hear. The constant stream of coming and going from the room was reminiscent of the Mad Hatter's tea party!

The other programs (*Burning the Interface*, *The Body Remembers* and the ATOM award winners exhibit, in particular) were scheduled to take place anyway and it would appear that experimenta has piggybacked these exhibits to flesh out its program. To claim them as experimenta events is stretching it somewhat. An experimenta advertising feature in *Beat* even went so far as to suggest that Troy Innocent's "latest venture is a contribution to Melbourne's experimenta festival".

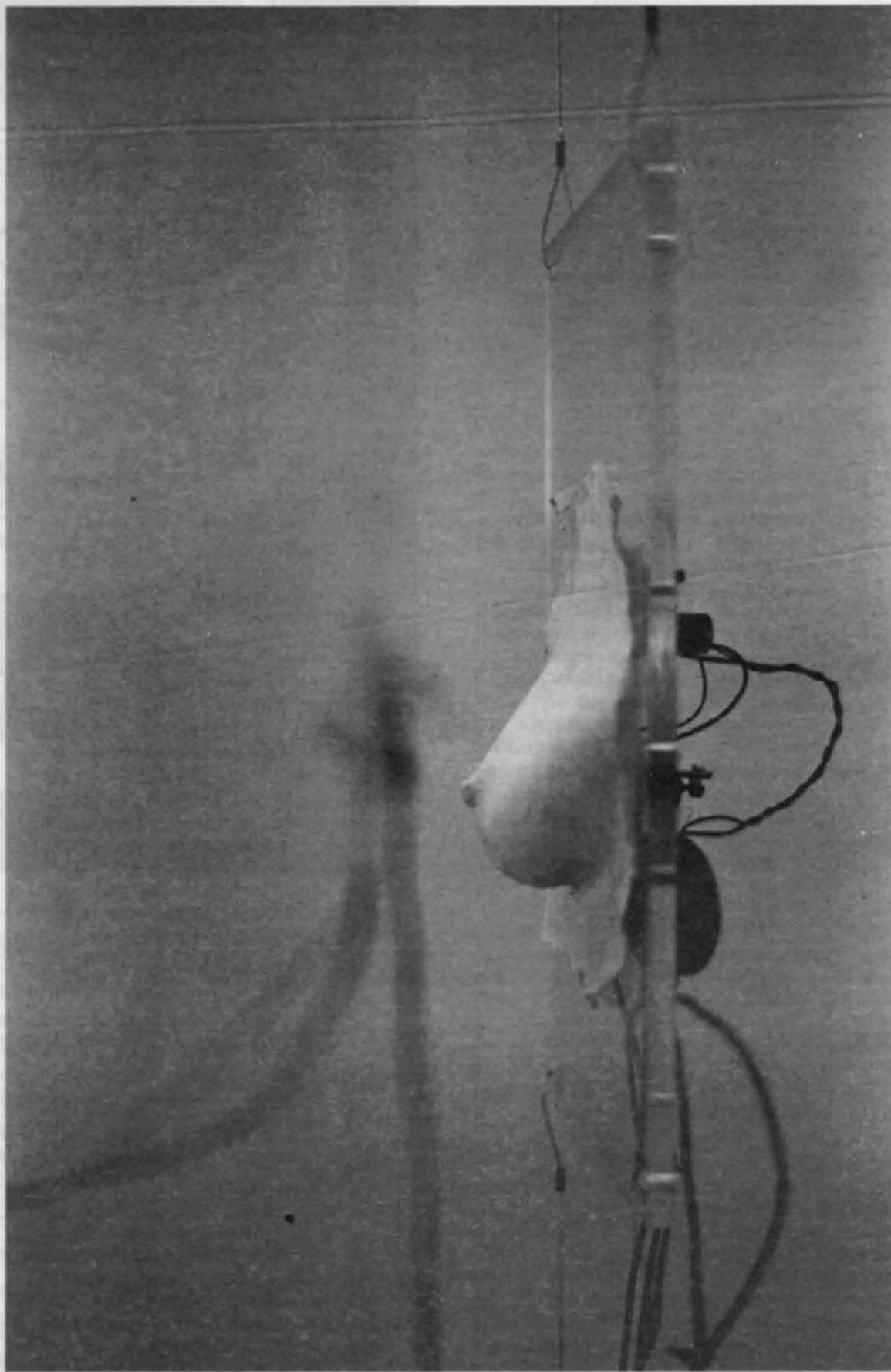
They were referring to *Idea_ON>I*, a CD-ROM-based interactive which was exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art as part of *Burning the Interface* in April and has been available as a supplement from *Mediamatic* for some time. And besides, what of Innocent's ongoing collaboration with Shaolin Wooden Men for *Psi-Harmonics*? Just like Wonderland, nothing about experimenta seemed to be quite as it appeared.

There are clearly problems in exhibiting media art which centre on the locatability of the art work both in a physical sense and in the sense that it is often multi-disciplinary and therefore not easily categorised. experimenta needs to rethink its strategies in the light of this. Rather than trying to stage an "extravaganza of media art" as it immodestly described itself in its

press releases, perhaps experimenta needs to return to a series of more focused and artist inspired mini events. They could use their funding to help artists complete and exhibit work rather than try and use the work of artists to fill the frame of an event which will always be less than the sum of its parts.

experimenta media arts festival
Melbourne, 7-16 November, 1996

Lisa Gye (<http://www.swin.edu.au/ssb/media/lghome.html>) is a lecturer in Media Studies at Swinburne University of Technology and recently assisted in the curation of *digita-online* for the Melbourne International Film Festival (<http://www.cinemedia.net/digita/>)



Sarah Waterson *Mapping Emotion*

Review

Capturing minutiae

Dirk de Bruyn on Laszlo Dudas's video *Beyond The Call of Duty*

Laszlo Dudas migrated to Australia with his wife and son from Romania via Hungary a short time before the fall of Ceaușescu and before all those other walls came down too. It was a hair-raising gamble and he has been working hard to create his own vision in film and video here ever since. There has been the migrant's single-mindedness about his determination and need to express himself and to tackle the barriers of exclusion. His skills with video and film developed through his work in Europe and his resourcefulness have illuminated a way through. He has set himself up with his own SVHS equipment at home in his bedroom and just started making stuff. The 24 minute video *Beyond The Call of Duty* (1995) screened at the Cafe Bohemio late last year stands as testament to this perseverance and

Apparently in '56 somebody took over the country, forget his name, or a government changed or something and took the country into communist rule and so certain people got lost what they had attained as in a democratic way. So wealthy people lost their money, and many poor people who were maybe bad, who were in positions of power and sent them away to camps. It was a very bad time for a lot of people and then Hungary got freed up, I think, it was in 1980 something, '89, something like that. And so you can see where people come from Hungary have a real struggling mentality of work hard to get what you want because, you know, they have gone without for so long.

As the words are spoken we see war footage of the ruin and utter destruction of that time, when everyday life was



Beyond the Call of Duty

resourcefulness. This video outlines the failure of style to represent the everyday. It is depicted as uprooted from its own history. *Beyond* opens with the a quotation from Paul Virilio: "The day that virtual reality becomes more powerful than reality will be the day of the big accident".

Beyond The Call of Duty follows performance artist and fashion designer Krisar in video clip, laser show, DJ style, with inane vox pops of some of his friends and colleagues peppering the glitz of his fashion model-cum-disco presentations. One section ends with a booming synthesised male voice enunciating "You can touch me". With all this emptied, surface style we at first assume we are watching a work imitating overused conventions. Gradually the emphasis shifts and we become aware of a persona marooned from the everyday, skating the surface, the outer layers only. It is as if the video is beginning to critique itself. There is something longed for, looked for, that is missing. When Krisar walks into the local 711 store in period costume and wig while travelling to his show in a limousine, we start to get the picture of this critique of the artist, the film's own style and the cultural environment or, if you like, non-environment in which this all takes place in. This gels with a telling sequence where Krisar's friend starts to give a potted history of Hungary and Krisar's past:

transformed into an explosion. It is as if war is the actual occupation of the Everyday by the Spectacle, delivering a catatonia that transforms and abducts its occupants. The juxtaposition between this and the friend's babble is tragic and comical at the same time. It is a description which somehow denies Krisar his past and delivers him to us as a variation of David Bowie's Major Tom: a figure marooned and floating in the meaningless abstraction of outer space.

The events of war that could yield Situationist and Lettrist explosion are here a mindless fairytale marooned from its own past. Quite apart from Krisar's own undeniable culpability there is also a sad comment here on Australia's failure to offer a meaningful context beyond style for this 'migrant' to situate and reference his persona.

Beyond the Call of Duty makes it clear that sections of our society live a parade of lifestyle statements where the everyday gesture is too often devalued. Near the end, Dudas captures a moment, by accident, of one of the interviewees talking about how easy it is to make a video, that he can do it better. There is no understanding that there is a whole history of self expression behind working in small gauge media. This is a voice shaped by a culture predicated on surface and 'the next big thing' where the minutiae of the everyday encounter are missed. Dudas goes a significant way to capturing it, his subjects do not:

Film reviews



Peter Hanley as Ronnie and Andrew Connolly as Liam in *Guiltrip*

Guiltrip
written and directed by Gerard Stembridge
a Dendy films release
currently screening in Sydney; Brisbane
February 28; other states to follow

Considering Irish film is a fledgling industry, *Guiltrip* is an astonishing production. Set in a small town, in a socially regressive country with neo-Catholic values enshrined in law (abortion and divorce illegal), the film interrogates repressive Catholic moralism with a cleverness that transcends the simplistic gravity of social realism.

Writer/Director Gerard Stembridge reveals a rupture in this limited moral system by allowing the stories of Liam and Tina to unfold through a series of flashbacks, teasing out narrative possibility with a precision that recalls Hitchcock. Over a 24 hour period, a youngish couple (Liam and Tina) each desire something beyond their insular and unhappy marriage, desires which are inadmissible in the terms of their relationship. Liam, an army corporal, played with a brilliant muscular intensity by Andrew Connolly, performs a case study in repressed male self-loathing. Anally retentive and sadistic, his sexual frustration finds a release in the image of a woman called Michele who visits his army base. He pursues her through the night with intensifying psychotic obsession. Earlier that day Tina has flirted innocently with a harmlessly gawky stereo salesman, Ronnie, Michele's husband (another couple seemingly set in an unhappy marriage). Tina and Liam both return home hiding secrets they consider unutterable. The possessive and sadistic Liam enacts a 'guilt trip' on his relatively innocent wife to project his own feelings of shame and self hate. The game weaves through cruel extremes, with Liam's final words a reminder that an Irish marriage has no escape route. "Because you are my wife I forgive whatever you might have done. Because you are my wife I will continue to love you". Of course, he is really saying, because you are my wife you will never be able to leave me no matter what acts of cruelty and hatred I perpetrate against you.

In the book of short stories *Trash*, John Waters tells of a different relationship to Catholic guilt. He prays each night, thanking God for making him Catholic, and thus for the intensified pleasure of 'dirty' sex. There is a lot of dirt in *Guiltrip*, but absolutely no pleasure in sexual transgression. A film you should see, for the performances and a script that charts domestic horror with an uncommon deftness. DV

Mr Reliable
directed by Nadia Tass
written by Don Catchlove and Terry Hayes
a Globe Films release
screening nationally January 28

Ever felt the attempt to market Australian films overseas was perhaps on the ugly side of cynical? *Love Serenade* won the 1996 Camera D'or in Cannes, confirming again "Australia's place in the European filmic imagination as a repository for fetishised tropes of culturally inferior otherness: antipodean idiosyncrasy, poverty of mind, the dominance of landscape and eccentric vacuity" (AMJ, RT#14). What happens when you remove the exotic from this formula? The caricatures of Australianness that appear in *Mr Reliable* serve a different end than Australia's other recent international successes, for instead of flogging once again Australian 'cultural inferiority', *Mr Reliable* actually refers back to Australian culture and audiences in an inquiring and humorous way.

Based on the true story of Australia's first (set in the late 60's) television siege/hostage drama, this is a tale of how one none-too bright 'battler' (not John Howard's double-income type) outwits the police and government. Colin Friels plays the illiterate Wally Mellish, a recent Long Bay release who teams up with Beryl (Jackie McKenzie) to set up a weatherboard home with Beryl's small child on the outskirts of Sydney. When cross police thugs arrive to question Wally over the theft of some hood ornaments from a local car wreckers, he protects his new found happiness by firing a warning shot in the air.

The NSW Police are reeling from the Vietnam protest 'excessive use of force' accusations and seize on the possibility of a siege as an antidote PR opportunity. Negotiations between Wally and Police Commissioner Norm Allen (Paul Sonkilla) begin with almost the same blokey bonding-lust that you might expect at a men's group introductory meet, and their relationship progresses through some intimate and affectionate spaces as the absurdity mounts. Wally demands and is given an M-16, and later a priest so he and Beryl can be married, gaining public sympathy in the process.

If you are not aware of the original event I will not spoil your pleasure in witnessing the increasingly farcical narrative unfold, for the twisting plot is a comic comment on 60s culture, morality, government and power that makes *Mr Reliable* worth seeing. It's a film that proves that popular Australian film (and this story 'has all the ingredients'—romance, triumph over adversity, redemption etc etc) can also be provocative and culturally self-reflexive. DV



baby Kerin as Leslie, Colin Friels as Wally and Jacqueline McKenzie as Beryl in *Mr Reliable*

Film reviews

Patricia Arquette as Renee Madison and Bill Pullman as Fred Madison in *Lost Highway*

Lost Highway
directed by David Lynch
distributed by Globe Film Co.
Release TBA

It's a bummer, but it has to be seen, if you're a Lynch fan that is. Even if you're not, I'd go for the remarkable first third before Lynch does his B-grade reprise of *Blue Velvet*—innocent falls for gangster's girl, gangster perpetrates bad case of road rage on a driver ie Robert Loggia doing a Dennis Hopper as the gangster, innocent gets girl, or does he? The overall narrative is a parallel universes number (the kind that Philip K. Dick does so well on the page): in one it's Bill Pullman, as a nervy, jealous saxophonist, and wife Patricia Arquette (is she just scared or is she guilty?), in the other it's motor mechanic Balthazar Getty mixing it with Arquette as gangster's moll (you can tell, no dress sense). Some how, some way, the two men are connected—through the murder of the 'same' treacherous woman. But it's only the initial Pullman episode that works, sparsely and deadpanly scripted, shot as if belonging to a totally different film from the rest, painterly, Rothko-ish walls of colour and dark threatening to swallow the saxophonist and the viewer. And the tension is not built on relishing how much damage Loggia will do to his road victim or how far a glass table top will slice into the head of a villain. It's a suspense building beautifully on a spacious contemporary interior design that becomes claustrophobic as the jealousy intensifies, as a strange video gift arrives each morning on the doorstep, as the couple realise that something else is in the house, as video images begin to flicker not just on the TV screen but in Pullman's head. This is sustained film-making of a high order, locking us into Pullman's point of view, into his conscious, until he's thrown in goal...and from then on, sadly, it's standard Lynch and does this filmmaker have some really old-fashioned problems with women or not? See it for the first third, it's the only part of the film that nearly lives up to the promo blurb, "A 21st Century Noir Horror Film". KG

Dead Heart
written and directed by Nicholas Parsons
AFI release

After Bryan Brown's public statements about his disappointment with the fate of *Dead Heart* despite excellent reviews, someone wrote to *The Sydney Morning Herald* saying that had the film been marketed as a murder mystery it might have fared better. As an exercise in meaningfulness, *Dead Heart* is dated and overwrought. As a suspenseful whodunit it often works. In between, a congested cast of characters dirty up the narrative line. It's enough to have Bryan Brown—as the good cop turning bad—up against tribal law and an aboriginal alcohol-runner, but Parson decides to drive the narrative with the schoolteacher's wife having it off with the criminal (on a sacred site—she loves his instinct, he's got an oedipal thing about elders and tradition) and adds an anthropologist and his wife watching on helplessly, a priest (Ernie Dingo) looking on helplessly (or as passively complicit) and, believe it, a helpless and unbelievably naive investigative TV journo and cameraman. And Brown's cop finds himself having indigenous mystical experiences during the chase through the bush. You could feel audience credulity stretching to breaking point. But the suspense often works and (the wife and the 'helpless' crowd aside) the performances are very good. Brown's balancing act with the white law and black justice is a gruelling struggle and well performed. The indigenous performers, especially the elders, are particularly good and notably less theatrical than the whites. *RealTime* is looking forward to some Indigenous responses to *Dead Heart* and hopes to commission one for the next issue, especially since it is in the portrayal of the elders that the film refuses to divide its world into good blacks and bad whites. But is its potboiler intensity at odds with its best intentions? It's a film worth seeing and not only for the debate it engenders. KG

Newsreel

Australian Multimedia Artists Prominent at Milia

The CD-Rom works of Australian multimedia artists Megan Heyward and Sally Pryor have been selected by an international jury for the New Talent Pavilion at MILIA, the major European multimedia market to be held at Cannes, France, from February 9-12. The works—Pryor's *Postcard from Tunis* and Heyward's *I Am A Singer*—are two of 30 interactive titles selected. *I Am A Singer*, produced with the assistance of the AFC, is a fictional non-linear work focusing on the story of Isabelle Jones, rising Australian pop star, who is involved in an accident on the eve of an international tour and suffers amnesia. The user assists Jones as she attempts to reconstruct her identity through various sources—media reports, diaries, dreams and anecdotes—investigating the possibilities of narrative storytelling within the CD-Rom medium. *Postcard from Tunis* is an experimental work set in North Africa. Focusing on local traces of the early history of writing, the work integrates images, sounds and texts in English, French, Arabic, Phoenician and Libyan.

Other titles to be presented are: *Five Bells* by Steve Thomas & Kath Symmons, *Galax Arena* by Kathy Mueller, *Girls Own Girl Zone Interactive* by Moira Corby & Gillian Morrison, *Metaplex* by David Cox, *The Good Cook* by Michael Buckley, *Gott's Treasure* by Greg Zaritski, *Bad Code* by VNS Matrix, *The Wish Fulfilling Tree* by Della Churchill, *The User Unfriendly Interface* by Josephine Starrs & Leon Cmielewski and *Body & Self* by Artmoves.

Matinaze '97

Matinaze '97 is Sydney Intermedia Network's seventh annual survey of Australian screen art. Works screened will include the latest in film, video, multimedia & websites.

SIN's curatorial policy for *Matinaze* is relatively open-encouraging works that challenge, innovate & explore established aesthetic boundaries. Entries are vetted by a selection panel of screen-art practitioners and academics. *Matinaze '97* invites practitioners to enter works in two NEW categories: "Attention Scan"—specifically created 'video exclamations' of less than thirty seconds duration; and this year for the first time internet WebSites created by & for artists. *Matinaze* offers screen-based artists a rare opportunity to showcase their latest work to a critically aware audience in a technically well equipped environment. All programs are archived for future research work & programs frequently tour both nationally & internationally. Domain Theatre, Art Gallery of NSW, April 5-12 Tel: 9264 7225, e-mail: sinsite@ozemail.com.au; website: <http://www.ozemail.com.au/~sinsite>.

Adelaide Film Director Invited to the French Film Festival

Adelaide short film Director Jenni Robertson will fly to France to attend the screening of her short film *Small Fictions*. (See Flickerfest review this issue). Other films travelling to France will include *Forbidden Porcupine*, the animation *Lovely Day* and *White* by Francesca da Rimini.

Back to Summer School

The Australian Network for Art and Technology recently held a summer school in Internet Design and Web Authoring at the University of Tasmania's Institute for the Arts, inviting 14 artists from around Australia. Held in collaboration with the Institute of the Arts University of Tasmania and Contemporary Art Services Tasmania, courses ran throughout January. The School is unique in that it provides the only intensive training program in Australia devised specifically for artists. ANAT has co-ordinated seven national summer schools around Australia since 1989. Australian artists also continue to earn the respect of their international colleagues by the quality and innovativeness of their work, a respect reflected in regular invitations to present at prestigious events including the International Symposia on Electronic Art, SIGGRAPH, Ars Electronica, and the Institute of Contemporary Art in London's Terminal Future and Deep Screen Diving programs. The resulting work of the ANAT summer school are available on-line at the ANAT website. See address below.

New media/film URL Directory:

Screen Culture Organisations
<http://www.afc.gov.au/www/sco/frames.html>

Sydney Contemporary Arts Network
<http://www.culture.com.au/scan/>

Sydney Intermedia Network
<http://www.ozemail.com.au/~sinsite/>

Experimenta Media Arts
<http://www.peg.apc.org/~experimenta/>

Rhizome New Media Art Resource
<http://www.rhizome.com/>

Australian Network for Art and Technology
<http://www.rhizome.com/>

Low Res Film and Video Festival
<http://www.lowres.com/menu.html>

GeekGirl
<http://www.next.com.au/spyfood/geekgirl/>

Election '96 Arts Policies
<http://www.ipacific.net.au/webarts/artspol.html>

The Virtual Film Festival
<http://www.virtualfilm.com/>

New Media Centre Homepage
<http://www.cslb.edu/gc/nmc/>

McKenzie Wark's Virtual Cultures
<http://www.mcs.mq.edu.au/VirtualCultures/>

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From unstable ground

Richard Murphet casts an eye over theatre and performance training in the US and the UK

In our post-post-Benjaminic age, when increasingly it is not a question of the mechanical reproduction of art but of electronic production as art, it seems it is the ontological instability of theatre (wherein lies the artefact?) that is also causing the crisis of identity in theatre training. Wherein and wherefore lies the training?

It was in order to investigate the lie of the land in these transitional times that I travelled through the United States and England in mid-1996. As a trainer specifically interested in the training of directors, writers and performance makers, these were the areas that I focussed on in the dozen institutes I visited. I returned with no integrated impression. The training philosophies and strengths and weaknesses differed markedly from program to program. The spread was across the spectrum of the alternatives: the standard of the training program, the inspirational power of the teaching, the upholding of strong traditions, the opening up of new horizons, the connection and relevance to the profession, the integration into the community.

THE UNITED STATES

University of California at San Diego
MFA Programs in Directing, Writing,
Acting, Dramaturgy, Design,
Stage Management
Enquiries: University of California, San
Diego, Dept. of Theater, MFA, 9500
Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA 92093-0344

The drama program at the University of California, San Diego prides itself on its high standing in the national ratings of theatre arts courses. The underlying philosophy is the training of the individual artist to develop his/her own voice. Tucked away in the eucalypt groves of La Jolla in southern California, the program feels a lifetime away from the tense interracial mix of San Diego a few miles south. It is a retreat for study and training, and gains and suffers from being so.

The playwriting course is known nationally as just about the best resourced playwrights' training in the States. The course lasts three years and is a well balanced mix of writing skill seminars, talks from visiting professionals, dramaturgical feedback and three productions of students' work—studio level in the first two years and a full production of the thesis play. There is a strong and productive connection with the graduate program in dramaturgy.

The directing course is newer and far less organised. Recently taken over by Englishman Les Waters from Joint Stock, its strength is potential rather than achieved.

Yale University
MFA Programs in Directing, Writing,
Acting, Technical Design and Production,
Stage Management
Enquiries: Registrar Yale School of Drama,
P.O. Box 208325, New Haven,
CT 06520-8325

At Yale it is the directing course that is remarkable. The overall department is exciting, with an energy and level of activity that provides meaningful connections between the different programs—acting, directing, writing, dramaturgy, stage management, technical production. As with UCSD, the isolation from a major metropolis draws the students and staff of the program into a self supporting unit. The school too is connected to a top class repertory theatre and in this case both theatre and school are run by the same man, the indefatigable Stan Wojewodski Jr.

Wojewodski's connections to the more experimental wing of the nation's repertory system has meant that he has drawn to the staff a wonderful team of adjunct teachers. Playwrights Mac Wellman, Eric Overmeyer and

Irene Fornes teach in the Writing program and the program is run by Marc Bly, recently dramaturg at the Tyrone Guthrie in Minnesota. Directors David Chambers, Liz Diamond and Wojewodski teach in the directing program.

This program is the most thorough training in any area I witnessed anywhere in the States and provides a beautiful balance of the classical and the contemporary. In the 1st year course it covers the major phases of 20th century stage directing. Students direct a realistic play and a new writer's play. In 2nd year they focus on verse drama, particularly Shakespeare and Moliere. They direct a verse play and a new writer's play. They also assistant-direct on Yale rep plays. In 3rd year there is a coverage of the great tradition of alternative writers and directors, from Ubu on. They do their thesis production in the main school theatre or on the Yale rep stage. For this they get full support and \$20,000 budget.

University of California at Los Angeles
MFA programs in Directing, Writing,
Acting, Design and Production
Enquiries: Student Services, UCLA School
of Theater, Film and Television,
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1622

Theatre at UCLA has a great tradition. The school was a strong force in the 1940s and 50s, and more recently had a renaissance under teachers such as Andrei Belgrader (now at UCSD) and Mel Shapiro (now at Carnegie-Mellon). According to my conversation with staff members things are not so robust at present and the department is trading off its name. It maintains a traditional training in the basics of writing or directing or acting, and its inability to move ahead is built into the structure of the place and into its inevitable connection to the narrow demands of the dominant LA industry—film and TV.

The philosophy at UCLA is a pragmatic one—learn the skills and get it on. The pragmatism has its appeal but at the moment it seems to be based on a training program in need of reappraisal.

California Institute of the Arts
MFA Programs in Directing for Theatre;
Directing for Video, Theatre and Cinema;
Acting; Design; Technology;
and Management
Enquiries: Programs in Performance,
California Institute of the Arts, 24700
McBean Parkway, Valencia, CA 91355-2397

CalArts was set up in the early 70s by the Disney Foundation. Located in the beautiful Santa Clarita Valley just north of Los Angeles, it is a multi-arts campus training for theatre, film, dance, art, music, and computer art. The separate disciplines maintain their own territories but the large catacomb all-purpose building encourages a lot of crossovers. At its best one can see this as a privileged experimental laboratory for the media artists of tomorrow. Certainly that is how CalArts would like to see itself.

Within the theatre program, the course with real energy and drive seems to be directing for video, theatre and cinema. It is a crossover between the three media and aims to train minds which can conceptualise in each. Students can finally specialise, but they are expected to direct in each area throughout the course. As well, they receive some acting training and encouragement to work across disciplines. Here is a course which seems to live up to its promise and in a training facility (funded by Spielberg) you would kill for.

Columbia University
MFA Programs in Acting, Directing,
Dramaturgy, Theatre Management,
Playwriting.
Enquiries: School of the Arts, 305 Dodge
Hall, Columbia University, New York,
NY 10027

The dean, Arnold Aronson, was almost apologetic when I arrived. "I don't know what you can find out here. We are only in our early days." Postgraduate courses in directing and writing began seven years ago; postgraduate acting began four years later. The undergraduate courses are even more recent and located in another building. With no purpose-built spaces, the department makes use of spaces in and around the university for its fairly skeletal courses. Its selling point is the high profile permanent and adjunct teaching staff.

Playwriting is run by North American playwright, Romulus Linney. Students attend one three-hour writing class per week for some of the year, individual tutorials on their plays, and history of theatre classes. On Monday nights student work receives a reading in front of an audience, with a well-known writer as moderator. Apart from that they get occasional workshop readings or limited productions.

Directing is run by Anne Bogart in between her other engagements as one of the country's most prominent current directors. Students work on scene study in the acting course, run by Andre Serban, on the classics—Greeks, Shakespeare, German Romantics, Classic Realism. They receive a weekly directing workshop from Bogart, direct the Monday night readings and attend internships at a NY theatre company. The department has started well by focussing on the quality of teaching.

New York University
MFA Programs in Dramatic Writing,
Acting, Design
Enquiries: Tisch School of the Arts, 721
Broadway, New York, NY 10003-6807

This was in many ways the most impressively thorough graduate writing program I encountered. It is enormous: nine full-time staff and 47 adjunct staff teach 250 undergrad students within a liberal arts course and 20 grad students per year. The graduate program is a combined film and theatre writing course. It is expected that students do both in their first year but after that they can pick and choose from the myriad courses on offer. The departmental philosophy places a lot of emphasis on cultural diversity—gay/lesbian, African-American, other nationalities (the diversity of New York), and there is a real recognition of different ways of perceiving and an attempt to cover these in the courses offered. Moreover, there is a great diversity of staff and this means that the various backgrounds and interests of the students can be catered for.

There are many courses on the craft of writing, and a lot of time given to the development of the individual's work in tutorials. Students get moved readings, workshops and full productions (4 weeks rehearsal). The constraints on space and personnel forces them to make use of the huge resources of the city, and plays are performed in and around the city campus by willing professionals. The style is necessarily intimate and the emphasis is on exploration rather than product. There are internships for all the students at one of the NY theatres or film houses or TV.

GREAT BRITAIN

Over the last 15 years the Thatcherite gradual attrition of funds and resources in education has seen the standard and morale of the previously high quality of theatre training in Britain undermined alarmingly. Perhaps it is in response to this that alternatives to the classical British training model have begun to appear in the nooks and crannies of the newer universities and

colleges throughout the UK. It is these developing alternatives that attracted my attention, reflective as they are of more recent forms of theatre practice.

Dartington College
BA Programs in Theatre, Performance
Writing, Visual Performance
Enquiries: Registry, Higher Close,
Dartington College of the Arts,
Totnes, Devon, TQ9 6EJ, UK

Dartington is, of course, not a new school. Since the 30s, it has offered an exciting training in dance and theatre and a dance-theatre mix. But recently it has been going through a fairly traumatic sea-change. The dance course has disappeared as has the art course, and in their place two very contemporary courses in performance writing and visual performance now sit alongside theatre, music and stage management.

Unfortunately, I haven't the space to go into these in detail. They are however well worth investigating. The performance Writing course in particular seems to be charting a fascinating approach to writing itself as a performative act. The young staff are from diverse backgrounds and draw on influences as wide as medieval illustrated manuscripts, tattooing, tape sampling, Duchamp and Naturalism. Partly as a consequence of the arrival of these two new courses, the theatre course is in a state of flux. This is reflected in a philosophical division within the staff itself. For all this it still offers the opportunity of a development of performance making skills and will gain strength as it realigns itself.

De Montfort University, Leicester
BA Program in Performing Arts—
Contemporary Dance or Music or Theatre
Enquiries: De Montfort University
Leicester, The Gateway, Leicester,
LE1 9BH, UK

Nottingham Trent University
BA Program in Contemporary Arts
Enquiries: The Faculty of Visual and
Performing Arts, Nottingham Trent
University, Burton Street, Nottingham,
NG1 4BU, UK

Here are two examples of the new performance courses springing up across Britain, particularly in the recently upgraded ex-polytechnic universities. Neither are vocational courses (ie they don't set out to train actors, directors etc, although, of course, many practitioners do emerge from their ranks). The emphasis in both is on the avant-garde and the cross-disciplinary. At Leicester the choice is theatre, dance and music. Nottingham also throws art into the mix. Students at both may specialise in later years but must work across two or three art forms in early years. Both courses combine practice with theory in an attempt to illuminate one with the other. Claire McDonald at Leicester teaches performance writing, composition, and gender and performance. David Gale at Nottingham was working on a crossover idea between science and theatre on the day I attended. Both programs are pushed for theatre space and are forced to deal with this practically by investigating found and neglected performance arenas. In both I found a refreshing ability to make the most of limitations by pushing the boundaries beyond the norms of theatrical practice.

There are limitations to the training such places provide. However they chart one map of future directions as theatre training tries to make sense of the unstable ground of contemporary theatre.

Richard Murphet teaches at the Victorian College of the Arts

Performance: between analysis and practice

Alison Richards replies to Peta Tait (*RealTime* 14)

The heat and dust generated by debates over the place of practice in university-based performing arts courses is reflected in Peta Tait's article published in *RealTime* 14. Peta argued strongly for contemporary performance as an integral aspect of university performance studies programs. An exchange with artists doing exciting work is of course of enormous benefit to all concerned; I would also endorse her emphasis on the need to develop critical approaches which acknowledge the complexities of performance itself, rather than relying on grafted-on theories borrowed from other intellectual disciplines.

However, there are several aspects of her argument that I want to take issue with. The first is her claim that there is a 'curious under-representation' of theoretically informed performance practice and performance practitioners in Australian universities. This is long on rhetoric but short on fact. Peta's contention that artists working in "an Australian genre of non-narrative collaborative texts orientated to visual imagery" are marginalised, renders invisible a great deal of valuable work that has already been done. While it is true that many established university courses retain an emphasis on the playtext, I can testify that in Victoria at least there has been a lively engagement with contemporary work. Leading practitioners are engaged regularly in university work as staff members, students, guest lecturers and artists in residence (one course conducted at the Victorian College of the Arts' School of Critical Studies this year had over 60% of class hours taken by visiting practitioners). Conferences such as Deakin University's recent *Conference with a Difference* (Nov 15-16) in association with Theatreworks, and case study documentation have

contributed to a body of knowledge about and between practitioners and academics extending the better part of a decade.

Discourse and practice differences remain between programs nominally within the same university framework—a significant gap still exists between those institutions that aspire to train for 'the industry' and university departments proper—but the really burning issue for universities is not whether to link practice and theory, but how to do it. Performing arts are often badly sited in universities, within arts faculties already strapped for cash. The internal struggle for intellectual and real resources, and the dominance of traditions unfamiliar with, or suspicious of, practice and its resource demands, combine with pressures for economic 'relevance' to make for a difficult strategic terrain for emerging departments with an interest in contemporary performance and contemporary theory, as Glen d'Cruz has pointed out (*Australasian Drama Studies* 26, 1995).

Peta ties her call to value contemporary performance with a call to reorient towards a performance studies paradigm, referring to the furor over Richard Schechner's rhetorical suggestion (originally made in 1992) that all theatre departments in the US be converted to departments of performance studies. Although I would broadly agree with her call to establish performance studies as the discipline horizon, this is old news. Australian academics have no need to re-rehearse American 'theory wars'. Schechnerian and other approaches to the theory and practice of performance have become reasonably well established in Australian universities over the past decade. The Deakin University Performing Arts Program (in which I taught until last year) went over to

a performance studies orientation in 1988. Far from Sydney University's Centre for Performance Studies being the 'only' institutional centre offering an engagement between intellectual and performance practice, Australian universities now offer a range of both undergraduate and postgraduate courses which encourage students to engage critically with performance theory, while acquiring at least a basic understanding of theatre practice. The course surveys by Keith Gallasch and Mark Minchinton in the same issue of *RealTime* bear this out.

The current challenge for performance studies courses is how to deal with performance as a critical medium. The thousands of undergraduates currently pouring into university performance courses are certainly keen to engage in practice; a high proportion hope to be trained as 'actors' within a model of 'theatre' that is limiting in terms of their real career prospects. Criticism of university graduates as 'semi-practitioners' obscures the inevitable fact that the skills taught in a performance studies course will not and should not be the same as those acquired in a training program within a particular performance tradition. They need to be equipped with a sophisticated understanding of performance, in line with the strategic importance it will have in the course of their working lives; it is up to departments to decide and advertise the extent of performance-making in a particular program, and its theoretical orientation. While performance framed as art is certainly a proper object of study within a performance studies paradigm, the logic of the discipline by no means restricts research to formal performance contexts, but encourages an engagement with a range of performative activity including social and political interaction. For example, Jonathan Bollen, now a postgraduate student at University of Western Sydney, Nepean, recently won the Schechnerian journal TDR student essay award for his research on Sydney's Sleaze Ball (*TDR* 40, 3, Fall 1996).

There is a real debate within the performance studies paradigm about the degree to which performance practice can itself be an appropriate teaching methodology and a viable instrument of research. This debate has been aired most usefully over the past twelve months in the pages of *Australasian Drama Studies* (issues 26-28) between Gay McAuley (who argues that her performance studies students are best placed as skilled observers, not participants in performance practice), and Glenn d'Cruz (representing those who see universities as a site for the development of a particular kind of reflective and critically informed practice).

My own efforts to outline guidelines for performance as research within universities

has become part of that debate. Contrary to Peta Tait's dismissal of university-based performance research as having "(a tenuous) connection to existing performance practice", the drive to establish performance as a legitimate mode of research and publication has been fuelled as much by the demands of practitioners engaged within the academy as by academics attempting to establish a new area of practice. Here too, there are important principles at stake, and useful debates already underway.

The decade has already wheeled us through several fashion cycles in both critical theory and performance practice. Anthropology, psychoanalysis, semiotics and feminism have been mined for insights; the exploration of associative compositional styles has been countered by calls to engage with the massive dislocations of local, regional and global cultural economies. As students and practitioners of performance work towards effective intervention within the power/knowledge formations competing for our attention and allegiance, it is useful to reflect on the complexities of cross-cultural, site- or culture-specific, and sociopolitical contexts—as well as on compositional strategies in physical, textual, visual, vocal and even mainstream theatre practice. Above all, it seems important to me that we avoid thinking reductively. Rather than simply calling for more reliance on practitioners as the source of authority, I would argue that we are now in a position to establish a much more sophisticated sense of where future debates might lead us, and how to facilitate informed exchange between theorists and practitioners without down-playing the contribution of either.

Surely the last thing we need is a dull 'postmodernist' non-narrative image-based art orthodoxy. It is ironic that the article by Gay McAuley (*Australasian Drama Studies* 28, 1996) cited by both Peta and Mark is actually calling for a re-evaluation of text and language-based performance within the theoretical paradigm of performance studies. It is important to establish a generative relationship between pluralities of theory and practice, and to encourage useful scholarship in a horizon of inquiry, rather than to attempt to reify 'theory' in a particular declension, or to assume a deictic relation between theory and a particular performance genre. A thorough-going problematisation of the relationship between performance analysis and critically informed performance practice within the university is required.

Alison Richards is a Melbourne performance-maker and theorist, and Vice President of ADSA (Australasian Drama Studies Association).

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JAN/FEB

four play

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a young woman is having trouble with her identity, this is nothing when the man downstairs says he is a spaceman

twilight - daynan brazil
three friends, one newcomer, one big secret. one of them is going to die

polaroid - andrew mcgahan
meet the world's greatest lover. thousands of women satisfied

the mutt- fiona munro
a gothic tale of two diners who sit at either end of a table, the food has run out, all they have left to amuse each other is abuse and a dog

MARCH

The Pool is Dammed: a trial by video
Company in Space

"Gesture, race and culture: a tentative study of spatio-temporal and linguistic aspects of gestural behaviour"...a performance capable of linking cities via interactive computer video medium carried over a teleconferencing system. Performed in Melbourne the work is taking place in Perth as part of TECHNE and in Sydney as part of ANTISTATIC

APRIL

Fumblefield

a nineteenth century sailor ploughs the deep: a traditional maori warrior undertakes a spiritual voyage; a contemporary australian woman who is a visual artist influenced by her extensive trips to south east asia builds a thai spirit house in preparation for her imminent death. the three are linked in the fumblefield, united by their deeply transformative journeying.

there is a forth figure; a doll, one of 'those emissaries between dead and living bodies...' (RILKE). Fumble field will be developed as a collaborative work from concepts of absence and presence contained in essays on dolls by heinrich von kliest, charles baudelaire, rainer maria rilke.

directed by doug lennard/visuals julianne lawson, scott walton, sound anna fairly, kiren knox

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Chris Hoyd, Herald Sun

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Challenging Chekhov

Benedict Andrews reports on Brink Production's (*Uncle*) *Vanya*

We know what a play is but what is an author? The author also sins. The author is not very clean. Is he clean I often wonder.

Serebryakov in Howard Barker's (*Uncle*) *Vanya*

A ghost-faced man appears, head shaven, eyes and eyelids red. His suit is cut 1890s Russian style, but made out of white plastic fabric. Like paper. His cuffs are stained with ink. He has written, he has been written. His face contorts with effort, with disgust, and he forces out his name: "Un-cle Van-ya, Un-cle Van-ya".



photo by David Wilson

This self-referential wrenching of character begins Howard Barker's rewriting of Chekhov, (*Uncle*) *Vanya*, produced by Brink Productions and directed by Tim Maddock in Adelaide in late 1996. Barker's adaptation is conceptually worlds apart from other recent engagements with Chekhov's play, such as the gentle frame shift of Louis Malle and André Gregory's *Uncle Vanya on 42nd Street* with its casual celebration of the New York Method and elegant melancholy, or Michael Blakemore's literal transposition of the story to Australia in *Country Life*. Barker warps, smashes and reinvents the original to unleash its unlived lives, and to 'save' Vanya from his paralysis within the Chekhovian narrative:

I remade Vanya because I loved his anger, which Chekhov allows to dissipate in toxic resentment. In doing this I denied the misery of the Chekhovian world, where love falters in self loathing and desire is petulance.

Howard Barker, introduction to the text of (*Uncle*) *Vanya*

Barker engages in a brutal and exhilarating argument with Chekhov (and by association Stanislavski) which creates a relentless investigation of the bloody politics of author-ity, textuality, and performance of self. Chekhov's slow unravelling of character, his subtlety and careful construction are blasted by Barker's ferocious language and convulsive theatrics.

The characters of (*Uncle*) *Vanya* begin as vapid fragments, puppets destined to replay the roles and neuroses as written by the Author-God. They are inscribed in a text of impotence, sterility and (e)motionless empathy. This stasis is broken when Vanya takes the gun ("supplied by Chekhov") and discovers an ability to exert power, to rewrite narrative. Chekhov's text explodes in a frenzy of self-definition, violence and sexuality as repressed desires are enacted. Vanya shoots Serebryakov, renames himself Ivan and goes upstairs to fuck Helena; Sonya seduces and murders Astrov; the servants rebel, and, in a climax of *jouissance*, the sea appears washing away the samovar and any remaining vestiges of naturalism. In releasing the characters from the boundaries of Chekhov's text, Barker opens a gap which forces the audience into a maelstrom of existential speculation about culture and instinct, the possibilities of unbridled imagination, crime, power and impotence.

In a startling display of metatheatrics, Chekhov appears sodden and half drowned, shipwrecked by the imaginary ocean. Like a severe father, he chastises, mocks and punishes his creations for their transgressions while the dead Serebryakov and Astrov applaud his actions and analyse his craft. Chekhov then dismisses all but Vanya whom he asks to sit with him while he dies of an unnamed disease. The death of the author has Barthesian ramifications. The characters are left broken around the stage like debris: the sea is gone, the old narrative lost, and a kind of catatonic insanity prevails. Helena transformed by her love of Vanya, gazes at herself in a gigantic, distorting mirror while Vanya obsessively tries to remember the serial number of his gun. In order to save him from further deterioration Helena proposes a deadly contract which leads to her assassination and Vanya's liberation. Barker avoids finite resolution, instead he asks the audience to imagine a new space outside the room/teat where Vanya might exist.

The young Brink ensemble in their inaugural production under Tim Maddock's direction responded to the text's challenge to abandon Stanislavskian dramaturgy in favour of an allusive contradictory reading of self and character. The very nature of performance, of 'truth' and 'reality', of repetition of role are

questioned in this playing out. Language is used like a fleshy texture to seduce, cajole, dominate and subvert others, and in turn the body is ravaged by words, by their bursting and birthing, by their holding back and swallowing and choking. Articulation of self is scrutinised and posited in conflict with the physical language of the body's history, its cultural inscriptions and chaotic eruptions. An intense and extreme physical style showed such contradictions directly manifest in gesture; desire and revulsion tear the body, learnt poise is counterpoised with raw anger, the body sways and shakes between selves.

Syd Brisbane as Vanya drove the work with an infectious, and anarchic energy. He jerked and snapped between extremes of agony and irony, turning Chekhov's *danse macabre* into a cruel and beautiful thrash. Other ensemble members, often playing against age, created a delicious play between their own bodies and the dynamics of 'role'. Maddock developed a series of painterly tableaux to map the text's complex shifts, further refuting a naturalistic reading of 'lived life'. Instead, the often cruel, erotic and beautiful scenes were infused with deliberate artifice. Sudden snaps of light and colour often accompanying a significant gesture also created this sense of hallucination of a world confined by text.

Imogen Thomas' design created an hermetic world in which the characters were enclosed. The Red Shed Theatre was transformed into a claustrophobic white chamber, maybe the page, maybe a madhouse. Lines of calligraphy covered the walls and black or white phallic spikes grew out of the ground like remnants of



photo by David Wilson

architecture, or a ruined forest, or pencils. The trace of Chekhovian naturalism was encoded in the ruined furniture which littered the space. It was a volatile place on the verge of catastrophe; lights swung sending giddy shadows, a beam fell diagonally delineating the space, and as Chekhov's text came unstuck rubble rained down. The characters haunted this space, like they'd inhabited it too long and were its anaemic custodians waiting for an audience. Dressed in white period costumes, stained to various degrees with ink, they floated in it, were its hieroglyphs. When shot, they bled ink: word become flesh.

Barker's rewriting of Chekhov shows him to be a rare playwright in the English language, one committed to shifting the boundaries of contemporary theatrical practice.

Benedict Andrews directed a production of Howard Barker's *Wounds* to the Face for Blueprint in 1996. Members of this company subsequently formed Brink Productions. (*Uncle*) *Vanya* is its first production. In August 1997 it will be performed at Sydney's Belvoir Street Theatre.

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Political places

Keith Gallasch reviews two works from the 1997 Sydney Fringe



The Geography of Haunted Places

The Geography of Haunted Places, The Performance Space

I saw Denise Stoklos in *Mary Stuart*. I saw Erin Hefferon in *The Geography of Haunted Places*. Utterly different performers, different shows. But both fought their hair, rearranged their bodies as if not quite in them, as if believing a pose would solve their being, both enacted radical physical transformations; both spoke as if the act was critical, every word precious, each breathing space vital, barely holding back from an outburst beyond their control. While Stoklos read as the totally

trained exponent of her own Essential Theatre, her influences inscribed in every manipulation of the face as mask and the foot as dance step, Hefferon (with a cool grace and essential stillness) declared no influences (save the careful framing of scenes provided by director Nigel Kellaway) and could thus truly frighten with her sheer strangeness and the sudden swerve into what felt like real anger as, naked on a chair, between long cigarette inhalations, she transformed momentarily, without a trace of irony, into a raving Australian fascist (with some choice phrases from Pauline Hanson's repertoire).

I had to see *Geography*... twice to believe the achievement it is. Hefferon performs a bizarre bewigged bimbo, Miss Discovery, in *cheong sam*, grappling with theories of place and desire ("Sssh, please, I'm trying to read of the landscape of intransigence, of the drama of resistance"), surrounded by stuffed Australian animals (invoking the role of the museum in our cultural shaping—"The world, my fishy friends, is not a museum to dribble over"), shedding her clothes in a set of delicately moved transitions from Oriental to South Pacific to naked 'self'. The text she delivers is as remarkable as the performance: "Show me just one of your truths that could not be read as irony, one secret that has not been whispered until the lips are sore". Josephine Wilson writes with a postmodern verve (implicating her audience with direct address: "So glad to be here. So glad to find a sympathetic audience"), but neither opaquely or abstractly; the specificity of her language creating delicious and disturbing images side by side with blunt swipes, eg at the Minister for Foreign Affairs—"He's a Doctor. He says, 'Talk about it'. He says,



Jai McHenry and Regina Heilmann, *Leni Leni*

Heidrun Löhner

'It's good to get it out of your system'. Well I know what system he means". She squats as if to defecate).

When she first saw the original version of *Geography*... a couple of years ago in Perth, Sarah Miller told us all that this was an important work. She was right. It is to her and PICA's credit that she has finally remounted it with Nigel Kellaway's expert direction, Mike Canning's lighting, Rob Muir and Derek Kreckler's powerful soundtrack, and toured it to Brisbane, Sydney and Adelaide prior to its Perth season. *The Geography of Haunted Places* is an inspiration.

The Geography of Haunted Places, performed by Erin Hefferon, written by Josephine Wilson, directed by Nigel Kellaway, sound by Rob Muir and Derek Kreckler, lighting by Mike Canning, painted backdrop by Aadjie Bruce, produced by PICA. *The Performance Space*, Sydney, January 15 - 25; *Nexus Caberet*, Adelaide, January 19 - February 8; *PICA*, Perth, March 12 - 22.

Leni Leni, Downstairs Belvoir Street Theatre

Yes, yes, that was me on the video, in the rollneck sweater, unshaven, washed out, half-toned, muttering about art and politics. I was in the show for a minute. I declare an interest. But I never read the script, I never saw a rehearsal. It was a cameo. I didn't even know what *Leni Leni* was about. Now I've seen it, I'm happy I was in it. Not that I'm uncritical. This is an almost very good show with a couple of real talents chatting their way through some hot issues, and I mean chat, along with some great video work. It's a kind of

talking head show, very swish studio setting, flash desk, nice lectern, video screen and a bank of monitors. You don't see *Downstairs Belvoir* like that too often. And all that red and black. Get it? That Hitler had style. Anyway, Jai McHenry and Regina Heilmann, in a couple of suits, chat, get tense with each other, deliver statements, dance, sing, show talking heads (speaking quirkily about art and politics) and lyrical black and white movie footage while children's eyes watch you from the bank of monitors (alternating with a pomegranate in various stages of destruction—like a head). There's some exquisite writing from the performers delivered to darkly beautiful (Vahid Vahed) video images (a girl on a swing, an old woman dancing), lyrical soundtracking (Peter Wells) and two powerful deliveries from the lectern. It's these passages that tell me what *Leni Leni* could be and hasn't quite become. The framing of the show is uncertain, the relationship between the two women is unclear. It is a leisurely, likeable, speculative show, with flashes of fire and fear, and not enough of *Leni Riefenstahl*, and no dialectic pushing you, the audience towards your own unsettling re-think of the art-politics connection. It needs another round of writing, thorough through-writing, because these artists really can write. They can already perform, but the writing has to push that performance to the limit.

Leni Leni, conceived, performed and written by Regina Heilmann and Jai McHenry, writing and dramaturgy by Victoria Spence, design by Peter Thornhill, lighting by Shane Stevens, video by Vahid Vahed, sound by Peter Wells. *Downstairs Belvoir Street Theatre*, January 10-26.

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About face: international art in the 90s

Sue Best surveys recent contributions to the broad-sweep school of art criticism

Those courageous and foolhardy individuals who produce broad-sweeping books about tendencies in art have started on the art of the 80s and 90s. Picking out the selected highlights of two decades is difficult enough, but this task has been further complicated by the profusion of international exhibitions. The really diligent trend-spotter probably now needs to visit all of the continents in order to properly survey the international art circuit. This spread of the purview of the 'art world' has itself become a theme. Edward Lucie-Smith in his recent contribution to the broad-sweep genre, *Movements in Art Since 1945* (3rd ed Thames and Hudson, London 1995), calls this trend of the 90s: "Questioning the Western Modernist Canon from the Margins". Art from the margins, it is suggested, is the new oppositional avant-garde. However, the question remains, who is doing the questioning here?

On this point it is interesting to compare Lucie-Smith and his brother of the broad-brush, Brandon Taylor. For Lucie-Smith the questioning occurs when the work—which he calls "modernist art from non-western milieux"—has an "impact" in the West. The "questioning" is thus purely contextual; it does not emanate from the artists. They are not explicitly oppositional. Rather 'their' art in 'our' context expands and thereby questions the closure of 'our' traditions. As Lucie-Smith includes arch postmodernists such as our own Juan Davila and Japan's Yasumasa Morimura in this marginal modernist category, one can only conclude that he has a particular stake in the continuation of modernism. Indeed, if he is to be believed, the supremacy of modernist progressive principles is being bolstered by unsuspecting art producers from all over the globe.

Like Lucie-Smith, Brandon Taylor is also an advocate of modernism. In his *The Art of Today* (Everyman, London 1995), he is explicit about his allegiance to avant-Modernism and "advanced art". In marked contrast to Lucie-Smith, however, Taylor assumes that artists from the "margins" are indeed active agents in their questioning of the Western tradition. He groups the activities of the so-called marginal artists together under the concept of "narrating identity". This narration he suggests is highly deliberate and intentionally subversive. He states: "What they (artists from India, Africa or Aboriginal Australia) share, however, is a perception and a theorisation of how those entering the white urbanised NATO-centred orbit as modern artists have renegotiated terms of recognition and legitimation that are acceptable, not to whites, but to themselves".

The other major difference, worthy of note, is the way in which the 'others' within the West are regarded by these two writers. Lucie-Smith has a totally separate chapter for what he terms "issue-based art". The subtitle to this section reads: "African-American, Afro-Caribbean, Feminist and Gay Art". Predictably perhaps he isn't very keen on this work; for him, "it tends to devalue universal human emotions". Further, issue-based work tends to "squeeze out aesthetic feeling and to replace it with arid, aggressive moralistic didacticism".

Taylor, remaining true to his type, has a more global approach: all art dealing with identity, whether that identity is racial or sexual, is included in the category of art he sees as narrating identity. He does, however, have two strands to his mapping of the contemporary, just like Lucie-Smith. Indeed, in this shared duality and his general, but very muted, sense of dissatisfaction with the art of today, Taylor is far closer to Lucie-Smith than one might first imagine. The main difference is that Taylor's two strands are described by him as "in conflict". He has a sort of modernist-formalist strand which owes its beginnings to minimalism and conceptualism, and then a realist strand which is the issue-based or identity-narrating art. In this dichotomy we have a neat

repetition of the key point of contention elaborated in the Marxist aesthetic debates of the 30s: whether realism or modernism is the most suitable style for radical art.

What is startling about this mapping of the contemporary scene is the peculiar occlusion of postmodernism. Both Lucie-Smith and Taylor share a clear distaste for postmodernism—Taylor doesn't even list the word in his index. In these histories there is no registration of art that bridges these categories, that is, art which is playful, ironic, deploys appropriation, and yet is seriously concerned with identity, such as the work of Juan Davila, Tracey Moffat and many others. The return of identity is clearly crucial to the construction of this by-pass around postmodernism. Indeed, one suspects that, for Lucie-Smith, identity-art's deadly earnestness is tolerable because it is not (for him at least) postmodern. Work about identity is thus being positioned as promising the return of all the things that postmodernism is claimed to have spirited away: originality, expressivity, authenticity, individuality and so forth.

This particular reading of recent history is also repeated by Hal Foster's recent analysis of the fate of postmodernism, *The Return of the Real* (MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass 1995). He aligns the mid-90s with the return of high modernist questions about identity. In an essay appropriately titled "Whatever Happened to Postmodernism?", he argues that, "the death of the subject is dead in turn: the subject has returned in the cultural politics of different subjectivities, sexualities, and ethnicities, sometimes in old humanist guise, often in contrary forms—fundamentalist, hybrid, or... 'traumatic'". While Foster does not explicitly call the mid-90s 'post-postmodernism'—indeed he is careful to underscore the fact that history

does not have such clean breaks—he nonetheless implies in his title that the postmodern moment has all but passed.

In subtle (and not so subtle) ways all three writers are intent upon aligning art about identity with modernism, rather than postmodernism. The implication is that the "new and ignored subjectivities" of the 90s have in no way partaken of the previous decade's critical interrogation of identity. Certainly, in some quarters this is indeed the case; the postmodern questioning of identity, authorship and subjectivity is frequently met with hostility and anxiety. The basis of this hostility is succinctly expressed by the feminist theorist Nancy Hartsock. In "Foucault on Power", an essay in *Feminism/Postmodernism* (Routledge, New York & London 1990) edited by Linda Nicholson, she asks, "Why is it that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes problematic?"

For Hartsock, critical analyses of subjecthood are an unwanted complication that devalue the prized 'claim to identity' just as it appears within grasp. She is clearly committed to an unquestioned or uncomplicated notion of identity: the pre-postmodern status quo must remain in place for the "silenced" to finally claim inclusion in it. Hartsock thus reveals a very narrow version of oppositional politics. Her complaint is largely with postmodernism and its foreclosure upon her right to uncomplicated, identity-expressing speech. In other words, she is opposing complexity, analysis and inquiry—not a dominant order as such. Her complaint about exclusion simply demands inclusion, not re-evaluation of the terms of that exclusion nor an examination of the criteria of inclusion.

Her approach thus could be summarised as a kind of 'me-tooism'.

While Hartsock conceives the postmodern 'death of the subject' as part of a vicious plot to maintain a silent underclass, Hal Foster suggests the 'death of the subject' was only the death of the universal subject claimed to be able speak for all. Foster's nimble intervention enables the critique of subjectivity to be confined to a single blow—the critique was directed at the universal subject, thus exempting the new, 'specific' identities from a similar kind of scrutiny.

Foster's historicisation of the 'crisis of the subject' has the effect of sealing off the 'bad', very singular subject of the past from the contemporary proliferation of 'good' subjectivities. When this sealant is applied to the art world—and indeed it all too often is—it means some of the more interesting lines of inquiry about contemporary identity-art are automatically closed off. For example, the construction of an historical rupture masks issues of debt, continuity and complicity. Questions that need to be pursued here include: How is the new identity-art indebted to both modernism and postmodernism? This may seem an obvious point, but all too often such work is posed as the pure emanation of the 'authentic' identity in question, rather than the result of working within, and transforming, established art vocabularies. This brings me to the final difficult question: How does one articulate something like a new identity in a globalised art world when the tools of expression have become so blatantly internationalised?

Sue Best is head of the Department of Art History at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean.

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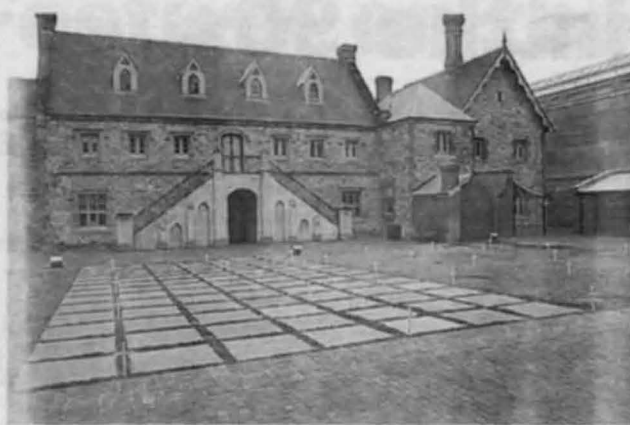
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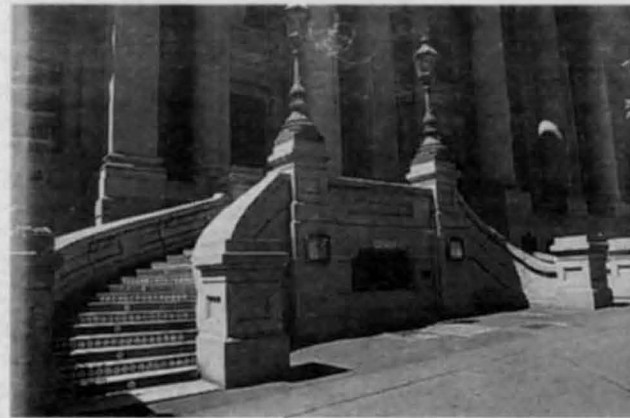


Alan Cruikshank



Anton Hart/Le Young

photos by Alan Cruikshank



George Popperwell

Something said in passing

Obiter Dictum: 5 concurrent temporary art works sited in the city of Adelaide from mid-December to mid-January 97 was the third in a series of installations curated by Alan Cruikshank beginning with *Jemmy* (East End Markets, Adelaide Festival of Arts 1994) and continuing in *The Invisible City* (Charlicks Building, Rundle Street 1995) wherein the topography, history and psychology of the city provided the impetus for a series of public artworks sponsored by The City of Adelaide. *Obiter Dictum* included a set of 26 nouns of assembly (eg "an erase of deficits") on the steps of Parliament House by George Popperwell; Richard Grayson's adhesive texts on the pavers outside the Rundle Mall department stores; Craig Andrae's field of white crosses on the lawn between SA Museum and the Art Gallery of SA; Alan Cruikshank's banner across Rundle Street East ("Easy Street"), and from Le Young and Anton Hart, a 16m x 28m bar code sprayed on the lawns in front of the Festival Centre with Parliament House, AMP Building, Intercontinental Hotel and Casino on the cultural horizon.

Lush life

Jacqueline Millner reviews new work by Robyn Stacey at the ACP

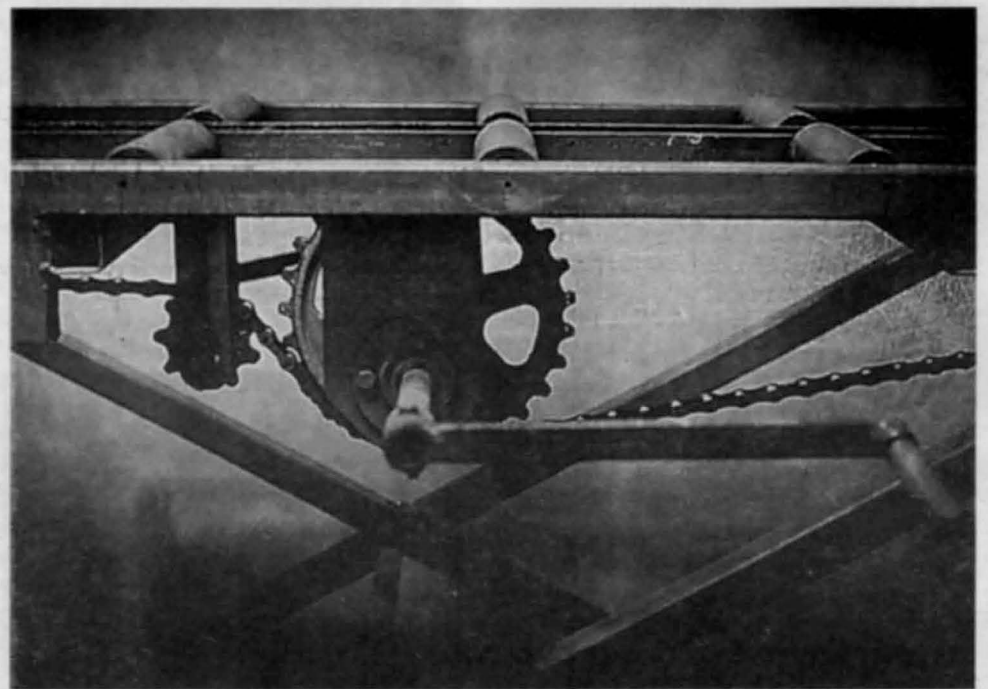
Robyn Stacey is one of the stalwarts of contemporary Australian photography. From the retro-pop imagery of the early 80s, to explorations of the semiotics of femininity later that decade, to her prescient embrace of digital technology, Stacey's work has pioneered some

signature concerns around popular culture constructions of the feminine—as represented by the works included in the recent survey of contemporary Australian photography at the MCA (*Photography is Dead! Long Live Photography!* July 23–November 10 1996). The imagery here is neither appropriated nor a result of unlikely collisions, but relies on more traditional aesthetics and evocations. Arguably, however, Stacey's fascination with sex, death and violence evident in her earlier work is still a powerful motivation.

The exhibition is segmented into four components linked thematically by the dynamic between life and death. Lush and decadent images of flowers—decaying roses on one wall, sprightly poppies *en face*—frame two radically different takes on the cemetery and the crematorium, one cool documentary-style, the other thoroughly worked with Rococo relish. The associations between these familiar tropes of dark/light, death/life, hot/cold successfully free play, although the strength of the individual components varies substantially.

Perhaps the most evocative element of *lushus* is 'Death has Many Doors', one of two series of prints Stacey produced as part of a project on Rookwood cemetery. Stacey has an uncanny eye for the suggestive and the sensual amongst the cold, hard machinery of the death industry.

Here, her close-ups of antique crematorium controls or scenarios of empty morgue slabs—with subtitles such as 'Catafalque' reinforcing a nostalgic dimension—take on a classical beauty, the deliberate fluorescent lighting doing nothing to detract from the seductive lustre of the images. Stacey has overlain the surface of the prints with scratched copper taken from the base of the cremator, to give the images a warmth and tactility she sought to counterpoise with the

Robyn Stacey, *Death has many doors*, 1996

coolness of death as industrial process. Undoubtedly, however, the harmonious and delicate compositions of these images together with a sense of reverence for their inert subject matter—namely, the technology of death—work with the sensual surfaces to create a thoroughly appealing, never repugnant, effect.

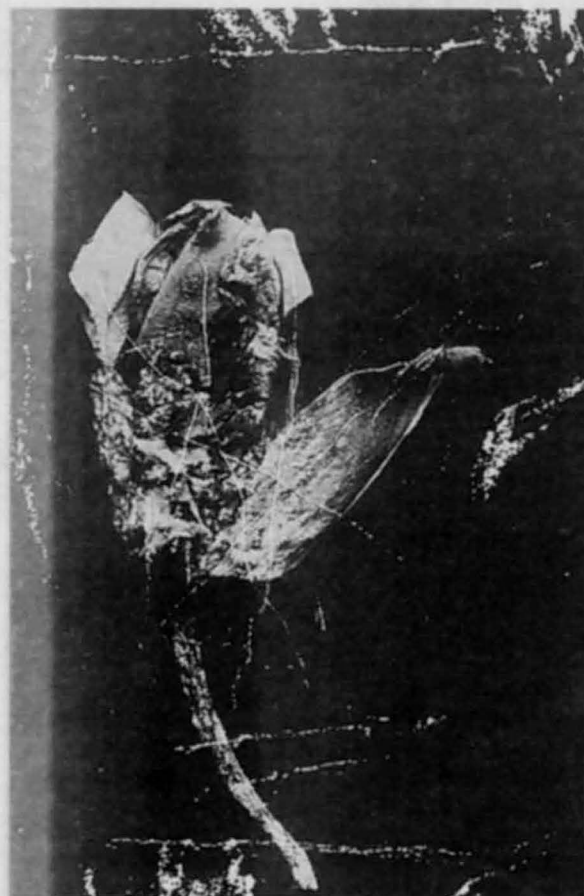
'Death Masks' is the other Rookwood-inspired series, seven matt cibachrome prints resulting from the superimposition of two heads from the tiny, generic, votive figures of Jesus and Mary found particularly on Greek and Croatian shrines. These faces have an eerie quality, as if suspended in formaldehyde but nonetheless slightly decomposed (and cannot but recall Andres Serrano's allegedly blasphemous *Piss Christ*). However, 'Death Masks' looks somewhat clichéd in its surrealist overtones, reminiscent of the effects of bad morphing technology. More effective in evoking decomposition are Stacey's 'Everlasting' works, composites of dying, fragmenting roses produced in a manner not unlike the flower 'portraits' of classic fashion photographers such as Irving Penn. Stacey has again worked the surface, this time with scratches and lines, to suggest mutilation, perhaps, or a desperate attempt to retain some form in a rapidly disappearing subject. The dusky prints work well in the dimly lit large gallery, acting as a dark foil to the heady

experience of 'Pollen Patch', installed in the adjacent small gallery which radiates an almost phosphorescent quality with its bright lights and orange walls.

This work features 33 photographs of head-sized poppies, vibrating in a cacophony of red, orange and yellow. The intense colour produces a synaesthetic effect, as one 'inhales' the pollen, disorientated by these narcotic flowers. The vitality of the subject is thus again undercut by the morbidity of its associations, energy confused with drowsiness, life with death, and Stacey's exhibition comes full circle in evoking both ever-present duality and ever-present contamination of those schisms. 'Lush' after all denotes both luxuriant life/sexual attractiveness and drunkenness/intoxication.

With *lushus*, Stacey demonstrates her range as a photographer, and perhaps sets the path for new directions in her work, away from the cinema-appropriated, popular culture imagery with which she is generally identified. The exhibition is a strong and assured statement, certainly one of the better uses of the (relatively) new ACP galleries.

Robyn Stacey *lushus*, November 15–December 14, 1996, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney.

Robyn Stacey, *Everlasting*, (diptych) detail, 1996

important trends in the field. It is difficult to trace the conjunction of cinema stereotypes, feminist theory and photographic practice which characterised the archetypal 'postmodern' aesthetic of the late eighties without thinking of her striking billboards and large scale cibachromes.

Her latest show, *lushus*, at the Australian Centre for Photography, billed as "a major solo exhibition of new work", appears to mark a departure from her

Decay, rot, putrefaction, garbage, detritus and filth. A short history

Edward Scheer introduces the work of Crow

—In history as in nature the rotten is the laboratory of life.

Karl Marx.

You enter a house. Just an ordinary house in North London. Someone asks you to 'sign in'. From the hallway, sounds of digestive systems at work greet you, echoing off the walls. In a room at the top of the stairs you find a woman wearing latex bondage gear sitting on an antique chest of drawers plucking a goose, a purple gelatine like substance oozing across the floorboards. Through windows you glimpse people moving slowly. In the bathroom a graffiti artist is covering the walls with charcoal letters. This is the Institution of Rot and Crow is artist in residence and curator of the events held here, like this one "The noisiness of bodies". Crow lives and works here. His studio is an installation in itself, a large white room with no natural light and containing an array of meticulously organised detritus. From floor to ceiling, dark decaying objects and substances are arranged in "a fulminating order" (Crow is fond of quoting Artaud). It is a miniature museum of putrefaction, a silent theatre of decay.

There is an absurdly theatrical element to much of Crow's work, from the curated art happenings at the IOR to his more recent solo pieces in Australia at Artspace in October 1996 and for the Newcastle Bicentenary in January 1997. It is a theatre without psychology or narrative but with a palpable atmosphere of bodies and their histories. In the Newcastle piece, entitled *Bad Habitus Project*, Crow spent 72 hours locked up in the exercise yard of a nineteenth century police station and was only allowed out to participate in conversations with invited guests and members of the public in the padded cell. These were videotaped and then screened as part of the 'set' Crow had installed in an adjacent gallery. It was an atmospheric piece like all Crow's work, designed to feel out the quality of a particular space, here the John Paynter Gallery and the Police Museum in the city of Newcastle, making visible its invisible sense of place.

Crow never performs just anywhere, the site has to be elaborately prepared first. Neither an installation artist nor a performance artist, he constructs a kind of *mise en scene* where the actor arrives only to rip up the script and tear the props to pieces. He cites David Lynch's

early film *Eraserhead* as a major influence. That film's micro-theatrical scenes where no context is given for what transpires other than the space itself is a useful image for Crow's "installations in progress" as he calls them. Beckett and Kantor are not far away either with their negation of the dramatic in favour of that which the superimposition of the drama always obscures, the composition of matter and time.

These are perhaps unusual influences for a British artist. Crow attributes this to the fact that his founding experiences as an artist occurred during the early years of Thatcherism, forcing him into the position of an outsider. To illustrate he tells the story of an experience of forced labour as an outcome of one of the early 'work for dole' schemes: "I was working at a mental asylum in rural Somerset putting up wire fencing around the perimeter of the property and there was this black kid who was always shrieking and trying to escape. It struck me as unusual because basically at that time you never saw black people in that part of England. He was set this task, a futile task which he was determined to make even more futile. He had a wheel barrow full of twigs and his task was to take the barrow over to another part of the yard and dump the twigs onto a pile. Instead he picked up the twigs one at a time and carried them over to the pile individually (a distance of about 50m). He did this until a supervisor came out and whacked him. I couldn't really help this person so I just observed, but I thought, this is a Dada performance." Crow says that what he liked in the boy's approach to the task was the refusal of any sense or logic to the task other than his own. "It's obviously a crazy thing but it made perfect sense to him to approach the task in that way. And it relates to my own working process, this kind of immense patient labour, sifting things and moving them around. Watching this kid was so powerful, sad, moving, human condition stuff, but it was also very funny."

Since that experience of building a fence on the grounds of an asylum, Crow has built an opus based on an identical structure of containment and composition of the stuff that culture discards: junk, used machinery, decaying vegetation. In the 80s while everyone else in the UK was compiling debt and stockpiling bric-a-brac, Crow was building an image bank of the things they were throwing out: rotten

objects, detritus from building sites and hospital rubbish disposals, tape recordings of bodily functions and wrecking yards. This material found its way into various performances and collaborative enterprises throughout the decade—notably in works produced by the noise art group *Diastolic Murmurs* of which Crow was a founding member.

In 1992 Crow opened the Institution of Rot in his house in North London. Named after an essay by Michel de Certeau, the IOR began working on the aesthetic tension provided by the two principles of composition and decomposition. The unconscious of the building was displayed through the classical composition of its discarded souvenirs. A visitor to the IOR leaves with the impression that, for Crow, there is no fundamental split between life and art, an experience the visitor can glimpse by simply crossing a threshold. Crow's descriptions of his ideas often rely on anecdotes collected from various jobs he has held in the past, experiences that would normally remain beyond the parameters of an art practice. In explaining the thinking behind the IOR he tells of working in the maintenance department of an architectural firm in London: "Offices were closing all the time and I had to collect detritus and old office furniture and rip out old offices and trash the computers. It fitted in perfectly well with all the art work I've ever done. One of my jobs was preparing this incredibly heavy extendable oak table for board meetings which involved crawling under the table. One day I found a paper plate stuck to the underside of the table reeking of the oldest smell in history. It was human faeces. Three days old. One of the supervisors came up and sniffed it and said 'that's not shit. That's chocolate. It's the same as the stuff we found in the blender in the kitchen'. He couldn't believe what his senses were telling him, that someone had shat in a blender and shoved it on a plate and stuck it under the table in the board room. But it's that confrontation with the unspeakable that I'm interested in and that is the Institution of Rot. That's it."

Crow's mode of working is organised around similarly disruptive acts. He says, "It's a necessary violation, a transgressive act which starts all my work. Once I've done that I know exactly where the piece is going". At the John Paynter Gallery in Newcastle it was taking the communal rubbish bin from the storage room and upending it in the middle of the gallery floor which became the focus for the installation. A mound of garbage around which the other components of the piece were arranged. The piece devised in October 1996, while artist in residence at Artspace entitled *Grenzgänger*, began with the act of throwing the contents of a tin of brown paint against a white wall.

In *Grenzgänger* Crow again did not present an 'English' piece, instead a misplaced Germanic mood pervades the work. The term is a German word meaning illegal border crosser, transgressor of territories, the one who refuses the logic of the frontier, the proper space of the artist. Brown paint is splashed on a wall. An old suitcase lies on the floor beneath the pages of a German-English dictionary. The conceptual



Heidrun Löhr

parameters of the piece become evident, cultural baggage is both empty and pregnant with significance. A hastily roped off section displays a scrap of woollen cloth with 2 parallel bars of soap. Textures are coarse, pre-synthetic and with the warm colours and reference to processed animal fats in the soap, recalling Beuys. Opposite this a section of the wall has been painted over like a tunnel, indicating the *Grenzgänger's* desired passage through a barrier. On the other side of the wall we enter an East Berlin memoryscape. The old man in the slide is Wolfgang Sisyphus Graubart, a homeless poet and performer from East Berlin. His image is a symbol of an experience of life in the eastern sector, an experience which is becoming invisible since the dismantling of the wall.

On another wall is the phrase 'flüchtige hingemacht' or 'fleetingly improvised' which quotes Daniel Paul Schreber (best known as Freud's celebrated case study in paranoia). When travelling between asylums in East Germany, people began to lose their sense of reality for Schreber and he perceived a certain category of person as 'fleetingly improvised', as insubstantial creatures thrown together just for the purpose of misleading him but also providing proof that he alone had survived the end of the world. He similarly perceived the streets of Leipzig as theatre props arranged to create the impression of Leipzig which had really ceased to exist. Crow's use of these words suggests that in the world of the *Grenzgänger*, an alternative reading of Schreber is possible. In place of the troubled judge, a shrewd and perceptive psycho-geographer is at work deploying a radical disorientation as a way into the art work.

Crow's work both here and in the UK could well be seen as an affirmation of experiences like that of Schreber, or of a black child in an asylum, or of something which was excluded because it was no longer useful, because it was waste, garbage, trash, rot. It is a deeply disturbing art, putrid and foul smelling but at the same time deeply generous and inclusive of the aspects of contemporary life most often overlooked, the "remoteness internal to us" which is the very definition (de Certeau's) of decay.

Recently Crow has been providing CD cover images for the Elision Ensemble in Australia. He will be designing the set for their performance of *The Opening of the Mouth* for The Festival of Perth in March at the Midland Railway Yards.



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A bittersweet harvest

Barbara Bolt interviews Melissa Harpley, Annette Seeman and Moira Doropoulos about the ethics of gardening, art and multinationals

A flourishing 'Italian' vegetable patch in the grounds of Fremantle Arts Centre provides a constant reminder of an event long gone. *Memory, Place and Identity*, an exhibition documenting the way migrant women adapted their tradition and practices to living in Fremantle, closed in December, but Vince Raffaele still comes to the centre daily to tend his vegetables.

Ironically, in many ways Vince's garden mirrors the dynamics which operated in the project. The vegetables were planted and remain in their rows, immature fruit dropped off in the intense summer heat and the vines keep producing an assortment of fruit and vegetables, some ripe and juicy, some motley and worm eaten. In the meantime, the centre's cafe has done very nicely from the produce of the garden.

Originally it was proposed that artists would work with individuals from the Italian and Portuguese community to document the latter's migrant experiences. What was envisaged as a collaboration involving artists and community members ended up as something quite different. The artists debated 'the issues' and went their own way, the Portuguese community dropped out of sight, whilst the Italian community participants adopted the project with verve.

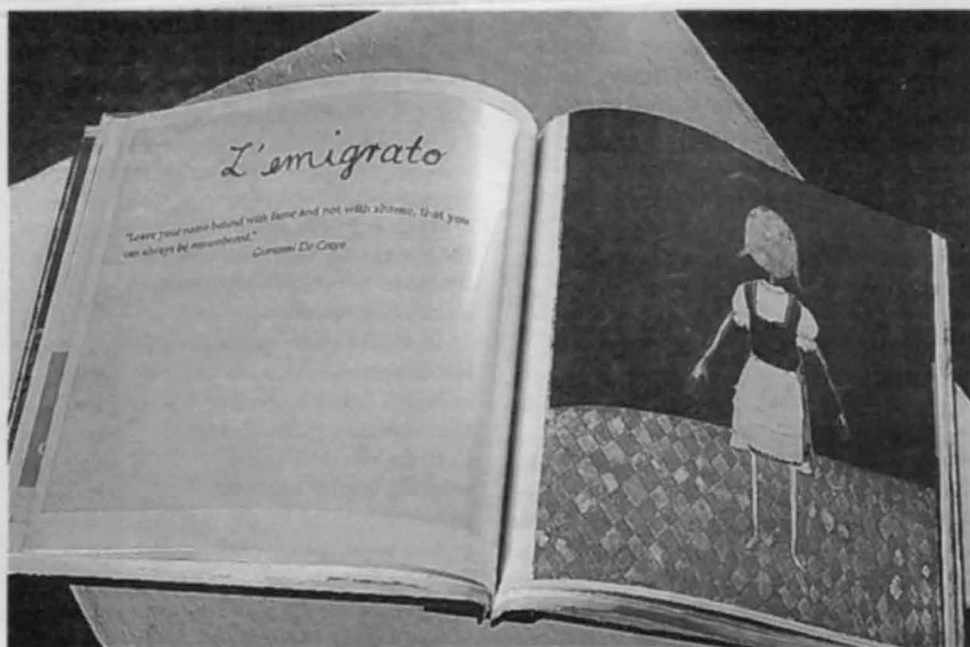
BB Why did Fremantle Arts Centre take on such a project as *Memory, Place and Identity*?

MH The ideas around memory and identity fitted well with the kind of work we were doing in trying to blend the distinctions between 'high' or gallery art with more everyday practices.

BB Walking into the Centre, there still appeared to be a separation between those objects made by 'artists' and the objects which form part of everyday practices, such as tablecloths, sheets, preserved fruit, domestic utensils and the garden.

MH When conceiving the project we had hoped that artists would be interested in

making contact with individuals within the community and perhaps in working with them, and in a very few cases that happened. However, a number of artists felt very uncomfortable about the fact that they were not from an Italian background and there



Simona Piscioneri

was a real issue about how to deal with what was perceived to be other people's cultures.

AS That was the key. A lot of the artists tended to split. Some wouldn't participate because they felt the project was intrusive or contrived or patronising or superficial or because they just didn't believe philosophically that the project was viable for them.

MD People were really concerned about whether they had a right to comment on these particular cultures which were not their own. At the same time, the interesting thing for me was that the people in the (Italian) community were so enthusiastic about having themselves represented that they didn't have a struggle with the issues. For instance, when

the question came up as to why the community was being depicted in the garden, the community responded that it was wonderful to actually represent one of the traditions about which they were passionate within the context of the whole exhibition.

AS That's a good example of the oversensitivity that exists. Where do you put a garden? You can put a vegetable garden in a gallery, but I'm not sure what the point of this would be when the alternative is an actual, productive garden.

MD Artists from Italian backgrounds didn't want to be identified as such. As artists, they didn't want to broach that subject.

BB During the year, Fremantle Arts Centre, amid a fierce debate on ethics and sponsorship, received a lot of flak on account of Shell's sponsorship of the Fremantle Print Award. Given that Alcoa was one of the major sponsors of this project, did sponsorship become an issue?

AS None of us would sit here and say that we necessarily support Alcoa but it was the curator's responsibility to determine whether or not we participated in this project. These are the choices we have as artists and curators. I guess for a lot of artists the question is economic. I'm not saying that as an excuse. I think it becomes a pragmatic decision.

MH From an organisational position what I've always tried to do with the money from Alcoa, and what they've always been comfortable with, is actually using it to pay artists. The money thus allows us to provide support for more experimental projects where they actually take that risk.

AS Most people I know are very aware of the ethics of sponsorship, but individually feel quite powerless. Collectively, perhaps it would be a different issue and I suspect that's something that we are going to consider. I think national bodies such as NAVA and the Australia Council should look at these issues. It's not always just the really obvious things, such as what has now been uncovered about Shell. For years Shell was wonderful in terms of its sponsorship. We've got no idea what may be uncovered about all sorts of other sponsors in the future.

MH It is really difficult because of the pressure from some of the governmental funding bodies to find equal funding from sponsors.

AS There is always encouragement to find sponsorship. Then it is like saying, will you find the sponsorship, but what are the ethics of who you are getting it from?

Memory, Place and Identity Fremantle Arts Centre Nov 10-Dec 8.



Lani Weedon, *2 Pulses*, 1996

Lani Weedon is hardly an emerging artist but her powerful little paintings on wood (Savode Gallery, Brisbane, November 1996) offered an intimate glimpse into her own emergence from a three year period in which she was not making but teaching art, an experience "like coming up from underwater". In this collection of 28 paintings, each measuring 35 x 25 cms, painted textures of torn and creased cloth, holed canvas, whirlpools, nets, ropes and ties capture the feeling of breaking painstakingly through layers of submergence. Some said that at a distance the intensity of the colours made the paintings glow, but their detail drew the viewer in "like a photograph". Each piece had a pithy title ("Drop", "3 Pulses", "Float", "Elipse", "Submerge", "Falling"). The single words make a poem around the room and the collection of paintings reads like a novel. In July this year, Lani Weedon will exhibit with three other women working on wood at Savode Gallery 11 Stratton Street Newstead 4006 Tel: 07 3852 2870.

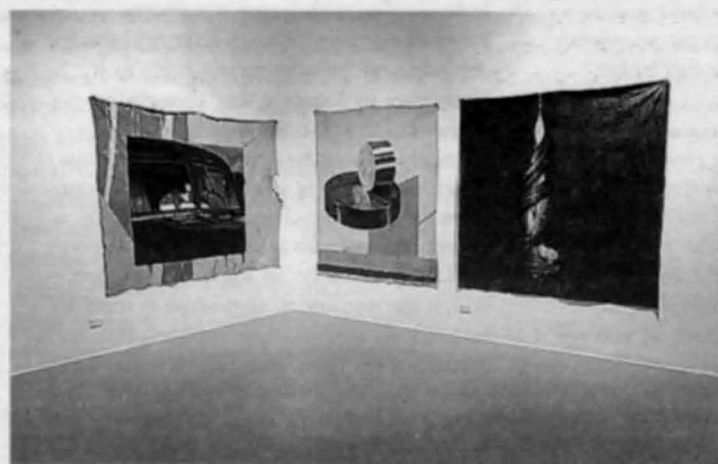


RT Lani Weedon, *Fall*, 1996

Triple treats

Jyanni Steffensen enjoys three recent Adelaide exhibitions

The uncluttered appearance of Anton Hart's *North Star* at first glance belies the complexity and finesse with which this artist addresses the proposition—embodied in the Experimental Art Foundation's project title *The Stretcher Case*—of whether painting is indeed dead or merely unconscious. Here Hart works in a variety of forms, such as photography, painting, installation, and a mix of mediums, including oil/wax on canvas, glass, text, neco imaging, and found objects. The work is presented in sets of twos, threes, and fives, placed with exactitude in this austere space. Each set is highly polished, glamorous even, betraying a mastery of forms and media, together with a visual coherence. Each piece becomes a discrete, though not necessarily autonomous, object.



Anton Hart, *Clump*, from *North Star*

haiku. A pair of Duchampian, simple, separated door handles appear suddenly and inexplicably in unexpected places, delighting one in the manner of Freud's theory about jokes. This is the piece whose title 'North Star' also names the exhibition. 'Landing', a large, unframed pane of glass bearing the computer generated, pseudo sand-blasted, sign CUS-HIO-NS leans, horrifically beautiful, against a double door. Accompanying Hart's show is a writerly essay by L M Walker, an extract from an unpublished novel of the same name—*North Star*. Together the writing and objects produce a strange narrative, sometimes opaque in meaning, but curiously and eloquently poetic, and one in which painting is not so much lost as integrated within an enriching dialogue.

Across town at the Greenaway Art Gallery Louise Haselton's *Misspent* exerts aporetic effects similar to Hart's work. Somewhat awry of the Derridean theory of *différance*—the differences in meanings between words which sound the same in speech are only apparent in writing—Haselton's 'Wrest' visually evokes both

connotations of tranquillity and violence, that is, rest and wrest. In her terms the difference is played out characteristically between language and the textural materiality of the object. The visible word 'wrest', constructed from thick foam and covered in plaid fabric from an old blanket, looks and feels like a pillow, an object paradoxically implying in this case both 'rest' and 'wrest' or wrenching. Haselton has made textured writing—words become three dimensional objects constructed from unusual materials which frequently add bizarre or humorous significance—her trade mark. Disembodied words and phrases, floating signifiers unanchored from linguistic semiotic chains, take on exotic dimensions of meaning in Haselton's scenarios. Here she works in candle wax, cotton embroidery on scrolled calico, neon, blanket fabric, and butterfly wings.

For Haselton language is both architectural and inside the domain of the dwelling. Something in her texts always escapes the theoretical cul-de-sac of the explicit goals and logic of the speech/writing struggle. Re-presented architecturally or



Suzanne Treister, *Dying for Your Sins* from *Kitsch'n Shrink* photo by Mick Bradley

sculpturally, language in Haselton's hands often appears to defy the gravity of the situation. If there are 'things' that words could truly and utterly be said to fail to represent, or to interpret in any meaningful way, then Haselton's title piece 'Misspent' would, in my view, be such an object. Confronted by this free-floating word, constructed from foam and covered entirely in thousands of butterfly wings, I gave up the effort to attribute meaning. I only desired it.

Central to Suzanne Treister's multimedia installation, *Kitsch'n Shrink*, also at Greenaway, are a sequence of large paintings. Overall Treister's pieces in this show are realised in photomedia, text, oil painting, and CD-ROM. With titles such as 'Entering the kitchen from afar' and 'Standing on the wall looking down onto the kitchen floor of the castle', the set of sumptuously rendered, wet-on-wet oils re-writes the baroque interior of King Ludwig's Bavarian castle, the Königsschoß Neuschwanstein, as a narrative of postmodernism. The interior architecture of Ludwig's study is renovated conceptually by Treister as a semiotic chain-mail of cultural narratives woven together through a series of linguistic and visual puns, hypertextually linking multitudinous iconographies and contesting discourses. The spectator is bombarded by a seemingly endless stream of familiar cultural narratives—folkloric,

fairytale, gothic, historical, mythological, technocultural, filmic, kitsch, sexual, scientific—rhizomatically connected through a series of running gags. The spectator might be caught in a bricolaged nightmare where unravelling any of the narrative threads and representational motifs in this metaphor of cyberspace becomes a game of severe commitment—or of chance.

In Treister's hyperreal vision the castle could be said to be haunted by the promiscuity of proletarian pleasure—a Hammer horror narrative of gothic intrigue, conflict, desires and anxieties. The fortified castle, read as an iconic representation of eurocentric medieval feudalism and/or anglocentric colonial imperialism, morphs, painterly fashion, into a multiply-penetrated site of popular postmodern pleasures, including a cherry topped Black Forrest cake, a miniature ice palace, s/m fetish paraphernalia, portraits of David Bowie as Aladdin Sane. The castle study/kitchen walls are made of gruyere, Jack Nicholson as the Joker from *Batman* replaces the dynastic lineage portraits of feudal robber-barons, and a detailed maquette of the castle is painted to resemble jello dildos. Within this matrix Christo-wrapped objects (a maquette of the Reichstag, a display plate on a dresser) and a Dali-esque jewel-studded omelette sliding relentlessly towards the kitsch'n floor suddenly appear in the object saturated room. A heavily curtained doorway promises a possible exit, coded in silver studs on

misspent

Louise Haselton, untitled from *misspent*

photo by Alan Cruikshank

leather, via the 'scenic route'. In this cyberspatial tourist paradise metanarratives could certainly be said to be dead.

North Star Anton Hart, Experimental Art Foundation October 31-December 1.
Misspent Louise Haselton, Kitsch'n Shrink
Suzanne Treister, Greenaway Gallery, November 6-27.

Jyanni Steffensen is an Adelaide based writer, artist and academic. She is also co-director of the Electronic Writing Research Ensemble.

The real material

Eleanor Brickhill at *Speak to me, Sugar*

The name itself, *Speak to me, Sugar*, has the sweet, flippant flavour of party food. But if you like Ros Crisp's work you'd arrive at Omeo Studio prepared to dissolve your disbelief in her perspective, expecting more than some saccharine playing out of simple minded, sentimental 'communication'. If your stance is more aloof, you might well see something fairly gooev—not noticing what I believe is the real material being investigated: something immediate and consciously physicalised, thought and feeling as it occurs, as

vocabulary; no slick, pre-arranged, 'perfectible' stylisation, but a more coarsely grained demeanour, thankfully not yet pre-packaged.

The ensuing series of duets and simultaneous solos were created by the dancers via improvisation techniques developed under Ros Crisp's direction. Physical expressiveness is focussed through a kind of moment to moment play, an emotional gambolling, jokes, trustful and teasing, soft voiceless whispering together, almost evoking an atmosphere of family—not those horrible dark tortuous

relationships, but the inexplicable communion of siblings.

Their bodies tend to be softly side-lit, unsculptured, expression defined more by rich visceral and emotional inflection, than by hard lines. Waiting to enter, there's a slight shift in focus, an internal activation, a moment where each dancer starts to listen—to themselves, to each other. Play begins, one with another, both serious and with enormous humour.

At one point, Diane Busuttill walks towards and into the audience, offering with eyes and gestures, a peculiar, alien, glutinous sort of feeling. Her look is not seductive, although it might appear that way at first, as her gaze is intent, and it's hard not to respond. But looking closely, that intensity deepens to a cavernous, black-widow, primitive, estranging

dimension hard to imagine, both repulsive and magnetic. And it's just as hard to look as not to look.

Through the duets, becoming slowly visible through what might seem nothing more than obsessive twitchiness, is evidence of multiple tracks of humanity, tenacious sensibility, timorous sentience. The dancers expose secret bodily voices, the murmurings and gleeful persuasive whimsy of imagination, need, sweet pleasure, and fierce hunger. Their bodies speak, full of histrionics, and with a quiet seriousness, one to another.

Speak to me, Sugar Studio performance by Ros Crisp, Julie Humphries, Diane Busuttill and Gabby Adamik. Omeo Dance Studio B2, Newtown, December 6-8.

Making web dances

Eleanor Brickhill visits Molissa Fenley's web site, *Latitudes*:
<http://www.diacenter.org/fenley/>



Molissa Fenley, *Latitudes*

A web site is not just an address of course, but a nice dry environment, and the world of exertion, physical precision, sweat and lactic acid build-up might seem a long way away. Both conditions however, are ideal for playing in, even though the kinds of games might be quite different. *Latitudes*, Molissa Fenley's recent www-site-specific dance project was, for someone like me who hasn't set foot in a dance studio for months, inspiring because it reminded me that you don't have to meekly accept some choreographer's wet dream fantasies, or the simplistic literalness that pervades much 'contemporary' dance. The land of the Neuromancer is here to enfold you. Well, at least in theory.

Get close up to a dancer, feel her thoughts, go with her meanings. Progress with her through tiny shifts and private nuances, epic gestures and inadvertent silliness. I think one of the ideas behind *Latitudes* is being able to zoom in and out of moments in a fragment of history, perhaps to inspect Fenley's physical tension and texture from close by, as if she had become the memory of a living, breathing human; or to place yourself in her position, to wonder about her reasons for doing this, perhaps to make her cognitive connections your own.

But you can see *Latitudes* in a number of ways. It first exists visually as a series of 'phrases', 1 to 17, each phrase being a strip of seven consecutive frames, shown at the top of the screen. By clicking on to each frame in any order, the viewer can access another level of the work. Behind the first still is Fenley's handwritten note describing the movement, something she might have used as a shorthand reminder of the phrase's basic shape. So, kinds of descriptions, ways of describing, become an issue.

Under the seventh frame lies another set of stills which can only be seen consecutively, rendering part of the same original phrase fragment. Once this is downloaded into cache memory, it becomes a sparsely articulated sequence of some 20 frames or so shown sequentially over about five seconds, and it's the closest you get to actual choreographed 'movement' in that it has a pre-arranged order, direction and timing and can't be manipulated by the viewer, only stopped. This 'movement', however, doesn't correspond directly to the frames because it may have been shot from a different angle, or from a different performance. Further, it doesn't make use of the whole 'phrase', only a part of it.

Under the other five frames lie closer images, either from stills, or of a number of sculptures evoking perhaps a certain kind of contour or spiritual presence. There are descriptions available in another part of the index.

The 17 phrases are tiny fragments of a three minute 'dance' which you can see, if you search through the *Latitude* index, arrayed familiarly as if on a photographer's contact sheets, showing the full length sequence, frame by frame.

To make lateral connections between these images, remembering close-ups from other phrases altogether, to find different ways of constructing the sequences, making new dances, is partly how the piece works, and it's absorbing even if the actual kinetic sequences of images and manipulated connections seem to get slower as you get to know them.

Or rather your brain speeds up. You keep wanting more speed, to see the images move, to try and flip through them like those decks of movie cards, manually animated. But these ideas don't seem to match her own, and the technology requires other considerations.

In an introduction, the curator, Lynne Cooke, describes the work thus: "She forsakes the accoutrements that normally

embellish staged performance in order to pare the dance to basics: a simple earth-coloured leotard, neutral black backdrop, and a terse score, *Jetsun Mila* by Eliane Radigue, which she likes for the way its close-toned electronic sounds seem to move in a continual flow around the listener".

Well, yes, and then again...no. Individually, each frame is a quiet, contained sculpture, with light and shade clinging and contouring her body as it progresses in a stately way though the sequence. The lines are not special in themselves, and the original dance seems generic, something you might recall from your own history. The most interesting aspect of *Latitudes* is that it reminds you that there are ways of looking at images which are not linear, that sense is there to be made in any way one chooses. But conscious choice is mandatory if you are to escape that slight "I'm bored already" feeling after flicking through several of the sequences; a fairly self conscious move to investigate possible ways through the work, like following a maze just to see if it gets you anywhere, to find some sort of completion; or like playing games like Scrabble or Patience or cryptic crosswords just to fill in time.

Another of the ideas is that the work itself can never be seen whole, but that "the audience's relationship is intimate and partial, operating in a fictive space which more closely approximates one of memory than lived experience". But why dance, when there's no real action to feel your way through, when the intimacy that is sought after seems to become bland and un compelling once Fenley's beauty has been appreciated?

Is it, then, about thinking, and about wanting, about trying to make something complete? Is it that a person, flesh and bone, history personified, perhaps Fenley's sweet elfin face (or someone else's) might stand for a series of ideas which we choose to put together with an erratic compulsion?

It occurs to me now, after seeing her performance at the Museum of Contemporary Art (Wednesday 15 January), that I was touched by her apparent vulnerability, there, solo, on a foreign stage. Sometimes, when she came close to me, I was conscious of her fragility, her mortality, perhaps her sense that the time these moments of experience would last was negligible, a fraction only of the time that they would last in memory. With these different perspectives before me, it seems easier to understand how *Latitudes* might redress such a feeling of fleetingness.

And finally, the 'cognitive' form of *Latitudes* does not seem to be especially about Fenley, except she uses her own image as grist. The viewer's mind completes, fill in the gaps, imagines or remembers fragments from the other sequences, tries to fit them together; wonders what to do with the art objects, 'sculptural counterparts', those shapely, suggestive echoes of feeling and experience and conception that Fenley includes behind some of the frames. How to work them out, or work them in? There's your dance.

In a sweet quiet Coda, Fenley makes a story up for us, showing us a possible way to go. Selecting images from all over the dance, she joins them together, making her own special story. And there it is, a soft, breathing-out kind of resolution.

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Something beyond

Julia Postle on *nouvelle danse* and Compagnie de Brune in Quebec

New Dance: an ambiguous, unfixed, transient term. It's a bit too expansive for me, but that doesn't mean I'm not interested in considering where this term fits in dance history. British choreographers and theorists embraced it as a broad means of categorising early reactions to modern dance. The more common, present-day use of the term is as a catch-phrase. So let me continue the catch-phrase discourse.

When I think of the 'nouvelle danse' of Quebec, the artist who first comes to mind is Marie Chouinard—controversial in the 1970s, and now, finding movement from an internal, cellular motivation. With Chouinard as my only point of reference, I was more than willing to extend my knowledge of the Quebec new dance. *Anatomie*, presented by Lynda Gaudreau's Compagnie de Brune, is a study in corporeality or, as Gaudreau has suggested, a type of architecture of the human body. I was fortunate to witness five parts of this originally seven-part piece; a reworking in keeping with both the shifting nature of 'new dance' and the choreographer's personal emphasis on changeability and play. Throughout *Anatomie*, Ana Sokolovic's compositions thread the physical core of this playful vision; the connection between the movement and the music is obvious and continuous, giving the dancers a strange, other-worldly quality.

Sylvain Poirier's opening solo introduces Gaudreau's sculptural conceptualisation of the body. He stands just on the edge of a sharply defined square of light, moving his head, shoulders and arms in and out of the light; reaching, grasping at something beyond, in the darkness. Looking into the light, then with indifference, through the audience.

Poirier reappears on one knee upon a raised platform. Fully exposed, we have a sense of the torso's relationship to the rest of the body, as he cups his elbow in his hand, spiralling his back towards us, in a wrapping of himself.

The following duet between Poirier and Anne Bruce Falconer explores the body in other ways, revealing joints and limbs in stark isolation from the whole, and contrasting this with their implicit contribution to the body in motion. It is a delicious sort of tension which Gaudreau explores and tests.

Poirier holds Falconer's head with one hand. They are close, but there is a certain distance between them. He finds the limits of movement, rotating and shifting her head through arcs and turns. Falconer maintains that sense of indifference which Poirier applied to his solo; initially



Compagnie De Brune, *Anatomie*
photo by Michael Slobodian

submissive and later participating in the investigation of movement and the body. Folding into each other, shifting between manipulator and manipulated, they find physical spaces, curves and surfaces particular to their different bodies. It is a 'new' intimacy of performance, far removed from the polite romanticism of more familiar duets.

Annie Roy's solo focuses more explicitly on the legs and their role in locomotion. It doesn't sound particularly 'new', but Gaudreau has created some fascinating sequences that merge the classical and contemporary dance traditions very effectively, moving beyond the more straightforward process of setting them against one another to, alternatively, a rethinking of both dance forms to emphasise their similarities as well as their differences. So while Roy throws herself

into the *plies* and *grand battements* of ballet, she does so with an aggression and sense of weight that departs from the traditional. It is a thread of experimentalism that links each section of *Anatomie* to the other.

Fourth on the program is Falconer's more defiant solo, which contrasts distorted ballet technique against gesture and more contemporary movement vocabulary; all covered with playful connections with the audience: making eye contact and looking away, abruptly. It is almost as if she is presenting parts of herself to us for our contemplation. First the legs, slicing complicated patterns across the space or shuffling from one point to another. Sometimes she retreats from us, always acknowledging our presence in the space with her deliberate gaze.

The final 'trio pour soloistes' is the concretisation of the sculptural, architectural ideas that Gaudreau embeds in her choreography. The three bodies move within the space, at times meeting physically, almost haphazardly, and at others dancing alone. The duet between Falconer and Roy—with Poirier repeating his first solo off to the side—is another exercise in manipulation; Falconer holding Roy by the hands and sending her body plunging forwards, backwards, onto the floor. Again, the dancers convey a robotic indifference to each other, and to the physical closeness of their duet. It is almost unsettling to watch. But it is also a highly perceptive, analytical examination of the body in motion. And the work speaks about relationships in ways that more expressive dance cannot.

Critic Linde Howe-Beck has suggested that Compagnie de Brune is more well-known in Europe than in Canada. Gaudreau does spend a great deal of her creative time in Klapstuk, a production centre in Leuven, Belgium. It is interesting, then, to be witness to performance which manifests a borrowing from different sources, as well as the forging of a singular artistic practice within the broad domain of Quebec new dance.

In issue 16, for the article titled *Journey through frames across dance floors*, by Eleanor Brickhill, the photograph of Dean Walsh performing *Hardware Pt 1* should have been credited to Adrian Dreyer, not Heidrun Löhr.

Sport

TEE OFF

with Vivienne Inch

Teeing off my '97 workplace agreement with *RealTime* I have been at pains to update the publishers on recent developments across the playing fields of this nation. Drawing their attention to the pathetic allocation to Mr. Rufus and myself and our placement here at the scrag end of the paper, I told them it was time this trendy rag embraced the new philosophy ("Too much sport is barely enough," H G Nelson) and put sport where it belongs—upfront and personal. Sport is nurturing, healing. All you need is sport. Why just this week, the grinding social problems of Aboriginals in inner city Redfern—potentially embarrassing for the Olympics—were instantly alleviated with a visit from Cathy Freeman. Clearly no-one reads the sports columns round here but I know for a fact they listen to Radio National. Tune in any weekend, said I, and see if you can locate anything on RN (or News Radio or 2BL) other than scores and game plans. Bob Mansfield is a sports fan whose recommended cuts will finally rid us of all that dull in-depth stuff in news and current affairs cutting straight to the highlights, freeing up the airwaves for even more sport. Who wants the unctuous outbursts of poets, philosophers and intellectuals. It is in the outpourings of sports commentators (Gold for Australia!) that the passions of Australia find voice. What need have we for complexity as we remove our caps and bow our heads for the weekly homily (don't let guilt ruin your game) from our Captain at the crease?

TOOTH AND CLAW

with Jack Rufus

The biggest problem with Australian cricket today is cricketers-turned-reporters. In the old days, a retired Australian captain just might end up in the Channel Nine commentary booth. But now, any old cricketer becomes an expert commentator—while he's still playing. This has created a media nightmare.

The first problem is that none of the cricketers are able to say the word "cricket". The current captain, Mark "Tubby" Taylor, is the worst offender: the "ck" consonant is gobbled up like a turkey's dinner. Kerry Packer needs to slip Tubby a valium whenever he's behind the microphone, especially now that Tubby is doing historical features on *The Cricket Show*. His recent history of India from the point of view of cricket was a revelation. 1947 was a downbeat year, Tubby informed us: due to the Partition, no cricket was played.

This broadcast paves the way for a whole new historical school. The Russian Revolution from the point of view of cricket: although no actual cricket was played, both teams were bursting with talent. The establishment team was fronted by a stoic opening bat in Nicholas II, while Rasputin was a wily spinner impossible to pick and difficult to wear down. The breakaway team was led by a tearaway pace man called Lenin, who came off a long run and aimed for the head. Just like the Packer rebel dispute six decades later, the world was never the same once these two mighty teams slugged it out.

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ment, text and image

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Shorts

Forbidden Love-Bold Passion, a travelling exhibition of lesbian stories explores over ninety years of different lifestyles and attitudes of lesbian women. Stories of mistaken identity and women who passed as men, discharged soldiers and gay activists, bohemians, butches, femmes, mothers, students feminists and Thespians. The exhibition was inspired by the coming out of Monte Pushon at age 104, who stated "If you can't come out age 104 when can you come out?". The three curators of this exhibition attended her funeral when she died at the age of 107, and began to discuss the invisibility of lesbian life, conceiving the idea for this exhibition. State Library of Victoria, until February 16; Castlemaine Historical Museum February 19 - April 8; National Museum of Australia, Adelaide April 10-June 1; Salamanca Arts Centre Hobart, June 10 - July 21.

Are we entering a new age of feminism? Is there a common understanding of the term postfeminism? Are postfeminists synonymous with Bad Girls? Is postfeminism a generational response to second wave feminism? Does postfeminism really mean the end of feminism? **Difficult Territory**, curated by Kristen Elsbey will engage with some of the questions surrounding recent postfeminist discourse in Australia in the late 1990s. This slippery and hard to define territory will consider how relevant and meaningful postfeminism is in today's cultural climate, and whether postfeminism is articulating an end point or a new kind of feminism? It will also offer a wide range of views and positions through the website, <http://www.culture.com.au/scan/artspace/>. Installations by Mishka Borowski, Cassandra Bossell, Olga Cironis, Eliza Hutchison, Lyndal Jefferies, Lin Li, Joy Saunders, Robyn Webster, Frances Joseph. Features a forum addressing aspects of postfeminism with round table discussion forum speakers include Camilla Nelson (University of Sydney) and Amanda Fernbach (University of NSW). The forum will also include a panel of artists exhibiting as part of this project. Artspace, February 2 - March 1. For more info call Artspace Tel: 9368 1899. e-mail: artspace@merlin.com.au.

Spirit and Place: Art in Australia 1861-1996 brings together paintings, photographs, sculptures and drawings by over one hundred artists, encompassing works from both the past and the present. It features examples by major indigenous and non-indigenous artists, and also works by European artists who have visited this continent. The exhibition deals with many themes, including the influence of esoteric movements and spiritual ideas on modernism, the interplay of Eastern and Western spiritual beliefs, the significance of Aboriginal art, and responses to nature and land. **Spirit and Place**, assembled by guest curators Nick Waterlow and Ross Mellick, aims to reveal resonances between cultures, and across different times and places. It presents a perspective on some of the varied traditions and inspirations that underpin the diversity of contemporary art in Australia. MCA Sydney until March 3.

The Eye of the Storm: Eight Contemporary Indigenous Australian Artists

This exhibition focuses on the work of the five major artistic traditions within indigenous Australia (Arnhem Land, the Desert, the Kimberley, the Torres Strait, and the work of urban-based artists). Artists represented are George Milpurrru, John Mawurndjul, Rover Thomas, Kwementway Kngwarreye, Fiona Foley, Ken Thaiday, Roy Wiggan, Brian Nyinawanga. Organised by the National Gallery of Australia. MCA Sydney March 12 - May 11.

Nan Goldin, one of the most celebrated figures in contemporary photography, visits Australia for the first time to present **The Ballad of Sexual Dependency** at the MCA for the 1997 Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras. With more than 700 images presented as a slide show **The Ballad** frankly chronicles the past twenty years of Nan Goldin's life and that of friends and lovers in New York, Berlin, Boston, and London. MCA, Sydney, February 25-26 at 6.30pm.

Sydney Women's Festival will be held this year in The Domain on **Sunday March 2**. Free workshops will be held, and a multimedia technology marquee will provide visitors to the Festival with the opportunity to get on-line and access the net, with the cyber active Geek Girls on hand to help.

Sydney Performer **Deborah Pollard** presents a video, slide and discussion about her recent performance and installation collaborations in Java, Indonesia: **Bada Pasir/Sand Storm**—a large scale site specific work which explored the difference between Australian and Indonesian cultural perceptions of the sea. Video by Peter Panoa, dramaturgy by Monica Wulff. Sidetrack Theatre, February 24 8pm.

Rosalind Crisp is giving release-based dance classes: Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays, 10.00am-12.00. Cost \$10 to drop in or five classes for \$40. **OMEQ DANCE** studio, B2 1-3 Gladstone St., Newtown. OMEQ DANCE studio is available for hire: 170 sq metres, light, piano, timber floor; for groups, individuals, classes, workshops, rehearsals, showings. Tel: 9519 3420



Jarrod Benson and Arvinda in *Narcissus' Dream*

Mixed Company present *Narcissus' Dream* with visual artists and choreographer Tony Yap directing a work that combines performance art, dance theatre, original music and multimedia to render a surrealistic interpretation of the myth of Narcissus. Chapel off Chapel, Prahran, Feb 1 - 22. Tel: 9522 3382.

Sydney's **Shopfront Theatre for Young People** is seeking a **Community Theatre Worker** to devise and direct theatre projects with young people (8-25) from a range of cultural and economic backgrounds. Position commences mid-March. For job description and queries, Tel: 02 9588 3948.

To Run—Sand, the final work in Alison Hallit's much praised **BRICKS WATER SAND** Dance Theatre Trilogy premieres April 18. "In the sand the dancers imprint their life stories and search for answers. They test their ability to preserve and forbear, in order to defy the sand as a metaphor for life and run without restraint". The Economiser Building, Spencer Street Power Station, April 19 - May 4. Bookings, Tel: 03 9252 1634.

Koel Productions presents **Lorca's Yerma** directed by Sarah 'Love and Human Remains' Carradine with saxophonist **Dale Barlow** playing his original score live with a three piece band. Sydney Street Theatre Space (PACT), Erskineville, Feb 7 - March 1. bookings, Tel: 02 9300 9554

SPLIT Records has just announced two new provocative sound art releases, *Talk is Cheap* from **Machine for Making Sense** and *Sonic Hieroglyphs* from **Jim Denley** and the Random module Twins. Tel/fax 02 9357 7723 email: splitrec@ozemail.com.au



C. Moore Hardy

C. Moore Hardy is a lesbian artist who takes on popular visual languages, especially those used in the portrayal of women. In her new exhibition, *Passion Fruit* at **Stills Gallery** in Sydney, she uses a montage technique, projecting lush coloured images onto the usually naked bodies of her subjects (female, male, gay couples or groups). Selecting well known images from artists such as Roy Liechtenstein and photographers like Richard Avedon and layering these images by projection, a male figure emerges from a portrait of Elizabeth Taylor, a view of two women embracing is overlaid by an iconic illustration from Tom of Finland. For the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. February 19 - March 16.



Jennifer Monson

The Performance Space focuses on contemporary dance with **Antistatic**, a three day performance festival accompanied by weekend forum with film and video screenings and two weeks of workshops led by three prominent practitioners in contemporary dance. **Julyen Hamilton** is one of Europe's foremost improvisers. Trained in the UK, he has created many solo and collaborative works with his Company Hamilton as well as with choreographers such as Pauline de Groot and Steve Paxton. His methodology concentrates on deepening the kinaesthetic sensing of the body with exercises that have a physiological base rather than concentrating on aesthetic form. New York choreographer, performer and teacher **Jennifer Monson** has worked collaboratively with many artists including Yvonne Meier, Cathy Weiss, DANCENOISE and Karen Finley, Lisa Kraus and Fred Holland. In an ongoing collaboration with composer Zeena Parkins over many years she has been investigating the dynamic interplay between movement and music. Her workshop (Unravelling the Plot) looks into the layering that occurs during improvisation. **Gary Rowe** works as a choreographer, performer and teacher throughout Europe and the US, most recently with writers, visual and digital artists. His workshop (Secure the Shadow) will focus on solo performance creating monologues from many starting points including text and visual imagery, exploring some new points of collaboration to be found in the distance between art forms.

All workshops run from 10 am to 6 pm Monday to Friday for the duration of the festival, March 24 - April 4. Register by February 28 for 30% discounts on Antistatic Festival performances and forums. Enquiries: 02 9698 7235

ARIAS, Recent Australian Music Theatre, by John Jenkins and Rainer Linz, is an invaluable, accessible, comprehensive and generously illustrated guide to over a decade of remarkable productions, performances and the responses to them. To be reviewed in RealTime 18. In the mean time order yourself a copy from your favourite bookshop or contact **Red House Editions**, PO Box 2123, Footscray, Victoria 3011

Ex de Medici is at ACCA until March 2: **Portrait** comprises life size tattoo portraits taken at her shop over a seven year period. **Fuel** looks at hot rods and the subculture of car enthusiasts (a Canberra Contemporary Art Space touring show). **Indelible** is an exhibition of Ex de Medici and another Canberra artist Kelly Leonard curated by Tedd Goot and Jim Logan from the National Gallery of Australia. From March 7, **Shaun Kirby's International Headache Congress** (EAF's national touring series "Speaking Part, For") and **Chris Fortescue's Gentle Hour Unsung**. ACCA, Dallas Brooks Drive, South Yarra.

Company in Space's new work is **The Pool is Damned: A Trial by Video**, a performance which links Australian cities via an interactive computer video medium carried over a video-conferencing system, converging live performers and interactive network multimedia. Audiences can manipulate aspects of live performance and change video, sound and light. The work will be performed in Melbourne with interactive links to Perth (as part of *Techne* at PICA March 4 - 9), Sydney (as a satellite event of *AntiStatic*, March 12 - 15, 7pm) and Brisbane at MetroArts (March 12 - 16, 9pm EST). Directed by John McCormick, performed by John McCormick, Hellen Sky, Trevor Patrick, Lucy Guerin, Andrew Morrish. Enquiries and Melbourne bookings 039527 4637

As part of the **Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival** and the **newIMAGES** program, leading British composer and bad boy of the Complexity movement, **Michael Finnissy**, will conduct his opera about Tchaikovsky, **Shameful Vice!**, with David Carr as Tchaikovsky, the Song Company, conductor Roland Peelman, members of Sydney Alpha and ELISION ensembles. **Toast II Gallery**, 85 Commonwealth Street, Friday, February 21. First Call 02 9320 9169



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