

# RealTime

the national arts April–May 1997  
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## OnScreen



**SCREENCULTURE**

**IN**

**VERTIGO**

Our cover image not only anticipates the release later this year by UIP of a glorious big new print of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, but also stands as a metaphor for the potentially precipitous state of screen culture in Australia should the federal government take on the Gonski Report recommendation to reduce screen culture spending by the AFC from \$2.9m to \$1m. *OnScreen*'s front page feature is Jock Given's detailed response to Gonski. We recommend you read it closely and then compose your letter of support for screen culture—film festivals, media resource centres, film publications—and address it to Senator Richard Alston (see page 16).

The new Chair of the Australia Council is Dr Margaret Seares, associate professor of music at the University of WA and seconded executive director of the WA Department of the Arts in recent years. Not well known outside WA, Seares nonetheless made an immediate and positive impression in her first press statements and *Arts Today* interview with her awareness of current funding tensions. Less impressive was the appointment of Christopher Pearson to Council—given his hostility to the Australia Council and its principles and practices, it's astonishing he deigned to accept the position.

In the meantime, the announcement of triennial funding for organisations and companies and the continuity and stability it offers can be only provisionally welcomed. By Council decree, overall funds in this area will diminish from some 70 per cent now to 45 per cent by the year 2000 as other areas are boosted. During the McPhee years a preoccupation with individual artists as opposed to organisations has generated a prejudicial distinction. The crude assumption seems to be that individuals are innovative and organisations are conservative and money-eating. Without arts organisations many individual artists, especially young and emerging, would lack the capacity to show and publicise their work and to have access to vital resources. As Sarah Miller argued in *The Australian* ("No early solutions in council overhaul", 27/3/97), "The proposed cuts to infrastructure are lacking in any kind of analysis or discussion or debate or the effects of what that will mean". It cannot simply be a matter of Council telling us over and over that there are not enough funds. We have to be part of the debate, part of the solution, rather than being advised of Council's decisions. As Meredith Hinchliffe, executive director of the National Campaign for the Arts, argued in the same article, "The Council has got a lot of work to do in getting its constituents back on side". A *fait accompli* scaling back of arts organisations without discussion is ill-timed. *RealTime* has commissioned experienced arts observer Mary Travers to survey the state of arts funding; inevitably the issue of infrastructure funding arises in her discussion with Michael Lynch, General Manager of the Australia Council.

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from Saul Bass inspired poster art for *Vertigo* dropped by the studio (Paramount 1958). A new print of Hitchcock's classic film is due for release by United International Pictures later this year and is tipped for a first screening at this year's Sydney Film Festival.

Publisher	Open City Inc.
Editors	Keith Gallasch, Virginia Baxter
OnScreen Co-ordinating Editors	Annemarie Jonson, Alessio Cavallaro
Editorial Team	NSW Annemarie Jonson, Jacqueline Millner, Virginia Baxter, John Potts, Eleanor Brickhill, Keith Gallasch, Annemarie Lopez VIC Richard Murphet, Anna Dzenis, Zsuzsanna Soboslay WA Sarah Miller, Tony Osborne, Barbara Bolt, Peter Mudie SA Linda Marie Walker, John McConchie QLD Julia Postle, Maryanne Lynch, Peter Anderson NT Suzanne Spinner (Darwin)
Assistant Editor	David Varga 02 9283 2723
Advertising	Sari Järvenpää tel/fax 02 9313 6164
Design/Production	Paul Saint
Produced at	Art Almanac
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# Cutting to the core

In discussion with Australia Council General Manager Michael Lynch, Mary Travers surveys the state of arts funding

The ever cheerful Michael Lynch is genuinely radiant about the extra \$700,000 the Australia Council allocated to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts for 1996-97. The Council General Manager said, "Looking over the history, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board [now Fund] have been under a lot of pressure, and there have been no big [financial] adjustments". The Australia Council supports more of the contemporary Indigenous art practice while ATSIC assists the traditional, and many miscellaneous items. The Indigenous arts budget has always trailed literature, music, and all of the art forms; last year the Board distributed grants totalling \$4m.

The increase to the Indigenous arts budget came two years after major increases to the major performing arts companies, as a result of *Creative Nation*. In fact, two thirds of the *Creative Nation* extra grant money to the Australia Council went to the Major [performing] Arts Organisations Fund clients in 1994-95. The Australian Ballet leapt by over \$700,000, to \$3.6m—almost as large as the entire grants budget for Indigenous arts.

The question of priorities in arts funding is rarely held up to scrutiny. Despite the new transparency with which the Australia Council says it is conducting itself, on the outside no-one seems clear on what the *Creative Nation* policy, the Council's restructure or the Coalition's budget cuts have delivered. And tracking the figures of the art-forms is an almost Escher-like experience.

The latest Australia Council policy, announced in March, is to limit the proportion of the Council's funds allocated to annual grants. This will cause the demise of approximately one third of the smaller dance and theatre companies across the country by the year 2001. "We have known for a long time that the likelihood of large increases, over and above what we have achieved in the last couple of years (from *Creative Nation*), is just not going to happen", said Lynch. He rightly believes "the policy is a significant achievement". It forces the Funds to allow space for the many other demands beyond annual support.

Sadly this watershed for theatre and dance is economically driven, and most likely to affect audiences in regions, the suburbs and the schools. Lynch sees the future as one where "a balance between corporate support, public funding and the capacity of organisations to earn their own income" is essential. Hanging in the air is whether a low profile touring children's theatre, or a regional theatre company in Wagga-Wagga or Darwin can attract corporate support. Lynch recognises the limits and also notes that "outside Victoria and NSW it is much harder to get corporate support".

The first Coalition budget cut the Australia Council by \$9.3m, then added \$2.8m for new schemes. The Lynch positive spin is that "the \$63.8m is still better than before *Creative Nation*".

At the heart of reducing the annual grants is the Council's inability to support growth. Their budget peak of \$70.3m, in 1995-96, was equivalent to the 1987 budget, CPI indexed. The number of funded companies has doubled in a decade. But the amount of subsidy available to organisations has also been squeezed by new funding schemes imposed on the budget by the Government, and the Council's increased spending on the improvement of business and marketing practices.

The Council re-structure shifted the funding paradigm so that it could report to Canberra from a more economic viewpoint. Broadly, the new categories define creative development, production and distribution of the arts as the distinct entities. By simplifying and funding every artform with the same

policies, Lynch believes they can report to Canberra more succinctly. "In the past the Council relied too much on the fact the Government should do this because it's good for the arts and good for the country."

"Obviously a lot of people are not happy with the changes, they liked it the way it was", he said. The restructure in itself has not shifted the Council from artistic to economic leadership. For several years the Council annual reports and public statements have offered no overview of what is happening or needed in particular art forms. The shift had already taken place.

Arts development at grass-roots level also appears to have less priority in the present Council. Through the 20 per cent *Creative Nation* budget bonus, the Community Cultural Development Fund grants stayed flat. The stagnation of funding for arts networks has also thwarted national conferencing, although views come through newsletters. Clearly the multicultural sector is fired up over last year's appointments to the Council and its Funds. There is a massively reduced representation, and a suspected slowdown of multicultural activity. Lynch says that in pre-budget discussions some initiatives are being considered.

He is hopeful of no surprises in the May 97 budget. After the cut in year two of the triennial funding agreement, he says "The Minister and Prime Minister gave us an undertaking they do not propose any further savings in this triennial".

Other political decisions are cutting across the Council. Most recently Jeff Kennett led a raid of State Ministers on the \$1.5m Regional Arts Fund which the Council was given in the last federal budget. The upshot is the states will report how they spent the money to the Council, which will retain a small amount for some items. A restrained Lynch said, "This move would not have been supported by me. I regard the national overview as a very important part of this organisation's activities".

It seems then that devolution of funding to the states has begun, although there is no indication of how far the "eradication of administrative duplication", as Coalition policy describes it, will go.

Since Paul Keating emerged as an influence on the arts, in the late 80s, the Government has gradually usurped the Council's role of chief arts agency by increasing the active involvement of DoCA (Department of Communications and the Arts). This included giving DoCA new funding schemes, such as the touring programs. The arts funding system is growing like Topsy, and includes myriad new business and industry support schemes. In the confusion, governments seem less accountable for priorities and the quality of their management, especially where arts organisations' support falls between different government departments.

The chair of a large dance company, while not wanting to be named, expressed frustration that, "governments fail to read budgets, understand the cost structure, acknowledge the non-government income and agree to a level of subsidy that matches the need". No-where is this better illustrated than through the story of the Bangarra Dance Theatre who lost over \$700,000 in federal grants as their funding moved between two departments.

A combination of great talent, hungry audiences, and ATSIC grants fuelled a meteoric rise in five years to 1994. That year, Bangarra had grants of over \$1m from ATSIC, \$100,000 from the NSW Government, and \$39,000 from the Australia Council. But in the same year, ATSIC pulled the plug. As the ochre-covered dancers stood behind the Prime Minister at the launch of *Creative Nation*, they faced a very uncertain future. Without ATSIC they would be left with box office

earnings and \$139,000 of arts funding.

The Australia Council hired Jonah Jones to make an assessment. He recommended the Council and ATSIC each provides \$350,000 in subsidy and if ATSIC could not, that the Council take this into account. The result is a Council grant for this year of \$275,000, ATSIC nil.

Consequently, Bangarra has not produced a new work since 1995. Its next one will premiere later in 1997. The dancers took on an excessive workload last year, to earn income. They danced seasons in four capital cities, made regional tours through three states, as well as India, Indonesia and Atlanta. They finished with an \$80,000 deficit and the Council is reviewing them yet again.

Jo Dyer, acting general manager, says "We cannot reach the level of activity we would like on the present funding. We have eight core dancers, with no understudies". Compounding their problems is the cancellation of a May season. The NSW Government is renovating a wharf to accommodate Bangarra and other groups. Bangarra planned a season in their new space in May, but termites have been found, and the move to this space is postponed indefinitely.

Lynch concedes the Australia Council is always slow to pick up new talent, "We have never been in a position to do that". The potential of Bangarra now looks dependent on the Australia Council persuading the Government to put up real money, another \$100,000 won't do.

In comparison, Jo Dyer points out, Bangarra's total state and federal subsidy is one third the level of Sydney Dance Company and one half Meryl Tankard's ADT. By sheer coincidence, in the year Bangarra lost over \$700,000 of federal funds, the Australia Council increased the Australian Ballet grant by over \$700,000.

After May, negotiations begin on the next triennial funding agreement between the Government and the Australia Council. One item likely to arise is the funding of

state opera companies. The Council has resisted this for years, to protect music funds for other purposes. The Coalition promised the operas funding before the last election, but Council support presupposes new money to make this happen.


Other changes are hard to predict, there are so many "reviews" taking place. There is the proposed sale of Artbank. The Visual Arts/Crafts Fund is reviewing the funding of the peak museum, craft and visual arts bodies. Later this year the Council is reviewing whether the New Media Arts Fund is the best approach to supporting this work. ATSIC is reviewing funding of the arts and crafts centres. A House of Representatives committee is examining the provision of sporting and community facilities ... All government departments and agencies are having efficiency reviews.

One certainty is that if governments continue to recognise that high quality opera, classical music and ballet cannot exist without public support, but fail to equal the comparable European countries in funding levels, support for the contemporary arts will further decline. Also, audiences gaining the most from arts funding will increasingly be those who have money to spend.

Michael Lynch says, "Politicians see only the total arts dollar", and firmly wedged between a rock and a hard place, the Council now makes no pretence of an ongoing commitment to the smaller parts of the arts infrastructure such as contemporary art spaces, theatre companies, music ensembles, arts journals, service agencies.

The Lynch bureaucratic language masks a great deal as he looks to the future, and works in response to the political and economic climate. His talk is peppered with references to the corporate plan and restructure. I was more interested in what I call support for the core arts infrastructure, knowing many of the smaller organisations cannot exist without some base funding. Lynch, always fast to reply, said, "but what is the core stuff?"

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## Risk at risk

Kim Konikow reports on the symposium *Is American creativity at risk?*

How valuable is creativity, individual innovation and research in America? Distinguished leaders in the arts, business, science and education convened for the weekend of November 8-10, 1996, to respond to this question. They met at Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, Rhode Island, in a symposium *Is American Creativity at Risk?* convened by the Alliance of Artists' Communities, a national arts service organisation whose members provide residencies—time and a place in which to work creatively—for thousands of artists each year.

Throughout a weekend of extraordinary discourse and debate, creative thinkers from many disciplines explored the nature of human creativity and its significance to their own fields. In so doing they began a national, public discourse on a subject they defined as vital to the country's future. At the end of the three days, they all agreed to a "Blueprint for Action" to restore creativity as a priority in public policy, cultural philanthropy and education.

The symposium's discussions ranged from arts, to physics, to technological advances in communication, to opportunities for business people and artists to work together to nurture creativity in the society. The common thread in all the discussions was the significance, for individuals and society, of freedom and opportunity to be creative.

The symposium featured three vibrant artists. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, in a moving presentation that offered a glimpse of her own creative process, described her public art projects, which involve collaboration with city sanitation and street workers across America whom she

describes as some of the most creative, and undervalued workers of our society. Guillermo Gomez-Pena, in a dramatic reading, depicted his conception of the future—a borderless society whose citizens speak "Spanglish". His masterful turns of phrase and dialect brought to life a new model for a society of equity and support for all its members. Mel Chin's powerful imitation and description of the "insult artist" of today was, in his own words, a much-needed "aneurism to rupture the way things are". He asked the group to look with new eyes at society's ways of presenting art, culture and ideas.

Speakers at the symposium included Robert MacNeil, writer and journalist; Lewis Hyde, poet and essayist; Brendan Gill, writer and critic; Mary Schmidt Campbell, Dean of the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University; Ellen Winner, psychologist, professor and researcher with Boston College and Harvard Project Zero; Jon Cusumano, Professor of Nonlinear Dynamics, Laboratory of Engineering, Science & Mechanics at Pennsylvania State University; Mary Catherine Bateson, anthropologist and professor at George Mason University; and Stewart Brand, founder of the Well and of Global Business Network. They emphasised the need to encourage creativity not only in artists, but in all sectors of society—science, education, business, government, service industries and in everyday work. Is America providing an environment that encourages or suppresses creators? Symposium participants emphasised the need for environments, programs and collaborations that support creativity of all kinds in all people. Indeed, American artists' communities, or colonies as they have traditionally been called, have for almost a century provided artists, scientists, scholars, architects and others with environments that support creative work and risk-taking.

Through intense conversation and exploration into the nature of human creativity and the culture of the United States, the symposium participants demonstrated that the daring innovativeness upon which America was

founded is still a vital part of the culture. However, because of market pressures, diminishing support for research and experimentation in all sectors and an ill-founded emphasis on product over process, there is a danger of losing that innovativeness—to the detriment of the entire society.

What are the consequences of a loss of creativity as America prepares to enter the next millennium, and where and how can creativity be supported for the common good? Using artists' communities and other "hotbeds of creativity" in science and business as models, the symposium participants proposed solutions, ranging from broad initiatives to restore creativity as a priority in education, to using artists in collaboration with institutions, business, unions, governments, technology and the media to support creativity and inventiveness. In so doing, the symposium participants began a national, cross-sectoral discussion to encourage collaborative projects that support creativity in America.

The Alliance of Artists' Communities is a national service organisation located in Oregon that supports the field of artists' communities and residency programs (which number over 100). It does this by encouraging collaboration among members, providing leadership on field issues, setting professional standards, raising the visibility of artists' communities, and promoting philanthropy.

Artists' communities are professionally run organisations that provide time, space, and support for artists' creative research and risk-taking in environments rich in stimulation and fellowship. Whether they are located in pastoral settings or in the middle of urban warehouse districts, artists' communities have been founded on the principle that through the arts, culture flourishes and society's dreams are realised. Some of America's most enduring classics have been created at artists' communities: Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring*, James Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son*, and Milton Avery's paintings, to name a few.

According to the Alliance's survey of the

field of artists' communities for its recent directory (November 1996, Allworth Press), about 3,600 artists were residents at American artists' communities in 1995. This includes painters, writers, composers, sculptors, filmmakers, photographers, performance artists, storytellers, choreographers, installation artists, architects, art historians, scientists and scholars. To engender ideas and dialogue that cross disciplinary, cultural, gender, social and geographic barriers, most artists' communities aim for a broad mix of residents at any one given time.


Artists' communities and those who support them are committed to the principle that art stimulates new ways of thinking and new ways of seeing. It should come as no surprise then that the voices and visionaries of our own times continue to be cultivated at artists' communities: poets like Gwendolyn Brooks and Louise Gluck, fiction writers Oscar Hijuelos and Jayne Anne Phillips, non-fiction writers Alex Kotlowitz and Stanley Crouch, composers Ned Rorem and John Adams, visual artists Lawrence Wiener and Portia Munson, choreographer Bill T. Jones, performance artist Guillermo Gomez-Pena and the experimental theatre company Mabou Mines all created work during residencies at artists' communities. Many lesser known artists are working at artists' communities right now, and in the months and years to come their books, exhibitions, pieces, performances, and productions will become known to us.

The future of American culture depends on supporting the creative efforts of a broad array of artists. Providing this support is the fundamental, vital work of artists' communities.

For additional information on the symposium, the "Blueprint for Action", the Alliance and its programs (including the recent directory) contact Tel: +1 503 239-7049 Fax: 239-6936 e-mail: aac@teleport.com

Kim Konikow is a Minnesota-based arts manager who visited Australia in 1996.

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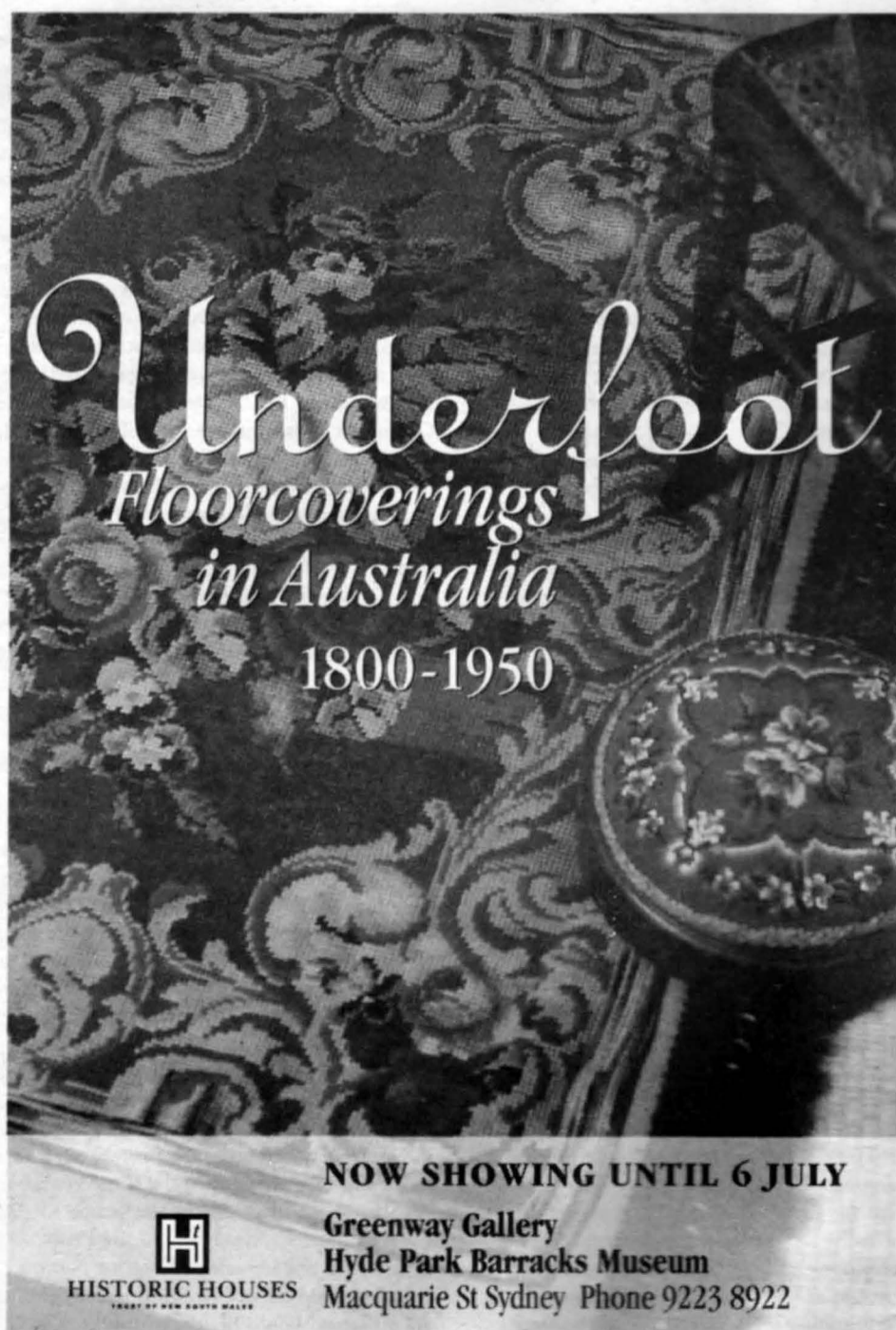
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# Festival of Porn/Perth

A selection of responses to the 1997 Festival of Perth introduced by Sarah Miller

*art(iculat)ions*); Semola Theatre, *Hibrid*; Elision ensemble, *Opening of the Mouth*; Yirra Yarkin Noongar Theatre, *Runamuk*; Belvoir Company B, *Up the Road*

It's just not a Festival of Perth without a media beat-up about sex and nudity, equated apparently with pornography. I guess it's 'interesting', in a weird kind of way, that those inveterate and 'Christian' letter writers, who presumably believe that humankind is created in God's image, should find even the idea of the naked body inherently pornographic; perniciously capable of corrupting and perverting 'youth'. Very curious indeed. I've put it on my list of questions for which there are no apparently logical answers.

The media play an essential role in all of this, frothing at the mouth at the hint of a scandal; taking it upon themselves to act as the moral guardians of a presumably outraged population. 5,000 people a day can attend Royal De Luxe's fabulously silly *Le Peplum*, but four letters of complaint by some dimwits or other who haven't even seen the show is the *real news*. David Blenkinsop, Artistic Director of the Festival of Perth is described in these letters as the Prince of Darkness or the Prince of Porn and reviled as revelling in filth.

General questions about the role of the festival, the virtues or not of individual events, performances and programs go unasked. The merest suggestion that philosophical, aesthetic, political or social issues may impact or affect the way individual works are positioned, presented or received, is treated with scorn: "we have a responsibility (sic) to our

their lecturers take such little interest in the dissemination of ideas? No wonder the mainstream press has it all their own way.

Looking at the performance program, it was Semola Theatre's *Hibrid* (from Catalonia) that copped probably the most flack, featuring—as it did—a woman enacting cunnilingus with a hanging corpse. Yes, she did have to do all the work and no it didn't look like something you'd get a real thrill from.

In fact *Hibrid* is strictly visual rather than physical theatre and as such it keeps its audience at a curious distance. Described as taking its audience "into the realm of perverse dreams and bizarre fantasies... transforming everyday images into the absurd, grotesque and sensual" and as "defying traditional notions of structure", *Hibrid* presents a series of fairly familiar images, tenuously connected through the structure of an apartment block where wild and zany things just happen to people without their noticing. So a couple sits at their dining room table eating spaghetti and drinking red wine, oblivious to the overflowing bathtub on the floor above, drenching them in water. Even when the bathtub has utterly capsized and the dripping wet (and of course rude and nude) bather is deposited in the middle of the table, this couple carry on eating, without looking, without speaking, without noticing. It is a comment—scarcely a shocking one—on the soullessness and decadence of modern life.

*Hibrid* was pleasant enough and occasionally funny. It relied on a recurring



Somola Theatre

something this work sought strenuously to avoid, although it certainly raises the question of how artists bear witness (or *witbness*, to employ Bracha Luttingberg Ettinger's term) to the atrocities of the twentieth century. Very tricky territory. I have to say that the assumption that the music, rigorously modernist and virtuosically performed, was capable of communicating or affecting 'meaning' was misplaced. You had to kind of take the composer's word for it.

It was, I think, to be understood as a kind of ritual of mourning and as such the performance space was carefully constructed to ensure the audience took the time to experience the space before participating in the concert component of the program.

*Opening of the Mouth* was performed in the enormous space of the Midland Railway yards. Transformed by Crow into a black and hellish nightmare, the space was dimly and sporadically illuminated by candles and fires, littered with the rotting corpses of decaying fish—replete with maggots—half submerged in stagnant, oily pools, and resonant with sound. Occasional projections of some of the mentally and psychiatrically disabled people—the first to go to the gas chambers in Hitler's mad experiments—and the more scarily evocative white tiled shower room with the odd white nightdress left to hang on a hook, were more clearly evocative of just which particular nightmare we had entered. It was an interesting and ambitious attempt but again, it probably overlooks the fact that many many artists have created this kind of environment and that many audience members have on many occasions, trodden this or a very similar path. You already know what it is you're supposed to be feeling.

This sense of familiarity was compounded by the fact that emerging at the end of the space, we were confronted by rows of chairs in which we sat (you didn't have to) to 'enjoy' the music. This concert at the end of an installation was probably logistically essential but completely disruptive of the sense of corruption and decay so carefully created.

The experience of Australia's Indigenous people since European contact is infinitely more pornographic than the sight of the odd naked body. Two productions in this year's festival attempted, from the perspective of very different Aboriginal cultures, to explore the contemporary Aboriginal experience.

*Runamuk* was the first 'professional' production by Yirra Yaakin Noongar

Theatre, previously a youth company. It is clear that this is a first work and like any first work by a company in the making, the hope is that the company will mature and develop. That it is essential that the Noongar people have a platform and a voice is undisputed; that this first production is running on raw energy and emotion is also undisputed, as is the fact that the script, direction, theatrical rationale and performances need rather desperately to mature in order that the vision of this company is able to be realised.

Much more polished and crafted was *Up the Road* by Company B (Belvoir St Theatre), a play written by John Harding and directed by Neil Armfield. In this instance, of course, we're talking about a director of enormous talent and experience, but once again, walking a well trodden path.

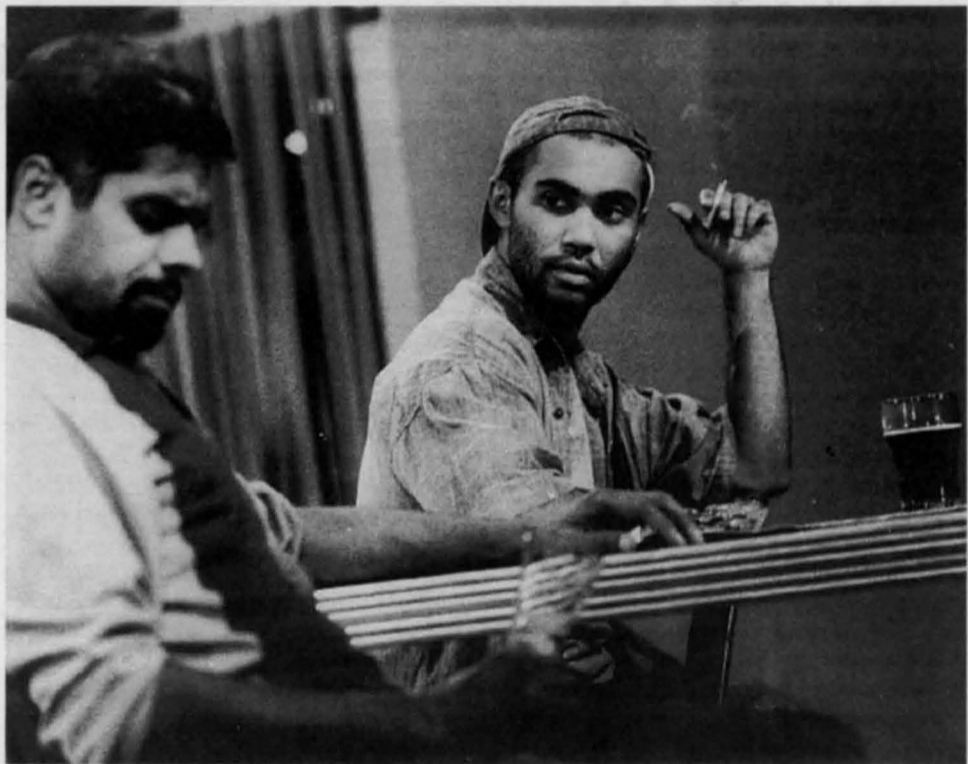
Charming, funny and beautifully performed with extraordinary lighting by Mark Howett, this production was nonetheless surprisingly formulaic. By and large the performers took the cute route: lots of winking and nudging and jokey asides. Perhaps the idea was to reassure the audience that Aboriginal people are just like us; that the human experience is a universal one but that in itself begs about half a million questions. Certainly it was good to see an issue based play that didn't take itself too seriously but it inclined to the ingratiating at times; a tendency I found distinctly unnerving. Perhaps that was the point.

★★★

The festival experience is one that relies on a large serve of bread and circuses. As a large part of the festival brief is to attract those audiences typically uninterested in art but with an appetite for (free) large scale spectacle, the trick is to convert audiences at free events into box office sales. This is certainly not an easy task. It makes the job of presenting or positioning more rigorous or 'difficult' or even blackly humorous work, extraordinarily difficult and the Festival is to be congratulated on taking the substantial risks they did take.

Here again, however, the Festival (and their various presenter/producers) find themselves pitted against a profoundly conservative media hungry for sensation(alism) and which abhors anything that can't be dismissed (and rarely celebrated) in some kind of reductive one-liner. Given that for many people, the media is their introduction, their first point

• continued page 6



John Moore and Bradley Byquar, *Up the Road*

Heidrun Lohr

readers/viewers". A much more common (and effective) tactic is to silence discussion by consigning it to oblivion. If you can't see it or hear it, it just didn't happen.

In this unlikely climate, the visual arts forum and lecture program, *art(iculat)ions* took place, providing a momentary respite from the lowest common denominator approach of the mainstream media. It was a highly eclectic but nonetheless satisfying program, juxtaposing artists and curators from very different art forms and cultural backgrounds. Whilst attendances were good, what was disappointing was the lack of participation by local artists, lecturers and critics. The audience broadly comprised members of the general public, interstate and international artists and curators, and a few film and new media practitioners; but as one visiting curator commented, where are the WA artists? And how can we hope to develop a new generation of artists when

trick; the top floor inevitably and repetitively tipped over, depositing people on the top floor (along with gallons of water) on those below. Hardly startling, certainly not shocking, and if that's pornography, well I'm sadly disappointed.

A project that sought to depict the holocaust as one of the *real* obscenities of our century was, *Opening of the Mouth*, created by Richard Barrett, composer, and Crow, installation artist (both from the UK), in collaboration with the Australian contemporary music ensemble Elision. Needless to say, this evoked nary a comment from those self-styled arbiters of porn. This music performance event inspired by the *Egyptian Book of the Dead* and the poetry of Paul Celan, sought to "bear witness" without resorting to either the anecdotal or the histrionic.

Often events such as these are let down by a kind of emotional over indulgence,

## Festival of Porn/Perth

• from page 5

of contact for what is happening (let alone for what *might* happen) this is profoundly discouraging. In fact the most substantial and interesting coverage of the Festival this year, was to be found in the free street paper, *XPress*. There was no television coverage (beyond the publicity) and *The West Australian* newspaper coverage was, generally speaking, an offensive joke. If you're looking for real pornography...

Sarah Miller

Theatre Physical, *Miss Havisham's Dream*; *Five Angry Men*, *Performance appearance No. 121a*; Teatr Podrozy Biuro, *Carmen Funebre*; Compagnie Boris Charmatz; Black Blanc Beur (B3), *Rapetipas*

The Festival of Perth street theatre events usually provide some disruption to city normality, but this year it was all a bit contained and performer/audience spaces clearly defined. The introduction of a new venue (the Central Park Undercroft) did, however, provide some 'edge' to the street



Compagnie Boris Charmatz

theatre program. In the absence of any peripatetic performances this squeaky-clean liminal space (between foyers, park and St Georges Terrace) was transformed by the surrealistic visions of Theatre Physical's *Miss Havisham's Dream* and *Five Angry Men's* superb *Performance appearance No. 121a*.

Passers-by and audience alike were transfixed by the *Five Angry Men* dressed in black suits and homburg style hats as they rode into the space on bicycles ringing their bells and looking very severe. They dismounted and inspected the five thick ropes suspended from above. They shuffled about restlessly pulling angrily at stray threads on the ropes killing time as if a meeting was about to begin and its convener yet to arrive. Then a sudden leap onto the ropes and the atrium was transformed into a bell tower. They skirmished and danced, glared and shouted, producing the sound of peeling bells, and looking completely incongruous amidst the spic and span of Central Park—as did the manic violin which heralded the arrival of Beth Kayes as the weird Miss Havisham.

Enclosed in her cage/dress, Miss Havisham comes to meet her lover who slips from her fingertips and is pulled by bungee ropes rotating across the floor. In Theatre Physical's reading of Dickens' character the imposition of circus onto narrative is never gratuitous, there is a perverse dream-like logic



*Five Angry Men*

within the images and within their progressions from floor to air. Each sequence makes sense and cleverly incorporates story, acrobatics and high-flying into a bizarre amalgam.

Meanwhile down on The Esplanade Royal Deluxe set up two acres of sets, pyrotechnics and machinery for *Le Peplum*. Thousands attended every performance whilst in Forrest Place there was some unremarkable circus from Pocheros as well as Teatr Podrozy Biuro's refugees story, *Carmen Funebre*. Although based on stories from recent events in Bosnia, *Carmen Funebre* didn't transcend the kitsch of Forrest Chase (sic) and floundered in its overdramatic and segmented structure. I was aware of the arrangement of things rather than the symbolism of the images. Spectator involvement in this bleak vision was too difficult in the face of the actual social unrest taking place all around the Perth CBD that week. The realities of Forrest Place every night completely upstaged the imported events. Truth is indeed stranger than fiction, or in this case more present than the events depicted, culminating on Thursday in the mid-show removal by police of an abusive punter on stage.

Less dis-ease inside PICA though, where Compagnie Boris Charmatz performed on a tower of three platforms each three metres square. Its integration into the central PICA



Compagnie Boris Charmatz

space was so effective it became a fourth figure isolating humanity but connecting performing bodies. Energies spun off and sparked upward or downward. I became fascinated by stillnesses, observing symmetries and disjuncture above and below. Sequences of chaos resolved into new beginnings and brought our attention to the organisation of things. Lighting provided by three large balls around the space prevented one-way audience gaze, equally illuminating watcher and watched and nullifying any Foucauldian effect from the tower by subverting the traditional eye-lines of performance. This was a conscious tactic by Charmatz which brought self-consciousness to the audience desire in the face of the performers' naked lower bodies. Recorded sound complemented the bone and visceral sound of dancers and platform—"AATT" "ENEN" "TIONON" or you'll fall; attend to detail or we're all lost.

At the other end of the serious art spectrum there was *Rapetipas*, "the history of rap culture", by French company, Black Blanc Beur (B3), which showed how black American culture can be appropriated to provide a rallying point for black people in other cultures. The "history" was a little obscured but the dancing was irresistible. DJ Dee Nasty provided the beat and his "dancing" hands were fascinating to watch. This was the show for the clubbers (presented in the Metropolis Concert Club, Northbridge) and this mob must love their work because after 75 minutes of non-stop dancing onstage they joined the punters on the dance floor to jam for another hour to the continuing beat from Dee Nasty. This provided more insight into rap dance than the show proper, showing the musical conventions employed by the dance. B3 and punters formed a circle on the dance floor, the centre of which became a space to dance solo. Many did and the crowd went wild—exciting stuff.

Tony Osborne

Black Swan Theatre Company, *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*, Subiaco Theatre Centre

The very idea of a merry-go-round in the sea, the spooky context for it sitting out in the waves, especially for a child. The sense of wanting to be out there, playing as a child should, and being afraid of what it means there, out of reach, despite the visual splendour, the wreck of it. Who else is out there, where does the danger lie? The little epiphanies of childhood: rarely little at all, but which are held and often carried right through a life.

Black Swan Theatre Company's staging of Randolph Stow's *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* for this year's Festival of Perth was a rich delight. An engagement with memory and longing, with childhood and the way that children and adults can connect powerfully, and a homage to place, to a beloved landscape: this is what was presented. A recipe for a pappy, nostalgic

show you might think, but no. It was worked gently and respectfully with an ensemble approach, each of its parts deftly assembled and resonant. The musical score by Iain Grandage was performed at mezzanine level by the quartet Magnetic Pig—real live sophisticated contemporary music played by Cathie Travers and Lindsay Vickery and Paul Tanner and Grandage. The mood it built into a set design by painter Robert Juniper that used fulsome sentences from Stow's text and a most subtle colour scheme was sublime.

This performance project seemed steeped in respect for the idea of the preciousness of childhood. The acting style was freewheeling and committed, the actors using their bodies to make a landscape. The adult man and the small boy, the two parts of the narrator's emotional memory, played with attention. The lead actor, Brian Rooney, playing a six-year-old child, *knew* how to do this without ever resorting to cheap tricks.

Sidetrack Performance Group, *sit.com*, Dolphin Theatre

Nothing better than to go to a theatre and get to laugh. The stories that the five performers of *sit.com* told, particularly their first solo offerings, were so funny and well timed and kooky, without falling totally into that form of absurdist drama that can be so clever it becomes tedious. These performances were full of contradictions—within the stories and positions held by the characters, by the simple way that they looked and stood.

I attended on a night with plenty of adolescents who laughed at a multi-layered thing; laughing, too, at the high embarrassment level of the words and the images. Always this shock of seeing people onstage: expecting one thing, invariably getting something else. The bodies of these performers are all so different, all of them wearing generic Sydney 2000 T-shirts or the barman's white shirt, and the stories they tell spreading over such a range from ridiculous to quite painful and frustrating. All accorded the same value, which is where the humour and the breaking down of this 'drama' is positioned.

The work was effortless, the performances freewheeling. I could see *how* the work had been made in a collaborative sense and envied Derek Kreckler for the business of conceiving such a piece. It must have been fun in the making and rich, too, with ideas and bodies and characters and remembered stories and the idea of sit.coms and funny convoluted communications all at play.

Terri-ann White

*Inside the Visible: an elliptical traverse of twentieth century art in, of and from the feminine; Daughters of the Dreaming: Sisters Strong Together; Modern Masters from the Museum of Modern Art (the W.S. Paley Collection)*, Art Gallery of Western Australia

"How does one articulate something like a new identity in a globalised art world when the tools of expression have become so blatantly internationalised?" (*RealTime* 17). The question raised by Sue Best in her article, "About Face: International Art in the 90s", could well have provided the curatorial brief for the visual arts program in the 1997 Festival of Perth. Exhibitions such as *Ingamal Godingi* at the Fremantle Arts Centre, the work of Nalda Searles in *Re-coverings* at the Moores Building, the paintings of Sue Templeton at Artplace and Elsie King's *Fragile Objects* at Craftwest, present practices which are firmly situated in the Western Australian context. Yet it is at the Art Gallery of Western Australia that the stakes in the debate are clearly delineated. The juxtaposition of three exhibitions: *Inside the Visible: an elliptical traverse of twentieth century art in, of and from the feminine; Daughters of the Dreaming: Sisters Strong Together* and *Modern Masters from the Museum of Modern Art (the W.S. Paley Collection)*,

• continued next page

• from the previous page

opens up the question about what it is to articulate something like a 'new' identity.

In her catalogue essay for *Inside the Visible*, Catherine de Zegher writes, "at times of crisis, there seems to be an urge to deconstruct existing representational codes to search for 'new beginnings' in order to imagine the world anew". The placement of *Inside the Visible* between *Daughters of the Dreaming* and *The Modern Masters* provides Perth audiences with one of those rare opportunities to engage in 'the unpacking' of western representational traditions so as to "imagine the world anew".

The *Modern Masters* collection represents the vision of one wealthy American patron, W.S. Paley. Comprising works from artists such as Cezanne, Picasso, Gauguin and Matisse, it marks the high point of modernism, a time when imagining and imagining the world anew seemed possible. In 1997 these works no longer point to the new, but stand for an order which *Inside the Visible* aims to deconstruct.

Yet the *Modern Masters* collection goes un/remarked. There is no space to comment or disagree with the version of history presented by the exhibition, a version that has Agnes Martin as the sole female artist represented. In contrast, *Inside the Visible* has engendered a passionate and re/markable debate. The prominent visitors' book at the entrance to the exhibition has become the forum for this debate.

The visitors' book, along with videos, artists notes and Netscape connections provides an imposing entrance to *Inside the Visible*. Armed with exhibition notes and catalogues, the visitor sets off on an 'elliptical' journey. It is a heady experience and judging from the visitors' book, does not please everyone.

*Inside the Visible* includes the work of thirty two women artists, selected from the 1930-40s, 1960-70s and the 1990s; periods of profound political, social and economic change. The thematic clusters and the layout of the gallery space evoke "nomadic" movement, "not only literally that of cyclic rhythm but more importantly, that of the



Nadine Taseel, *Untitled (Self-Portrait)*, 1992

and pass through the space and exit from the other. In watching her feet to avoid the hairballs on the floor, the viewer's face is brushed by invisible lengths of hair hanging from the ceiling. It evokes a sense of disgust and prohibition.

The exhibition has many of these small, almost invisible encounters. It is not an exhibition of the 'grand narrative' but rather operates in a quiet, thoughtful way. Joelle Tuerlinckx's projected pinpoints of light at floor level shift my viewpoint elsewhere. In taking the point where wall meets floor, Tuerlinckx finds another space and one either falls over her work or looks closely. They made me look. In propping up her projector with a local Perth phone book and bits of an old polystyrene cup, Tuerlinckx makes me wonder whether she was 'making do' or whether she was careless in her work? Joelle Tuerlinckx and Anne Veronica Janssen came to Perth to install their work. Janssen's *Untitled (Exit)*, a sound recording of an exit stairwell handrail, is invisible to the eye. It 'tolls' out

from somewhere within the belly of the art gallery. It suggests nostalgia, being somewhere other than the here-and-now.

Seen in the here-and-now, *Inside the Visible* sits in a strategic relationship to the *Modern Masters*. Artists in both exhibitions have been concerned with "new beginnings", with bringing the invisible into the realm of the visible. What marks them as different is "difference" and the way it has been represented and circulated in history. It is easy to appear confident when defined as a "modern master". It is much more difficult to intervene in that Modernist history and speak anew, with confidence, without being incorporated or rejected by the globalised

art world.

The concern to rethink 'difference' was a prime agenda in the theoretical writings accompanying *Inside the Visible*. Artist/theorist, Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger's conceptions of "co-emergence" and the "matrixial" became the buzz words in and around the exhibition. The excitement produced by her theorisation lies in its ability to think beyond the impasse of difference as incorporation or rejection.

The first art(iculations) forum (held at PICA), which brought together Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger and Julie Dowling, created a meaningful bridge between the two exhibitions. While Lichtenberg Ettinger's work operates at the borderline of visibility, Dowling's paintings 'work' in the borderlines between Aboriginal and Western representations. In this, I believe,

they are groping to articulate something like a 'new' identity, an identity which nevertheless (like the work in *Inside the Visible*) traces back in time and experience.

Julie Dowling's work is described in the catalogue as dealing with "confrontational issues, portraying prejudice, racism, a sense of loss and sadness" (Tjalaminu Mia). Art criticism tends to label her a 'political artist'. Whilst it is true that much of her practice opens out into the political realm, it is much more than that. Julie Dowling's discussion of her attempts to reconcile her Aboriginal heritage with her Catholic upbringing in works such as *Hail Mary, Mother of God* (1996), points to a function in art in addition to its signifying function. In Aboriginal art, the work performs, it has power. For Julie this sits in an interesting relation to Catholic notions of transubstantiation.

Tjalaminu Mia points out in her essay, that art "is the core element in preserving

and promoting the understanding of spiritual beliefs as an essential part of Aboriginal life until the present day". Many of the women exhibiting in *Daughters of the Dreaming* are senior law women who have responsibilities as custodians of their 'country'. Their painting reflects this position. In this respect then, the quest to make the invisible visible, is a doomed enterprise for non-Aboriginal viewers. And whilst we struggle to find its 'meaning' we may just miss the 'pulsation' that dances in and through these works or fail to notice how many of these senior law women have only recently taken to painting 'their' country. In this, I think there may be a clue to articulating something like a new identity; not looking elsewhere, just being there. It suggests embodied, situated knowledge as a "new beginning".

Barbara Bolt



Julie Dowling, *Hail Mary*

state of exile, fragmentation and uncertainty" (de Zegher). This curatorial emphasis has resulted in an exhibition that appears anxious and self-conscious. In rejecting a linear, historical approach for a nomadic one, de Zegher has risked cutting the work off from its political, social and economic context: a context that helps make sense of the work for the viewer. Works such as Martha Rosler's *Vital Statistics of a Citizen Simply Obtained* (1977) suffers badly through this dislocation.

Understandably, it is works produced in the 90s, in particular the installation and video works that respond to de Zegher's curatorial strategy. Mona Hatoum's *Recollections* stands 'between clusters', between the weaving of water and words and parts off/for. It is a work that creates discomfort for the viewer. S/he stands at one door unsure if s/he is allowed to enter

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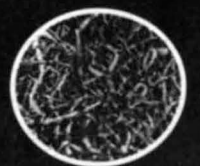
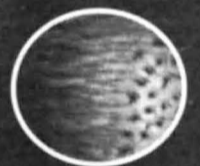
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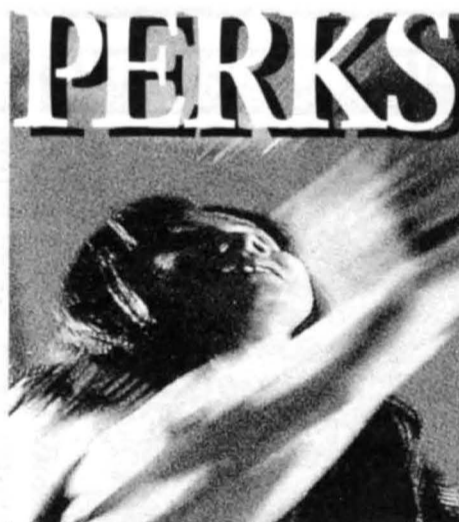
# What on earth is that sound?

Edward Scheer in conversation with Daryl Buckley of Elision and visiting UK composer Richard Barrett

There's something genuinely disconcerting about these guys, the combination of a seriousness in their approach to music and a personal lightness of touch which their work does little to prepare you for. Barrett is an emerging heavyweight in contemporary music composition in Europe, one of the leading lights of the "new complexity" movement. Buckley's group Elision have built an enviable reputation, again largely in Europe, as innovative interpreters of contemporary repertoires with an uncompromisingly radical attitude to the presentation of the music, treating each piece as a score for a total art work, involving installation artists to design sets for the performances and taking their audiences on a journey, not only through the music but through the performance space itself, most recently at the Goethe-Institut in Sydney and the Midland railyards in Perth WA, where they performed Barrett's new composition *Opening of the Mouth* for the 1997 Festival of Perth. I spoke with them about this and new/old music.

ES I've just been listening to the *Etcetera* CD (Elision/Richard Barrett 1993 KTC 1167) before this interview but the problem with it for me was that I couldn't do anything else. I kept having to stop to ask myself, "What are they doing there?" and "What on earth is that sound?" So I found myself wishing for Eric Satie and his furniture music.

RB Well Satie was a pioneer of a kind of music that quite a lot of people have made a lot of money out of since then, like the stuff that's playing in hotels and airports



## The most unusual game of badminton you'll ever see.

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Ute Wasserman, *Opening of the Mouth*, Goethe-Institut

Heidrun Löhr

and which was eventually called ambient music. On the other hand the function of the kind of music that I write and Daryl plays is that the mind has to separate it from everything that surrounds it. It's interesting that of the visual artists I know, many of them have a particular attitude to music which is often that, while they might be involved in whatever the cutting edge of contemporary artists are doing, they have no idea what the musical equivalent to that is. When you ask them what sort of music they liked they usually say Schubert or somebody like that. Whereas for myself, as someone whose involved in carrying on the process of thought in musical terms, I'm interested in the point that's been reached by various other disciplines, eg the sciences. The other point is that you talk to a visual artist and they say, 'Oh I love music and I always listen to music while I'm painting'. Well I don't look at paintings when I'm composing, and why is that?

ES Well maybe it's because you can't. Isn't it that old 'ineluctable modality of the visible' problem, that you somehow can't avoid being consumed by it?

RB It's difficult to talk about music in terms of that analogy but it's a quality I would like it to have. And if you couldn't focus on anything else this morning then maybe I've already achieved something.

ES Daryl what is it about contemporary music and Richard's music in particular that interests you?

DB I think it's really strongly located in the physicality of the relationship between the performer and the instrument. As somebody who spends their life living and

breathing with a musical instrument, I know that you tend to integrate it into your posture, into your thinking, how you play it is ingrained into your muscles, it's an entire choreography that's built and learned around it and what Richard does is he composes, if you like, into the grain of that relationship and puts you into a position where you have to reinvent it quite substantially. There's a certain amount of pain

in that and a certain exhilaration. There's also a level of invention because it poses a lot of questions back to you as a player and I think that's the thing that I love. It's not just the sound world he's conjuring, but how I experience it physically, that extra stretch or that strain, or that particular vibration against my body or that particular reconception of my instrumental practice.

ES Richard, some of the arrangements in *Opening of the Mouth* call for some pretty heterogeneous instrumentation, for example koto, mandola, 10 string guitar. Do you ever, in the style of Cage, compose for non-musical instruments?

RB Anything that makes a sound might possibly have a function somewhere. It tends to be in the percussion department that things like that are used, like in the Schneebett (Snowbed) section of *Opening of the Mouth* (not played in Sydney). The last part is played by the percussionist on a suspended door with a sledge hammer. A percussionist is going to be skilled at producing sounds with unusual objects because they have to do it all the time. If you bring in other objects that they may not have played before, they can take to it relatively easily and it's not like asking a violin player to blow down a hose pipe, something they wouldn't have the technique to do. For our next project, which is an opera on the simple topic of the end of the world, I'm planning to have a number of special percussion instruments built.

ES It seems to me that Elision's approach to music has always been to treat it as a total art form, that you always think very carefully about every single aspect of the mise en scene so that it's not just guys in

black shirts playing instruments but there's an attention to every aspect of the performance. That's what makes the group unique and so it's surprising that you don't do more opera given that is your direction.

DB I think the installation projects like *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the *Opening of the Mouth*, and the one after which is called *Earth* with Timothy O'Dwyer down a mineshaft, these site specific installations offer us a way of responding to performing in Australia and perhaps making a departure from the European concert hall even though we don't have the population density. And location is important too in that the poetics of a space like a mineshaft can add to the music in a way that a sanitised environment like a concert hall can't.

RB Everything is supposed to fit in the concert hall which means that nothing really does. But the first step in music as a total art is to think about composing programs rather than composing pieces. Why for instance, shouldn't the music have some sort of overarching structure to it which means it's basically one large composition, and having gone that far why not involve some sort of quasi-composition in creating the environment for it, and then before you know it you're in the world of theatre, just from keeping in mind artistic objectives that arose in the first place from a musical point of view.



Crow, installation, *Opening of the Mouth*, Goethe-Institut

Heidrun Löhr

DB One of the things that I intensely dislike about opera is that stylisation in which you somehow gut the impact of what's happening. Every night someone is raped on stage in the same way that in American movies 100 people are shot every ten minutes. It's the evisceration of this kind of human experience which opera repeats. But working with installation on the other hand means that somebody has got the smell of rotting fish heads and a pile of maggots going up their nostril or that somebody goes there not to think about the comfort of their seat or whether they've got the front row or when they take their toilet break but they're there to be there and to be inside the work.

ES Opera such as it is generally practiced in this country always reminds me of that line from Lyotard that the repetition of a historical impossibility is the essence of parody.

RB I've got nothing against 19th century opera just against people who continue to write it in the 20th.

Richard Barrett was commissioned by the Festival of Perth to compose *Opening of the Mouth* and is a guest of the British Council newIMAGES program

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# The inner game of badminton

John Potts interviews Jon Rose prior to the premiere of his Percy Grainger work, *Perks*, for Brisbane's 4th Biennial Festival of Music

*Jon Rose has spent the last twenty years, as he puts it, "trying to re-write the history of the violin". This grand ambition has taken many paths: actual physical reconstructions of the instrument, including triple neck versions, bizarre attachments, and giant 15 metre violins; remarkable performances, including marathon 12 hour concerts, performances on top of buildings, playing fences in the outback using the violin as a bow; improvisation techniques, including performances with other improvising musicians; plugging the violin into electronic feedback circuits, both analogue and digital; the invention of mythical violinists—the Rosenbergs—in a delightfully askew version of music history; interventions into actual musical history in book, radio and performance formats.*

*This last mentioned string to a multi-stringed bow incorporates many radio productions. The most recent for ABC Classic FM's The Listening Room is a re-writing of music history which has Bach's wife inventing sewing machine and ironing keyboards. Similar historical incursions have dealt with Paganini, Mozart and Beethoven. Rose has also composed an interactive performance work, *Perks*, based on the extraordinary Australian composer Percy Grainger, which will be performed at the Brisbane Biennial Festival of Music.*

*Perks features Rose on violin and Stevie Wishart on hurdy gurdy along with two badminton players whose rackets trigger—via electronic devices—video images and musical material. The musical component is Rose's quotation from Grainger's early works, themselves drawn from folksong. The two sides of the badminton net represent a duality of the human mind most severely expressed in Grainger's own personality: the same mind created singular musical innovation and appalling racial bigotry.*

*JP But stepping back from the net, what have been the driving forces in your career? And why the focus on the violin?*

JR I studied the violin as a kid in England, and I rebelled against it. I wanted to improvise on it, but that wasn't allowed at my school. So when I took it up again, the first thing I did was work out my own improvisation language for it. Then, I started to build a whole history around it, to reconstruct history as I'd like it. One reason I was reluctant to do Bach for such a long time was because he's my favourite composer, and I couldn't come to terms with how I'd deal with it. Then I found a way in, through his wife.

The other side is to take the violin and put it in places it wasn't designed for, like in the desert, or in the sea, or supermarkets. Then there's changes to the instrument itself. I've built over 25 deconstructed violins. There's one with wheels, like a lawnmower. Then I've always been interested in electronics, building amplifiers inside the violin, and in the last 10 years, using digital technology. One system I built is an ultrasound for violin with MIDI, which measures the movement of the bowing arm. The other system is bow pressure to MIDI. Both are improvisation mediums: they're very unreliable in that you can't get the same



Jon Rose

thing twice, because a bow is 'organic'—it depends on the weather, the room humidity, how tight you make it, how you use it. It's the motor of how to play the violin, but it's also the motor for the MIDI stuff. How they react is up to you as an improviser. It's a very schizophrenic existence.

*JP Did the emergence of digital electronics create a more expansive space for your approach?*

JR Without a doubt. I was waiting for that possibility, because I'd done everything possible to the violin. I'd been happy working on radio, because radio was virtual reality as soon as it was invented. It meant that any place that made a sound, you could go there, and there were no boundaries. That way of thinking is where I'm happiest. Now, with

interactive systems, you can go anywhere, if it makes a sound.

*JP How did Perks originate?*

JR For me the most perverse and interesting composer of the 20th century, out in another stratosphere, is Percy Grainger. People talk about Cage and the others, but they're like parish priests compared to this guy. He was extreme, he was very uneven in his output, but he was an extraordinary Jekyll and Hyde personality. One side was a childlike, Paul Klee-type figure, with completely original ideas. On the other side was a racist dog. You can read it in his book of letters from 1901 to 1914, where he switches his targets—he's completely irrational about it. He despised Latin-based words in English, he thought we should purify the language and get rid of the Latin and French words. He started developing his own Anglo-Saxon based language. For *Perks*, I fabricated some letters that he could easily have written by following very closely his style and content. I made them concentrate on the subject of badminton, and related subjects to do with evolution. That's what the piece comes down to.

*JP Evolution?*

JR Our lack of it. Grainger's an extreme example of it, that we're fundamentally fucked up. We can't conceive of anything outside that duality: we have to hate, we have to love, we have to always make hierarchies. I think this is an area to explore. Forget about cyberspace; if we can ever come to terms with this, we'll have achieved something. There's a quote from somewhere: "If the brain was so simple that we could understand it, then we would be so simple that we couldn't". And I don't think we ever will. We have some metaphors for it, and we know where certain things go on in the brain, but we can't know how it works. In *Perks*, the analogy is with two sides of the brain—and the brain is fighting with itself, all the time.

*Perks, May 28-31, City Hall Auditorium, 4th Biennial Festival of Music, Brisbane*

## Best and last

The Brisbane Biennial Festival of Music exits with edge

The first Brisbane Biennial got off to a powerful start under the direction of Anthony Steel, but was too radical for some. It was replaced by a relatively populist event (with a few sharp edges) under the direction of Artistic Advisors composer-conductor Richard Mills and composer Jonathan Mills, and Chief Executive Officer Nicholas Heyward. The cautious approach seems to have paid off in generating audiences, sponsorship and critical approval, and has allowed the trio to shape a more challenging 4th Biennial (this team's third festival).

Sadly, this will be the last Biennial as Arts Minister Joan Sheldon continues her restructuring of government arts management in Queensland (Maryanne Lynch's article in *RealTime* 17, "A new bottom line", proved curiously prophetic when Sheldon sacked the head of Arts Queensland, Greg Andrews, in March). The Biennial will be absorbed into the Brisbane Festival, which got off to a very tame start in 1996. At the Sydney launch of the Biennial, Mills, Mills and Heyward restricted their expectations of continuity to the hope that Composers' Week will be part of the 1998 Brisbane Festival. It's a pity that Australia's only large scale music festival (there are smaller more adventurous

events across the country) has given way to another standard arts festival.

Sparkling amidst the predictable offerings of Brahms, Strauss, Mozart, Mahler and Vine come gospel, Creole-Portuguese and Caribbean folk, Finnish and New Guinea folk-pop, Korean classical, diverse *a capella* works and a rich vein of rarities and challenging new compositions and artists.

On the opera front, a concert version of Erich Korngold's rarely seen or heard (though it is now available on CD) *Die Tote Stadt* (The Dead City) demands attention. A fully staged version would have guaranteed a flood of interstate visitors. The all male La Gran Scena from New York will do their diva acts with a mix of campy and seriousness. An oratorio by Elliot Goldenthal, *Fire, Water, Paper*, composed to a poem by a Vietnamese Catholic nun who burned herself to death as a protest against the Vietnam War, is another unusual choice—Goldenthal, the composer of soundtracks for *Batman Forever* and *Alien 3*, is a serious populist.

For the adventurous, plan your program now. Jon Rose is bound to generate fascination and debate in his handling of the music and personality of Percy Grainger (see John Potts' interview above) in *Perks*.

Sarah Hopkins, whose cello sonorities can be massive, both ethereal and alarming, is in an intriguing collaboration with Brisbane choir Canticum. Perihelion's program includes two commissions: Gerard Brophy's *Crimson Songs* (based on Peta Spear's anthology of poems, *My Sweet Sex*) and Elena Kats-Chernins' development of a fragment of Schubert's *Du bist die Ruh*. Pipeline's *Trombone Resonances* embraces new music and improvisation under the direction of trombonist Simone de Haan.

Synergy will be joined by a strong lineup Mike Nock (piano), Trilok Gurtu (an astonishing percussionist) and Palle Mikkelborg (jazz composer-trumpeter). Their program includes works by Nock, Westlake, Pratt, Askill, Gurtu and Mikkelborg. If Gurtu is to your taste and you want to take that exhilarating step into the unknown, then you'll not want to miss the Spaniard Pedro Estevan with his virtuosic play of drums and body in a program that includes works by Glokobar and Stockhausen.

Elision ensemble continue the feast of works musically and culturally new to our ears when they join Norwegian conductor Christian Eggen, Korean performers Min Young-Chi and Chang Jae Hyo to play works by Brian Ferneyhough, Liza Lim, Akira Nishimura, Manbang Yi and David Young.

As well there's an extensive jazz program, some fine Baroque programs (counter tenor Andreas Scholl is a must), Nigel Westlake conducting his film scores for *Babe* and *Antarctica* with Carl Vine's 'percussion'

Symphony 5 with Synergy. The acclaimed all-female Anonymous 4 *a capella* group from New York will sing masses and vespers from the 12th and 14th centuries, and will make for an interesting comparison with the 12 voice, all-male *a capella* choir Chanticleer from San Francisco with their wide ranging repertoire.

Dance also features in the program with new works to European music from the Queensland Ballet and Les Ballets de Monte Carlo dancing Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*. The Monte Carlo second bill includes the must-see Australian premiere of William Forsythe's *Vile Parody of Address*. The adventurous should add this to their program.

At their Sydney launch, the festival's artistic advisors spoke of their prime responsibility, the need to nurture Australian music, something that normal mainstream concert life does not normally do, certainly not to any significant extent. The Biennial is an international event, but its commitment to Australian music playing and composition and the increased and adventurous role these play in the whole event makes it especially regrettable that this is the last Biennial Festival of Music. It would have been interesting to see where it would have gone next, how far it could take its audience and what more it could do for Australian music. In the meantime, there's much to enjoy and be challenged by in this 4th Biennial. KG

*4th Biennial Festival of Music, Brisbane, May 23-June 9*

# The landscape of continual surfaces

Linda Marie Walker enters the sound world of visiting artist Johannes S. Sistermanns

You write as you listen. Or, you write as you read, which is a listening. And which we know as a Barthe(i)an expression. Or something, rather, that is outside of expression, but is expressive, is material, flirtatious, and violent, and is about an erotic relation to methods of working, to attention which in itself is desirous. I imagine this is why he is quoted over and over, for want of hearing him, as in 'I want to listen to him again': "Thus, what I enjoy in a narrative is not directly its content or even its structure, but rather the abrasions I impose upon the fine surface: I read on, I skip, I look up, I dip in again".

And so what is it one hears? It is the voice of another, what or whoever that 'another' might be. A drum, a bird, a tree, Rhonda; and then that voice in, or with, all the other sounds. Footsteps, unknown, coming closer. The noise one tries to make sense of, and then sighs at, when it's just the neighbour. Still, every sound is precisely different, as if a world.

The work of Johannes S. Sistermanns wants to keep sound as sound. And this is sometimes unbearably raw and sometimes strangely beautiful, sometimes full to overflowing, and sometimes empty to distraction. In all the work I've heard so far there is room to think. This is probably what attracts, concerns, touches me; that a compositional style gives and forms space in which 'another' can work, and wonder, and become text or speech. Therefore, this is not work of calm account, or ambient work which 'lines' or 'papers' the actual space one finds oneself in.

Sistermanns is a German composer, musician, installation and performance artist who has recently visited Australia, giving one concert at the University of Adelaide. On February 11, his radio piece *I hear you think* was premiered on Radio SR Saabruucken and Radio WDR Cologne. It's this piece that I am referencing here, and asking: what is this language, of voices and sounds, this performative placing of both together, which makes 'things' for the ears, this invisible material that permeates the physical and emotional bodies. The grammar or fabric of this language is indecisive and irregular, using voice to voice the vibration (the stutter and murmur) that voice is. For example, hearing the voice, a young voice in this case, say 'voice' over and over, and then hearing it said by adults in many languages. This is an investigation of the sound of sound as it comes from and goes to beings who are human. And as I hear 'voice', I 'hear' Clarice Lispector writing this: "It could scarcely be called singing, in so far as singing means using one's voice musically. It was scarcely

vocal, in so far as the voice tends to utter words. Flamenco singing precedes utterance, it is human breathing." In Sistermanns' sound-works I hear breathing, the breath just before and after 'voice'.

Kafka wrote in his journal: "I am sitting in my room, i.e. the noise headquarters of the whole apartment. I hear all the doors slamming, etc." Sound is over immediately, gone at the very moment of arrival. Sistermanns' works are occasions where anything might happen, where one sound does not predict the next. And although production is of a high quality, the event of low quality is treated seriously. So, it could be said the subject of his work is duration, what might be called 'is'. And the complexity of 'is' as both present and presence is not overtly obvious. It is accepted as 'life', nothing too profound or essential, and yet there, clear as a bell, soft as a wound, as distinct and crucial elements of our time on the planet. (Sticks hit the hard floor—in 'I hear you think'—and several people say



Johannes S. Sistermanns' *I hear you think*

numbers, and then there is the sound of what might be a huge engine, hissing and hushing, turning on its own axis into another 'creature', another space of shuffling papers, mucking-about, searching.) It just 'is', this complexity. It can be no more or less than itself, and cannot be made simpler for listening. So listening then becomes the meaning, and the reason to hear; the reason is not to make meaning, but to be inside meaning, as if meaning is the movement of the mouth at the start of the word.

There's no point describing this one work, although one is tempted to tell of the brushing or scraping now being heard. The sound of writing, I am sure, of something sharp on something cold. It is a composition, an invention, music—and here I intend invention as 'calling', and this 'calling' is always an excessive energy, a provoking

necessity, one which conveys sorrow and danger, and must in its urgency, change the position of oneself in and to the world—and other thoughts come to be, that one remembers and creates, and dances to and for (to and fro). A quiet, terrible piece, with menace perhaps, that makes one laugh through associations, and these associations are of the order of Joseph Beuys, say. Ulmer writes: "...when we are told that Beuys seeks to change the very concept of 'object' we may assume that what is involved is this notion of the object as 'energy field' or 'transmitter': 'The object is intended as a transmitter radiating ideas from a deep background in time through an accretion of layers of meaning and biography...' (Beuys)."

This is not 'sound' that tells or re-presents without interference, although it revels in what (we believe) is familiar, using as material, as substance, the unspectacular. That stuff which moves over and through us, gazing at and grazing us, like 'film'. That films us, as we go about our chores, in the midst of whatever: "To listen to someone, to hear his voice, requires on the listener's part an attention open to the interspace of body and discourse and which contracts neither at the impression of the voice nor at the expression of the discourse." (Lacan). So, stop me speaking, if you can, stop me listening, if you can.

Anyway, this morning, in the mood of *As time goes by*, with its tenses and tensions, in the tone of difference and deference, of final request (with Abba singing in Spanish on the radio), I needed to hear (I confess) The New Riders Of The Purple Sage 'doing' *Gypsy Cowboy*. It was as I remembered, almost, this personal past that suddenly appeared, this recollection that might stand for re-information.

*I hear you think* and the overall work of Sistermanns is not about 'information', or the memory of information, that I longed for and experienced, say. Still, I do not expect writing and listening to be different than the wind. I do not expect reading to be different than sound. And yet always different, and not so as to be oppositional, or irrelational. When I read, I read to hear, like the waves, when I hear, I watch, etc.

What is it, or might it be, to listen to words as mobile communities, as fleeting and endless, as their etymologies suggests? A breaking apart, cutting, ethereal listening, which could (as a possibility) generate

monstrous territories without didactics. A listening which doesn't seek or plot good sense and moral.

Okay, the 'voice' is lapped-up, and this is the condition and circumstance of sonority. And is consumed alone, and is at the mercy of the self who is named 'me', and is porous, guarded, and repellent too. As with reading, attention roams, waiting to be beckoned.

Perhaps I am getting a little closer to Sistermanns' motivation now: it is connected to and touched by the heart, and is at the same time the heart, and at the heart of things visible and invisible. And could be said to be the body of the heart, the space which resonates with fluidity. The space for the only duration there must be: the terminal. Sound, in its making, in the recording of it, is the calling of the heart, as flesh as ears, into what is a silence, a death, a doing-away, an inside-out, and an outside-in, a building without walls. The heart is the pulsing 'isness' of moments, the moment to moment facing of the body which hears the body of oneself or another speak, cry, scream. And this facing, the face of this, can never be anticipated (as Sistermanns' work can never be predicted). And can only be then a memory faithfully recollected. At the heart of memory (I imagine, pretend) is the drive for what might come about, what might afterwards be recorded or recognised or refracted.

Getting closer to Sistermanns' work, bit by bit. And this doesn't mean surrounding or capturing it, so as to bring it to light, or reveal and expose it. This slow approach is the only route, other than interpretation, which often seems like a memorialising. The work is too alive and living, and far from reiteration, documentation, interview, conversation, and dramatisation. Although there is a traumatised limit reached for and then bypassed at the first sign of 'theatre', a ruinous beginning and end remains. This can be read, for example, when there is laughter, or repetition, or low or high abstract sound, as if after tragedy or before elation.

The quality of every sound of the world, world as voice, the object-value and structure of that, the air for example, that one breathes yet rarely hears as it enters the mouth and nose, and that one might even distance oneself from; these, and their impossibility are the matter of Sistermanns' music and gallery practices. It might be called the landscape of continual surfaces, which are fragile, tenuous, and awkward: "...the singing voice is not the breath but indeed that materiality of the body emerging from the throat, a site where the phonic metal hardens and takes shape (Barthes)."

## From Baroque to Broadway

Song Company hosts Chanticleer's visit to Sydney

Imagine a chorus that can sing Renaissance polyphony and then the theatre songs of Irving Berlin and Harold Arlen, as well as spirituals, gospel and jazz, with equal aplomb—that's Chanticleer.

Chicago Tribune

A rare flow-on bonus to Sydney from the 4th Brisbane Biennial Festival of Music is a single concert from Chanticleer. The San Francisco-based all male *a capella* choir brings its internationally celebrated 'vocal orchestra' to Brisbane in May for three very different performances and then on to Sydney, where they are being hosted by the Song Company.

Founded in 1978 by tenor and current Artistic Director Louis Botto, this ensemble of twelve male voices ranging from counter-tenor to bass have gathered a

remarkable reputation for their interpretation of vocal literature from Renaissance to jazz, from gospel to new music. It's an unusually broad spectrum for the challenge that vocal music brings, specialisation in one historical period is often exacting enough. There'll be a lot of critical ears listening out for Chanticleer's capacity to bring expertise and feeling to so many periods and forms.

Indicative of their range is their Biennial programming. Chanticleer will perform sacred music (*Renaissance to 20th Century*) in St John's Cathedral, Sunday May 25 at 3.00 pm; contemporary works (*Baroque to Broadway*) in the QPAC Concert Hall on Friday and Saturday, May 23-24 at 8.00 pm; and gospel (*Gospel at the Symphony*) at the QPAC Hall on Friday and Saturday, May 23-24.



Chanticleer

In Sydney, at the Town Hall on May 29, 8pm, Chanticleer will perform motets by Josquin, Lassus, Ramsey and, especially appealing, Poulenc, along with spirituals, folk and popular songs.

An unusual fact about Chanticleer, even an alarming one in its implicit comment on US culture, is their claim to be the only full-time vocal ensemble in the US. The Brisbane and Sydney visits are all in a busy year's work for the company. Chanticleer's 1996-97 season includes a tour to 20 states of the US and visits to Sweden, Japan, Singapore and Taiwan. Following a collaboration with Christopher Hogwood on the music of Antonio Vivaldi, they return to New York's 92nd Street for a concert of Mexican Baroque music with the Janus Ensemble and polish off the year with a season of Christmas concerts at the Metropolitan Museum. KG

Chanticleer, Sydney Town Hall, May 29, 8pm. Enquiries: The Song Company, 02 9364 9457

# CD reviews

## Sydney Dreaming

The Contemporary Singers, conducted by Antony Walker, compositions by Stephen Adams, Anne Boyd, Julian Yu, Matthew Hindson, Raffaele Marcellino, Jennifer Fowler, Elliot Gyger  
ABC Classics, 1996  
CD D45510-2

Can we reconstruct the bygone and the dead? The compositions in this CD seem to. Stephen Adams' *Sydney Dreaming* seems an inadvertent homage to Anne Boyd's 1975 *As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams* of 1975 with slides and stretched harmonies an echo passed down twenty years. Julian Yu intentionally reconfigures Bach through Eastern-influenced ornament and embellishment; Matthew Hindson resurrects Elvis to swagger like a postmodern Rhinestone ghost surprised to be re-lamented by a loyal crowd. Whilst conductor/singer Antony Walker does a good job as the cowboy who can't quite believe he's survived all the drugs and adulation, yet, for me, it's Raffaele Marcellino's *Responsorio* and Jennifer Fowler's *Vene Sancte Spiritus...*, which, though based in older traditions of indigenous Calabrian hymnody and medieval plainchant respectively, find their own roots in real landscapes that are not just studied metafiction, but acts of faith speaking, struggling, and finding their own ground. Interestingly, in these pieces, the choir seems to work less at meaning and marvelling at discords than being in the music as the discords stretch sound.

Elliot Gyger's *Five Bells* (set to Kenneth Slessor's poem) certainly falls into the whirl of water which drowned Slessor's friend, but lacks submergence into the "dark warship...there below" in which Joe died and gives little space to the life his memory lives in the inexplicable world of the drowned. Gyger's piece is relentlessly articulate; Slessor's text is harrowingly explicit about the unliving silence between waves of water and peals of sound. In much of this CD, harmonies and choir tone clutter; more discretion would help to better serve the landscapes being formed.

Zsuzsanna Soboslay

## Michael Askill

### Free Radicals

Black Sun/Celestial Harmonies 15027-2

### The Sound Of Gondwana

Black Sun/Celestial Harmonies 15026-2

### The Masters Of Calm Vol. 1

Calm Centre/Celestial Harmonies CALM 003

These three releases through Celestial Harmonies provide different angles on blended music styles. *Free Radicals* is a CD version of the music originally commissioned by the Sydney Dance Company work of the same name. In the dance version, the music is performed by three percussionists on stage with the dancers; on CD, the percussionists Alison Low Choy, Alison Eddington and Askill himself are joined by David Hudson on didjeridu and voice. The resulting interplay is compelling. The didjeridu locks into rhythmic shapes set up by the percussion, sometimes propelling the music along, sometimes diverging onto its own path. Hudson's vocalising, along with the voices of The Sydney Dance Company, sets up further patterns. Broken into nine tracks, *Free Radicals* is a little too muted at times, drifting off into a musical background, but for most of its sixty or so minutes it offers an engaging mix of rhythms and textures.

David Hudson also appears on *The Sound Of Gondwana*, a collection from four contemporary Aboriginal performers of the didjeridu. Matthew Doyle, Mark Atkins, Alan Dargin and Hudson present a diversity of playing styles and effects. Anyone who considers the didjeridu a limited instrument, or didjeridu playing 'monotonous', will be startled by this CD. Dargin's three pieces use drones and subtle textural shifts, accompanied by a sympathetic setting, from producer Michael Atherton, of percussion and synthesiser. This musical synthesis is, thankfully, a long way from New Age muzak; the didjeridu often leaps out of the setting with some astonishing sonorities. All the performers provide works of great interest, ranging across traditional playing, imitation of nature and animals, to distinctive approaches. Although the record company jumped the gun a bit in subtitled this album "176,000 Years In The Making", given recent doubts surrounding that figure, this is without doubt an impressive and valuable recording.

The same cannot be said for *Masters of Calm Vol. 1*, although this CD may well be pressed into service wherever calm is sought. The trouble with this kind of music is that it should be content to exist as use-value music: that is, for producing a certain effect such as relaxation. Regrettably, the CD cover trumpets a quotation describing this as "art of the highest order", a claim difficult to sustain. It's certainly an eclectic gathering, drawing together Dr Riley Lee on shakuhachi or Zen flute, guitarist Colin Wilson, Matthew Doyle on

didjeridu, Tina Harris on bass, with Genevieve and Kim Lemon providing vocals. Dr Lee's flute is haunting, but the mix of styles is not convincing, and when the soothing female vocals enter, the album plunges into New Age schlock. JP

*Within our reach, a symphony of the Port River soundscapes* by Chester Schultz

The Waterhole

CD winDmud 1 1995

Orders: 08 849 7558; cost: negotiable

This one came by post from the composer and has become a favourite. Neither bland watery ambience the one hand nor Rik Rue delicately treated edges of the ocean on the other, *Within our reach* is a documentary of the life of Adelaide's Port River that relies primarily on river sounds (waves, hulks, pontoons, shore surfaces, birds—very specifically identified), out of which emerge voices (yarns, folk and indigenous songs, snatches of talk) to form a thirteen part 'symphony'. The format is not unfamiliar to anyone who enjoys the expertise of ABC Audio Arts, but the ambition of the work, its directness, accessibility, clarity and independence make it particularly appealing—as well as its environmental concerns. As a child I spent a lot of time by the Port River and I find *Within our reach* moving and evocative, but never sentimental. Sound quality (analog cassette recordings from 1989-94) is good. The accompanying booklet is packed with information and backgrounds to each track. KG

# Radio reviews

*The Listening Room*, ABC Classic FM, Mondays 9 pm

*The Listening Room's* lineup for April breaks into two themes: family journeys and the night. The first two Mondays explore the past, family history, and geographical distance. On April 7, Kaye Mortley's *Stopover Bangkok* has a woman and her daughter in Bangkok en route to Paris. This transitional state is the scene for an aural meditation on displacement, lives travelling backwards and forwards. April 14's program continues this theme: Paul Carter considers 1966 recordings of himself, made in Berkshire, in *The Native Informant*. This is an interesting study of oneself as anthropological record; Carter suggests that the archive, even of himself, is more mute witness than informative "document". Janne Ryan's *Spellbound*, a similarly autobiographical work, is otherwise a quite different project. A deeply personal piece, it delves into the emotional reaches of grief, life and death.

The third and fourth weeks of April deal with night skies, in various real and metaphorical incarnations. April 21 has an intriguing trio of works: Virginia Madsen's *Dark Room 1*, which considers the dark "an endangered space"; Russel Stapleton's *Seeing Stars*, which proposes that our colonisation of the night has not been without cost; and Robyn Ravlich's re-reading of Van Gogh's famous painting in the light of recent theories and speculations. Given the hushed, darkened connotations of night skies, this theme is ideal for radio exploration. Each of these works, along with Roz Cheney's *Night On The South Massai Steppes* on April 28, is evocative of the mysteries of night. Sounds are used subtly and sparingly, with the odd surprise along the way, such as Stapleton's use of music derived from Pythagoras' Harmony of the Spheres.

*Radio Eye*, Radio National, Sundays 8.20 pm

*Radio Eye* in April splashes into sound itself in a range of programs about music, noise and technology. *My Echo, My Shadow and Me*, on April 6, is an aural net to catch sound as it bounces off walls, bodies, recording studios. Produced by Patrick Gibson, Tony Barrell and John Jacobs, this is a delight for lovers of sound and its shadows. The program's major obsession is not with echoes in the natural world, fascinating as they are, but with the technologies that treat sounds, layering them with reverb and other effects. Studio equipment can dress up a sound to simulate its presence in another space, or in an aural space that wouldn't otherwise exist. An evening listening to this program will train the ears to detect the qualities of sounds in space, real or synthetic.

Over the first two weeks of April, *Radio Eye* ventures around the world exploring the role of music, noise and technology. *Japanese Noise*, also on April 6, wrings distorted noise out of urban techno-scapes. This production by Matthew Leonard and John Blades lets us sample noise created by Japanese sound artists. Blasting out of reject equipment, this is not pretty, but neither is it pretty vacant. On April 13, we travel to Jamaica in Brent Clough's *Sound Systems*, a captivating profile of the musical—and cultural—power exercised by these mobile sonic juggernauts; while in *Songs From San Antonio*, Matthew Leonard surveys the blend of Europe and Mexico in Tejano music, with its complex social context. Both these pieces are audio travelogues in the best sense, combining information with imaginative radio composition. John Potts

# Celebrating music theatre

*Arias, Recent Australian Music Theatre*, John Jenkins & Rainer Linz, Red House Editions, Footscray, ISBN 0 646 30403 8

Read it in one hit. Loved it and have dipped back into it frequently. But then I would. This is the kind of easy to handle, nicely illustrated paperback that I'm desperate to see for dance and especially for contemporary performance in a country where serious documentation of the performing arts is rare, casual at best. Even so, *Arias* itself is sometimes a bit too casual. But, so grateful that it exists and for its ambitions, I feel a little guilty for carping about substantial inconsistencies. At a time when music theatre appears to be gaining greater prominence and acceptance, *Arias* represent a justifiable celebration.

*Arias* vividly recalls works you've seen and conjures up the unseen, works you know by word of mouth but which tyrannical distances prevented you from experiencing. It does this by offering synopses of the works, recollections from writers, composers, designers, a few singers and the odd critic along with slices of press interviews at the time the works were premiered. These are valuable historically, particularly in terms of motivation—for the careful reader a history of invention and determination unfolds—and of opposition to the hegemonic conventions of 19th century opera.

*Arias* announces itself as a "discursive, rather than critical, documentation". It does in fact offer a critical perspective here and there, crucially in its accounts of the main players, Chamber Made Orchestra and the Sydney Metropolitan Opera. Here and there, Jenkins and Linz grapple with the issue of interpretation, for example in the public responses to Andrée Greenwell's *Sweet Death*, and they worry at Jacqui Rutten's *Tresno*, teasing out the reason it doesn't work. Some of their better writing, occurs at this critical moment:

*Tresno's* closely woven and simple, often-repeated elements result in a sort of decorative fabric of stylised sound and movement. One has the impression of a faded tapestry returning to brief life before it is cast off and consigned once more to some forgotten corner of history.

And their final word on the work is a rare example of a clear exercise of critical judgment:

*Tresno*, of all Chamber Made pieces, feels constrained by its relationship to the story...The lasting impression is of the centrality of the narrative. Yet, the opposing demands of abstraction and representation often obscure it, to a point where it has little relationship to either the music or events on stage.

More often, there is a considerable distance between the authors and their material, as if they never saw the works, or if they did they are not moved to respond or to judge (or that their approval is implicit).

This could spell disaster. If you're looking for sustained argument you're not going to be sorely frustrated. If you're looking for straight documentation (and a good matching index) you'll be ropeable. *Arias* is an inconsistent cut and paste of a book, the best bits sparking amidst the historical ashes. However, it still manages to work, for amidst the deadpan documentation there are glimpses of the trajectories of composer careers (Greenwell, Edwards, Meale), of the significance of instrumentation (Chesworth; Broadstock on the electronic score; Friedl on interactive real-time MIDI control), of ideas and provocations (Vella, Horton, Kosky) and creative tensions (best reported in the account of the two productions of the Smetanin-Croggan *The Burrow*). Best of all, and most appropriate to its subject is the issue of process, the diverse ways a work can be created, something music theatre shares with its nearest kin, contemporary performance. All of these make

you greedy for more, and you don't always get it. Having been told, for example, how some works fared with audiences and critics, you wonder desperately about the fate of others—what has been created that is worthwhile, that might be worthy of revival.

This unevenness is worrying when it comes to the big picture. Opera Australia and the state operas are not the main subject of the book, but they have meagrely supported a handful of opera makers and so occupy a position in the book midway between the persistent innovators like Chamber Made and a multitude of small companies and groups who have flirted with opera or have instigated other kinds of music theatre and events (the net is cast very wide here, possibly too wide, but does admit some very significant practitioners—Doppio Teatro, Going Through Stages, Jonathan Mills—at particular historical moments). However the chapter on Opera Australia and the state opera companies is tasteful, bloodless, respectful even, with a focus largely on the composers and nothing on responses to the works. It reads like an opportunity lost.

For the innovators, the book is largely approving, especially for Chamber Made Opera (save the observations on *Tresno* cited earlier). Attempts to grasp the totality of a company's work are rare but very welcome:

*The sheer diversity of its productions has precluded Chamber Made from settling into a recognisable 'house style', though there seems an underlying penchant for the blackly comic, with a sort of contemporary Gothic sensibility undercutting any comfortable production gloss, plus an ironic and often witty investigation of some recurrent and highly operatic themes: death, excess, obsession, terror, disintegration and madness.*

Questions of the outcome of Chamber Made's critical engagement with opera and especially of its relationship with Australian culture are not raised, and clearly Jenkins and Linz don't see that as their job. Sydney Metropolitan Opera, however, gets relatively tougher treatment in another rare instance of a judgment delivered, if later tempered:

*One has the impression that the SMO is most comfortable (and successful) with works that aspire to innovation in their design and general 'feel', yet still rely strongly on story and familiar theatrical conventions... Particularly when it has mounted experimental work...there may have been problems in striking a balance between perceived audience expectations and a full realisation of the composer's original vision... Such judgments, of course, are always subjective, but what cannot be doubted is the company's commitment to the recent and the local and its bold approach to controversial or politically charged subject matter.*

Accurate criticism as this is, Calculated Risks, Seduction Opera, Opera Australia and the state companies simply don't get these moments of up close criticism, and Chamber Made goes unchallenged. Although not intended as a critical overview, *Arias* nonetheless manages to offer enough opinions—and omissions—to trigger debate.

*Arias* is an important documenting of the evolution of chamber opera and music theatre in Australia. A careful reading yields an intriguing history, and the focus on process, collaboration and artist opinion is truly welcome, as are the detailing of synopses and brief biographies. Its inconsistencies are infuriating, but nonetheless the discursiveness keeps the book accessible and the focussed largely on the artists we must credit with great and sustained invention. New works and companies and chamber opera gatherings are on the horizon—*Arias* is a timely celebration.

Keith Gallasch

# Intimate connections

Merlinda Bobis' *The War Trilogy* leads Annemarie Lopez to reflect on language and listening

In walking a busy street cluttered with the sounds of traffic, who has never heard a tune, unfamiliar yet compelling, that drew them into a doorway to demand of someone, anyone, "What is that music?" Our ears are our friends and our guides, we should pay more attention to them. They draw us to sounds we need to hear, they force us to change our path and take time to listen to things we think we don't have time for, to music and poetry. Music and poetry are seductive, they jolt us out of the distracted mode of attention in which we spend most of our time, and

to ease her homesickness and the distress of being a writer unable to write, she taught herself to dance traditional dances from the Philippines. And it was out of the rhythms of dancing that the metaphors for her writing began to emerge.

When the epic was finished, Merlinda then encountered the problems of publishing. Publishers in Australia didn't know what to make of it, it was unlike anything they had seen before. In this country "they are reluctant to cross to the other side of the river, unless you have a reputation like Rushdie". Merlinda then

Philippines, China and France. But here she discovered another problem. She began to wonder whether people were listening, or merely watching. People began to comment on the poetry, the beauty of the language, but still none of the Australian literary magazines published her work. Bobis noticed that people were commenting on the poetry only when it was written with her body. She suspected that she had become written into the text.

How then to write, without losing the rhythms or the music, but to be released from it? Merlinda had discovered that, just as poetic metaphors arose from her dancing, drama emerged from her poetry. A series of plays, *The War Trilogy* was conceived. "It is a text that will not need me," says Merlinda, "a text that other bodies can inhabit."

The trilogy begins with *Serena, Serenata*, the story of a Filipino war veteran who has fought with the US against the Japanese in WWII. His past is haunted by the brutal killing of his wife and the death of his comrade in arms, an American soldier. The central metaphor of the play is the serenade, the love song, which the veteran sings to an Australian woman with whom he has fallen in love. It is through the device of the serenade that the ghosts of the past are summoned and his story unfolds. The third play, *Promenade*, is an abstract and eternally postponed dance between

two lovers, prevented from embracing by their shadows. This was workshopped by Playworks in 1996 with choreographer Julie Ann Long and composer Sarah de Jong.

The second story, *Rita's Lullaby*, won the ABC's radio play competition and was developed at the Australian National Playwrights Conference. It tells the story of two children, refugees from war, who are playing in a park. Throughout the course of their teasing, game playing and the singing of children's lullabies, we discover that one is a pickpocket and the other a prostitute.

*The War Trilogy* is united by the theme of war and how it withers our capacity to make connections with others. But these are not works of miserablism. They reveal the wounds that each of us carry within us, and into which each of us retreat from the world. It is this wound, however, which is the origin of beauty and redemption. Above all, Merlinda stresses, these are compassion plays.

Structurally, the trilogy is linked by its poetic and dramatic use of music. The composer, Jim Cotter, who worked on the soundtrack for *Rita's Lullaby*, commented that only in working with a few writers has he ever found the musical logic and beauty of the work so manifest—Dorothy Hewett and Merlinda Bobis. Bobis' plays are written in both English and Filipino because "I do not want to rob the listener of the music of my language". As you stroll the byways of the soundwaves on your radio, and hear an unfamiliar but compelling concert of voices, lend them your ears.

*Rita's Lullaby* was broadcast on ABC Radio on April 1. Contact ABC Radio Tapes for a cassette copy.



Merlinda Bobis' *Cantata of the Warrior Woman, Daragang Magayon*

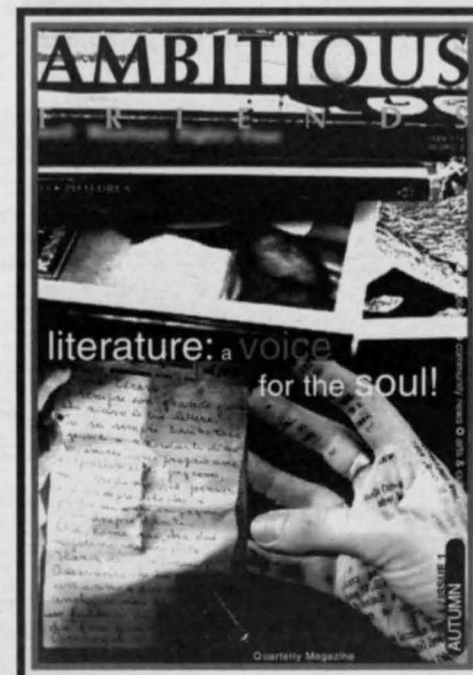
lead us astray. There is an intimate connection, which sometimes we may forget, between music, poetry and magic. You do not have to remind Merlinda Bobis of this—it is a truth she lives and breathes.

Merlinda Bobis arrived in Australia from the Philippines six years ago, to pursue a Doctorate of Creative Arts, for which she wrote an epic poem, *A Cantata of the Warrior Woman, Daragang Magayon*.

But when Merlinda arrived, she ran into writer's block. It was a year before she could work on the epic. During this time,

began to perform the text, drawing on the dances she had learnt and the Filipino tradition of epic chanting. In the Philippines, before colonisation and Catholicism, the shaman was the repository of literature, the custodian of the spirit and of the story. The shaman would sing in times of celebration, a special form of chanting, using a vocal technique where the sound originates in the throat, rather than the diaphragm, and a single voice may split into three which harmonise.

Merlinda has subsequently performed the *Cantata* in festivals across Australia, the



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# Spoken word review

David Malouf reads from *Poems 1959-89*  
Tall Poppies/Sonart Music Vision  
CD

The discovery of this Tall Poppies recording may come as a surprise to those who only know David Malouf the author, but it shouldn't: Malouf's prose is poetry. The supple transduction of ideas flowing through his more well known work belies the many years prior to becoming a novelist when David Malouf was a poet.

The works are easily categorised, the division resulting from the 1975 publication of *Johnno* which established Malouf as an author. His earlier poems are memoirs: *At My Grandmother's* and *Early Discoveries* recall Malouf's forebears, *The Year of the Foxes*, other idiosyncratic memories. Elsewhere he dubs himself "a boy...who never will learn to distinguish between perfect past and past conditional". However, by the 80s *First Things Last* anthology, Malouf's childhood museum of recollection has been expunged. *The Crab Feast*, from that period, is an erotic poem that arises from a polite meal. Like some gross intrusion, the speaker "slips into the furthest, sweetest corner" of the crab. Since the work is read by the poet, it exists almost as an empty vessel. There is not the interpretation that an actor, say, might produce. Since the case for authority is strong, the way to add to the quality of the disc would be to record it live. The audience would help create that extra dimension that would render delivery more dynamic. Tall Poppies may consider this for future releases in the *Australian Poets Reading* series.

Demetrius Romeo

## POWER

### PUBLICATIONS

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### The Filmmaker and the Prostitute

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modernism and masculinity

edited by Terry Smith

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the structure of iki

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# PANIC CONFERENCE

## MORALITY MEDIA CULTURE

Last year was a year of panics in Australia. Revelations were made about the sources of the panics, and figures emerged to fear and hate: killers, pedophiles, Asians. Other fears were more established, and often about new media: violent video games, Internet porn, even commercial television. A moral crisis is provoked and tough measures are called for. But whose crisis is this?



### SPEAKERS

- Paul Jones
- Jeannie Martin
- Fiona Allon
- George Morgan
- Catharine Lumby
- John Potts
- Philip Bell
- Lea Redfern
- Stephen Stockwell
- Sally Stockbridge
- Tim Dwyer
- Clarice Butkus
- Mark Evans
- Jason Sternberg
- David Marshall

PANIC is presented by Artspace, Media International Australia and the Department of Media and Communication, Macquarie University

*culture + theory + performance*

# INTER zone

curated by Nicholas Tsoutas

# 4

**Khanthamala Sourintha**

*Addict* <performance>

**Dr Yao Souchou**

*Oral Sex, Judicial Ruling and Other (Un)Natural Pleasures of Modernity*

**Yuji Sone**

*If a theorist can theorise 'performance', can't a performer perform 'theory'?* <performance>



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# Avant quoi?

Engaging with two new publications from Routledge, Boris Kelly reflects on the paucity of politics in Australian theatrical discourse

Drain, R. *Twentieth Century Theatre: A Sourcebook*, Routledge, London, 1995

Huxley, M. and Witts, N. (eds) *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, Routledge, London, 1996

Towards the end of last year a good deal of press coverage was afforded to speeches given by directors Barrie Kosky and Richard Wherrett on the subject of contemporary Australian theatre. Both men concluded that our theatre was in a state of crisis, though each provided his own spin on how the crisis manifested. Despite the differences in their aesthetic preferences, both men spoke from a position of centrality in the theatre establishment: Wherrett as a former director of the Sydney Theatre Company; Kosky as the *agent provocateur* of Opera Australia; and both as former artistic directors of major arts festivals. Their words were received as provocative interventions into a mostly soporific public discourse on the state of Australian theatre.

At almost the same time of year, 100 years before, the 23-year-old poet Alfred Jarry staged his notorious play *Ubu Roi* at Paris' Theatre de l'Oeuvre sparking a riot in the audience and marking the beginning of—or at least a convenient signpost to—theatre's historical avant garde. Jarry's production was an attempt to demonstrate principles outlined in his polemical writings on the renovation of theatre, a definitive example of which is contained in two new performance studies releases from Routledge. *Ubu* was a radical departure, in almost every respect, from what Antonin Antoine had earlier referred to as the "grandiloquent gestures of romantic theatre" which characterised the dominant theatrical paradigm of late 19th century Europe. Despite its radical, anti-bourgeois aesthetics, however, *Ubu* caused a storm mainly because of its repetitive use of the quintessential and highly theatrical French expletive "Merde!" Jarry had deployed the art of moral contravention so effectively taken up by American comic Lenny Bruce many years later.

The past century of performance making and writing about it—as represented in these Routledge anthologies—has been characterised by a serious consideration of the relationship between culture (specifically the interdisciplinary performing arts), politics and society. Most artistic avant garde movements have acted as a collective alarm to the political underpinning of the dominant culture of the time. How effective that alarm has been

is another question. Modernism was founded on the mistaken belief that technological advancement would bring social liberation. The anti-logic, anti-language outburst of Dada was in reaction to the European world and its avowed bourgeois values being turned upside down by World War I—a conflict fuelled by new technology. Tristan Tzara's Dadaist proclamations of 1916 were made in the safe haven of Zurich and, however radical, could do little to prevent the mass slaughter occurring across the border in France.

Unlike Kosky and Wherrett today, Alfred Jarry was a marginal figure at the time of his intervention into contemporary theatre. Notwithstanding the teacup storms of Kosky's *Nabucco* or the marketing coup resulting from the Williamson-Harrison schism over *Heretic*, it has to be wondered if it is at all possible for performance to reverberate as strongly ever again. Late 19th century Europe was not in the vice-like grip of American consumerism as Australia is today, a consumerism which renders everything a commodity, disposable and struggling to sustain its meaning beyond the moment of consumption. Jarry had no mass cinema, no television to reckon with; Baudrillard's "evil demon of images" was just beginning to stir. It was the eve of the global colonisation of the imagination. It is axiomatic that for capitalism to function effectively minority allegiances to culture or religion must be subsumed by allegiance to the (corporate) state. Increasingly, the values of the state are those promulgated to the majority by the global media. Societies once bound by the cultural adhesive of a shared mythology (religion) reinforced by storytelling (oral and written) have been splintered by the international flow of narrative resulting from the rise of the mass media. The Market is God, Homer has become Disney, Murdoch is King, Gates the Pretender.

Common to most of the contributors to the Routledge anthologies is the question of political intention in art: Brecht's incitement to "change the world", Artaud's radical spirituality, Müller's defiance of the stage as a site for interpretation, Isadora Duncan's Soviet revelations, Laurie Anderson's "public service announcements about various political situations", the theoretical contributions of Benjamin, Williams and Barthes. Neither is the 'political' characterised exclusively as 'leftist'. What about the fate of Meyerhold or Mayakovsky under Stalin, or the artists purged by Jiang Qing's Cultural Revolution or even Marinetti's fascist portents? In almost every example in these two anthologies, the vast

majority of which come from theatre practitioners, the question of ideology is in some way confronted. From the plain speaking socialism of 7:84's John McGrath to Richard Foreman, doyen of the New York loft performance set, giving a useful summary of the liberating function of non-narrative form eschewed by Richard Wherrett:

*Society teaches us to represent our lives to ourselves within the framework of a coherent narrative, but beneath that conditioning we feel our lives as a series of multi directional impulses and collisions...I like to think of my plays as an hour and a half in which you see the world through a special pair of eyeglasses. These glasses may not block out all narrative coherence, but they magnify so many other aspects of experience that you simply lose interest in trying to hold on to narrative coherence, and instead, allow yourself to become absorbed in the moment-by-moment representation of psychic freedom.*

Richard Foreman, 1992

Richard Schechner explores the dilemma of the death or otherwise of the avant garde with typical incisiveness. Having identified five categories of avant garde (historical, current, forward-looking, tradition-seeking, intercultural), Schechner goes on to argue that the term itself no longer serves a useful purpose. What can be said to be 'new' he asks? Is anyone waiting for Artaud's second coming? Schechner doubts it, suggesting that any niche market "signalling through the flames" would be quickly appropriated and burnt out in the commercially voracious but ultimately conservative intellectual and artistic contemporary milieu. Like Andreas Huyssen (a notable omission from these anthologies) before him, Schechner, in calling for a realignment of art with the everyday, recognises that it has been "the culture industry, not the avant garde, which succeeded in transforming everyday life in the 20th century". He shifts the debate to what he calls the "broad spectrum" of performance by bringing the methodologies of performance analysis to bear on the world as stage. He asks: How is performance used in politics, medicine, sport, religion, popular entertainments, and ordinary face-to-face behaviour? Denying the relevance of a modernist high/low culture divide he concludes:

*Art comes in several mutually reinforcing varieties: that which passes the time of those with enough money to buy tickets; that which excites without satisfying the appetites of its consumers; that which shows off the wealth, power and tastes of its patrons; that which is acquired as an investment. Popular entertainment follows roughly the same path.*

Richard Schechner, 1993

In Australia today, the theatre debate is too often fixed on the question of public

subsidy, once removed from the broader questions of politics (broader than bipartisan rambling, that is) and aesthetics. Since 1975 we have experienced a welcome explosion of theatrical activity which has resulted in the diverse, energetic performing arts sector we have today. Ironically, however, the chances of an antipodean Jarry being born under such circumstances may now seem even more remote. (Perhaps, the need for radical artists to work outside the ever-shrinking system of public subsidy may yet produce another Ubu.) Nostalgia aside, it seems to me that the political grit which underpinned the various avant gardes has been lost to a preoccupation with the prevarications of the Australia Council just as the country is being gradually sold off to the highest bidder. Certainly, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the eastern bloc resulted in an intellectual vacuum which has not yet been filled. The 'end of history' has momentarily left us flummoxed. In a resurgence of modernist idealism, art has been reclaimed from the contaminating influence of politics and the philosophical vigour which has characterised the great cultural movements of the century has been replaced, in Australia, by a generation of bean counters. Although the recent contributions of Kosky, Wherrett, Romeril and others (eg Williamson's attempted critique of postmodernism in *The Bulletin* last year and the indefatigable stridency of Sarah Miller in Perth) are welcome, the debate needs to go further and grow sharper in its analysis of the symbiotic relationship between theatre and ideology.

It is instructional that the artists represented in these two volumes, many like Jarry relatively marginal during their time, chose to write about their work (and their politics) and in doing so contributed to a theatrical record existing in parallel with the preservation of dramatic literature. One hopes that artists working in Australia today will continue to adopt a similar attitude which finds the support of an adventurous publisher.

These two anthologies provide a valuable resource to students and practitioners of contemporary performance largely because of the non-academic style of the writing and the historical and artistic scope collectively covered by the contributors. Although there is some duplication of material between the two books, they are in fact highly complementary. Huxley and Witts prefer to organise contributions in alphabetical order with a minimum of editorial, allowing for an easy intertextual read; Richard Drain provides a more formal five part structure arranged according to category and prefers the term 'theatre' (to Huxley and Witts' 'performance') in the title indicating a modernist tendency apparent in his commentary. Both books provide excellent notes on the contributors and useful cross-referencing systems.

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# OnScreen

## film, media & techno-arts

Feature

### Gonski and the allure of a mature industry

Jock Given detects a vision without philosophy in the Gonski report with the word 'culture' its vulnerable target

*There is currently an air of confidence surrounding Australia's film and television industry...*

So begins David Gonski's Review of Commonwealth assistance to the film industry. There are internationally successful films like *Shine* and *Muriel's Wedding*; international companies like Miramax and Pandora and Polygram and *Clay* 2000 are pursuing Australia's new talent; international 'majors' like Warner Brothers and Twentieth Century Fox are operating or building studios here; private capital is flowing into local companies like Beyond International, Southern Star and Artist Services. These are seductive times.

Gonski's, and now the Government's, first task, has been to decide if this is the beginning of a new history, or just a golden moment in the familiar cycles of the Australian film industry—to join the earlier gold of making the world's first feature length film in the early years of this century; the art movie breakthroughs of the mid-1970s, *Sunday Too Far Away* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock*; the (mostly 10BA) blockbusters of the 1980s, the *Mad Max*, *The Man from Snowy River* and *Crocodile Dundee* films.

The new history might be one which starts in a more mature place, a place less impressed by a world's first, a breakthrough, or some blockbustingly-mythical boys. It might be a history which starts with skilled practitioners, viable businesses well-connected to international partners, access to a range of sources of finance, and receptive audiences.

Gonski is optimistic about this new history, but not quite ready to be seduced by it. He does not agree with the suggestion that increasing levels of foreign investment will reduce the need for Commonwealth support to the industry. He thinks Commonwealth assistance "has been critical to the building and development of the industry to (the) current level of expertise and quality", and that if the Government is to achieve its cultural objectives within a commercially driven Australian film and television industry, "there will be a continuing need for Government assistance and non-commercial rates of return on its investment".

That assistance should be "directed to those areas where market failure is greatest: that is, to those activities which would not occur without government support, or at least would be severely curtailed and threaten the sustainability of the industry". Gonski's report argues that this means training/professional development, script development, production and archiving. Other activities—marketing, distribution, exhibition and production infrastructure—are commercially viable and, for the most part, can do without assistance.

It's a significant outcome that a review which was feared might slash and burn levels of Commonwealth assistance has not done so, overall. Gonski puts firmly on the record the conclusion that, if you want a film industry and a film culture, you have to pay for it. He also supports the continuation of the Australian Content Standard for commercial television.

The report is at its best in looking at new ways of attracting private finance into the industry. This is Gonski's home-ground. It's in the specific recommendations about other activities like marketing, distribution, exhibition and production infrastructure that the industry's apparent contemporary maturity seems to have led Gonski away from the caution of his earlier generalisations.

#### The Money to Make It

The Coalition's Arts Policy indicated that it would explore ways of encouraging more private investment in the production industry. Gonski recommends the re-introduction of the tax advantages for limited liability companies that existed prior to August 1992 and an easing of prospectus requirements to reduce the complexity of private fund raising.

Most significantly, he recommends the establishment of Film Licensed Investment Companies (FLICs). This would involve the replacement of the existing Division 10BA (already much reduced from their generous levels in the 1980s) and 10B tax concessions, available to all taxpayers, with a concession available only to perhaps three licensed companies with expertise in the development, production and distribution of film and television program productions. They would be able to raise a designated amount of concessional capital (estimated to be around \$50 million a year at a cost to revenue of around half that amount, assuming all the relevant taxpayers were on the highest marginal tax rate), with subscribers getting a tax deduction of 120 per cent on their investments.

FLICs are designed, to the extent possible, to cost no more than the current 10BA mechanism. That is, they are not intended to put new money into the industry, but to make tax dollars a more predictable and structured source of production finance. Investors will be able to invest in a portfolio of projects rather than a single one, with the administrative costs of capital raising spread across more projects. Investment in film and TV projects should become more attractive, but the total amount of money raised will not change. It should encourage the development of skills in fund-raising and

management within the FLICs, although the annual production slates they will be able to finance with the concessional finance will not be particularly large.

The limit on the number of licenses, which contrasts with the open-ended nature of the existing 10BA, is designed to ensure the net cost to government revenue is capped. The price paid is that the fund-raising power is centralised in the hands of the three lucky licensees. Gonski makes much of the need for 'many doors' to be open to producers seeking to finance projects. FLICs would open three significant new doors, but close the 10BA door currently available to all producers—a mixed blessing.

The removal of 10BA also makes the proposed changes to prospectus requirements much less useful. If private investors don't have the option of a tax deduction other than through FLICs, the likelihood that they will be interested in even a simpler fund-raising process diminishes greatly.

There are a million questions about FLICs—who will get them, where will they be located, how will they use them, who will get supported through them, who will be employed by them—all of which have very significant implications for the results of the initiative. But there are going to be unknowns about any new policy instrument. The Film Finance Corporation took years to sort out processes that could only be developed through experience. FLICs are worth trying as a new idea in an industry that needs some policy invention alongside its stable major funding sources.

#### Institutions

Throughout the months of Gonski's review, there was much speculation about changes in the institutions which assist the film industry. Film Australia would be closed down, the FFC and the Australian Film Commission would be amalgamated. Gonski leaves them all in place, but, in some cases, with substantially changed mandates.

The major proposed institutional change is the closure, in its current form, of Australia's longest established film institution, the government-owned production, facilities, sales and distribution company Film Australia Pty Ltd. Its assets at Sydney's Lindfield would be sold but the \$6.4 million National Interest Program funded by the Commonwealth Government, would continue as a discrete activity overseen by commissioning editors and the existing Board, physically co-located with the FFC.

Gonski looks hard at what was, until the establishment of the FFC in 1988, the major federal assistance agency, the Australian Film Commission. He says it needs to concentrate on its two critical roles—"to support script development of...productions and professional development of new entrants to the industry"—which is where the monies he proposes to save from screen culture and other areas should be redirected.

He worries that "the current range of activities undertaken by the AFC is at risk of becoming unfocused and its major priorities being subordinated without a clear direction from the Government on the AFC's objectives and priorities".

It's a familiar theme. Many of the film assistance agencies established around the world in the 1980s—New Zealand on Air, British Screen Finance, Eurimages—have, like the FFC, been given more focused briefs than their predecessors, the New Zealand Film Commission, the British Film Institute, the CNC in France. The idea of statutory authorities with wide ranging charters and the flexibility to choose how to spend their budgets to pursue them, sits uneasily with governments more fiercely concerned about the cost of governing.

Focus is everything. In 1997, the FFC has the kind of focus David Gonski was looking for, and it does well out of the report. Its budget broadly maintained; its current operations "generally consistent with its core function and its current memorandum of association"; the administration of Film Australia's National Interest Program to be co-located with the FFC; the Commercial TV Production Fund, if it survives, to be administered by the FFC.

But 'focus' can't simply require all organisations to reduce themselves to single missions, particularly if there is pressure to reduce the number of organisations involved in film assistance, unless current functions are dropped or scaled back. That's what gets recommended—for marketing, distribution, exhibition, screen culture, policy activities. The rationale comes in the alleged 'commercial viability' of many of these activities.

#### Commercially viable?

There are two problems with this. First, lack of commercial viability is equated with 'market failure', where these are actually quite separate concepts. Markets can work very nicely while producing outcomes which are regarded as socially or culturally sub-optimal.

• continued page 16

## Feature

## Gonski and the allure of a mature industry

• from page 15

Second, the bases on which the conclusions about commercial viability are reached are highly contestable. The marketing of individual feature film and most television titles may be commercially viable, but the representational activities of the AFC (such as staging Australian film events in overseas countries), is a quite different kind of work. It does not have a logical private sector player, without potentially conflicting commitments to its own titles, ready to take it over.

Distribution of individual feature film and most television titles may be commercially attractive, but distribution of most short films, animations and some features and documentaries (whose production the report believes should still be funded) is not.

The art cinema market may be much more buoyant these days than it was a decade ago, but the touring programs, the cinemathèque screenings organised by the screen culture organisations, are in a quite different league to the commercial cross-over titles which are making the sector its money.

The fact that Warner Roadshow and Fox run huge commercial studio complexes may be good reason for the Government to stay out of this end of the studio business, but it has very little to do with whether Film Australia should sell-up at Lindfield.

Moving on from activities which are allegedly 'commercially viable' without government support, the report recommends deep cuts in assistance to screen culture, reducing to \$1 million the \$3 million currently given by the AFC to organisations like the Australian Film Institute, *Cinema Papers*, *Metro Magazine*, *RealTime* and Open Channel (Melbourne), Sydney Intermedia Network, Metro Television and the Museum of Contemporary Art Cinemathèque (Sydney), the Film and Television Institute (Perth) and the Media Resource Centre (Adelaide).

This is not so much about 'commercial viability' of the activities. Gonski is more concerned about the AFC's internal priorities and processes. Monies for screen culture have stayed constant while the AFC has reduced project development funding. He worries about "transparency in funding arrangements for these activities and a perceived lack of contestability for, and flexibility in funding arrangements" and that "funding levels to organisations have remained static and on-going". The same crowd keep getting the money for the same stuff year after year, regardless of how good they are at it.

But rather than explore any concerns, or try to get inside this sector of the industry in the way the report does get inside the tax issues, the report opts simply for the axe—chop two-thirds of the money and see what happens. It's not the kind of thing you do if you think the area matters much. And it's not the kind of thing you do if you clearly understand the relationships between what happens in the 'screen culture sector' and the more visible mainstream—the training of young people, the access to facilities, the opportunities for taking the films whose production is assisted to audiences who might be interested in them, and who might understand and criticise them.

On research activities, there is an expression of concern "that the current spread and focus of research activities being undertaken by Commonwealth agencies may lead to inefficiencies in achieving these aims", and a recommendation that the Government require the development of a ten-year research strategy for the industry to be developed by the Department of Communications and the Arts and the Commonwealth assistance agencies.

No problem with a strategy, but the Statistics Working Group of the Cultural Ministers Council has been working for years on developing and implementing one. The greatly improved collection and presentation of statistics on the industry are a matter of record. The AFC's bi-annual *Get the Picture* is, simply, the best work of data and analysis on a national audiovisual industry produced anywhere in the world. That's not local preening, it's the view of the monthly bible, *Screen Digest*, which calls it "information...virtually unparalleled elsewhere" (February 1997, p45).

At a time when the Government is closing the rest of Canberra down, it seems odd that areas like film marketing (which also gets the 10-year-government-strategy treatment) and research should be dragged back down the Hume Highway for a grease-and-oil.

It all begins to add up to a grab-bag of ideas that's short on clear, guiding philosophy. Once the report is through it's main game, examining private fund-raising for the production industry, it starts to read like just so much politics—shift this branch, outsource that function, have a strategic review here or there.

The report sometimes interprets its terms of reference narrowly, so that it can't express a view on the continued existence of SBS Independent or the Commercial TV Production Fund, but at other times, broadly enough to endorse the Mansfield Report's support for further outsourcing of ABC production, and to recommend the abolition of the provision in the Migration Regulations requiring producers to consult with the performers union over the importation of foreign actors for shows fully funded from outside Australia.

It wants the AFC, like everyone else, to be more focused, more guided by a "clear direction from the Government on the AFC's objectives and priorities", but acknowledges the importance of the AFC's work in new media. This was going on long before multimedia and the superhighway became fashionable to hype merchants and bureaucrats in search of territory. The AFC's Indigenous Branch is another example of an activity which grew, initially, largely without government direction—a product of a statutory agency with a broad charter and the flexibility to do what could most usefully be done within its annual budget.

It's hard to avoid the conclusion that the main problem with marketing, distribution, exhibition, screen culture, research and policy activities, in the eyes of the report, are their complexity. The report just doesn't get them.

### Visions

*Shine* and *Muriel's Wedding* are not the only shows that are giving the Australian industry its "air of confidence". Another contender is *Romeo + Juliet*. Those who saw Baz Luhrmann's production of the Australian Opera's *La Bohème* would have recognised the vast L'Amour neon in the new Fox-financed spectacle, a reminder of the odd path this remarkable creative team has walked from NIDA to Verona/Venice Beach via *Strictly Ballroom*—a film with Sydney Theatre Company origins, the FFC and a paternally 10BA investor. It's a good marker of the complexity of the film business, of the strange array of factors it can take to make it.

David Gonski's report starts with the air of confidence, but, allured by the maturity, moves on, forgetting all too many of the factors that bring the confidence about. It delivers important support for the idea of government assistance to the film and television industry and for the specifics of assistance to production and archiving activities. But its answers on issues like marketing, distribution, exhibition, and access to production resources reveal a more troubling vision. It's not just that the specific

recommendations would deliver immediate pain, particularly to the screen culture sector. It's that there is no clear language or philosophy that sees these activities as vital parts of a broader cultural policy.

'Culture' alone may now be an inadequate place to go to seek justification for some of the measures Gonski sees as expendable. Indeed, the word may be a particular target.

Those seeking, in film policy, interventions beyond limited partnerships and value chains and tax effectiveness, might need to stress elements which speak more loudly in these times. One is the relevance of media to young people. It is a crucial industry, a 'clever' industry, a growing (at least, some parts of it) industry and one where young people are often much more comfortable with the technologies and skills of the day than their literary or couch-potatoed parents.

Another, paradoxically, might be history. The National Film and Sound Archive gets a good mark from Gonski—"Australia's audiovisual product is considered a vital element of Australia's cultural heritage and as such requires careful collection and preservation. Additionally, in an increasingly globalising, content-hungry industry, the value of high-quality library collections will increase to the industry generally". With Gonski arguing that the Government's development agency, the AFC, retreat to core functions centred on production, it may be that the cultural mandate of 'history' might provide the most persuasive rationale within which to secure on-going 'cultural' assistance.

Like an ANZAC Day march, Australia's film industry is going to need space for some odd policy bedfellows—the remembering, out there on the pavement beside (un)welcome children inventing new images of their own.

*Jock Given is the Director of the Communications Law Centre. The Centre has, since its establishment in 1988, received financial support from the Australian Film Commission to undertake activities including the convening of regular meetings of production industry groups.*

## Screen Culture: Gone-ski?

Dear *OnScreen* reader,

As you may be aware, Mr David Gonski's *Review of Commonwealth assistance to the film industry*, known as the Gonski Report, was recently released (see Jock Given's commentary above).

The report in general acknowledges the substantial achievements of the Australian film industry and endorses continued Commonwealth support to the industry.

However, the report also makes two key recommendations that, if adopted, would severely affect screen culture organisations, practitioners, writers, audiences and publications throughout Australia—including the *OnScreen* supplement of *RealTime*. The highly contentious proposals are:

- that funding to screen culture through the Industry and Cultural Development Branch (ICD) of the Australian Film Commission (AFC) be reduced from the present \$2.9 million per annum to a maximum of \$1 million per annum; and
- that only those projects with a national interest receive funding.

The publication of *OnScreen* is supported by ICD. The consequence of the first of the above recommendations is clear: *OnScreen* in its current form will cease to exist.

Since its inception in February 1996, *OnScreen/RealTime's* 12-page film, media and techno-arts supplement, has provided around 18,000 words per issue of highly accessible information, critique and analysis of screen culture. It comprises comprehensive coverage of screen arts issues including policy features, previews, film and new media and related book reviews, interviews with filmmakers and new media artists, conference and festival reports and essays on aspects of screen culture not covered elsewhere.

*RealTime's* nationwide circulation of 25,000 copies per issue means that *OnScreen* is the most widely read of Australia's screen culture publications.

*OnScreen* is complementary to but different from other screen-related publications: it promotes critical analysis of screen issues within the broader context of artforms covered in *RealTime* such as performance, sound, the visual arts and dance, highlighting the fertile interconnections between screen arts and other forms of cultural production. *OnScreen* has also demonstrated a particular commitment to exploring the convergences between traditional film, video and multimedia practices, including on-line developments in the screen arts.

The ramifications of the Gonski report's recommendations on screen culture would, of course, extend well beyond these pages.

Screen culture encompasses film festivals and screening events; specialist screen exhibitions; professional development through conferences, seminars, courses; production resource support and training; film distribution; multimedia

development; journals and publications; research and information; and awards. Organisations as diverse as Sydney Intermedia Network, Metro Television, and the Museum of Contemporary Art's Cinémathèque project in Sydney; experimenta media arts, Open Channel and the Australian Film Institute in Melbourne; the Media Resource Centre in Adelaide; the Film and Television Institute in Perth; the Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane film festivals; and other screen culture publications such as *Cantrill's Filmnotes*, *Continuum*, *Metro Magazine* and *Cinema Papers* would all be adversely affected.

*OnScreen/RealTime* is involved with these other organisations in a cohesive national campaign against the possible decimation of Australian screen culture. Meetings have been held with key federal and state politicians, including Senator Richard Alston, Minister for Communications and the Arts, who commissioned the review. The Minister was impressed by the commitment of the screen culture bodies, but could not allay our concerns. The concerted effort to have the recommendations overturned continues. But time is of the essence—the Expenditure Review Committee is deciding on federal budget allocations.

It is vital that Commonwealth funding to screen culture be maintained at the current levels. Your active involvement, by writing to Senator Alston, will certainly influence the government's deliberations on this matter.

Please write and express your support for the organisations which comprise screen culture. Impress upon the Federal government that: screen culture provides unique opportunities for young people to work in the film, television and multimedia industries; screen culture returns more dollars than it costs the taxpayer; Australian screen culture internationalises our film, television and multimedia industries and projects our culture to the world; Australian screen culture inspires and shapes Australian culture—it drives the future industry. Please address your letter to:

The Hon. Senator Richard Alston  
Minister for Communications and the Arts  
Suite MG70, Parliament House  
Canberra  
ACT 2600

but please send it to the *RealTime* office—PO Box A2246 Sydney South NSW 1235—and we will forward it with other documents.

Thank you for your support and urgent co-operation.

Sincerely

Keith Gallasch, Virginia Baxter  
Editors, *RealTime*

Annemarie Jonson, Alessio Cavallaro  
Co-ordinating Editors, *OnScreen*



# Outsourcing and downsizing creativity

Gil Appleton looks at the implications of the Mansfield Report for Australian program content

The almost universal reaction of relief which greeted Bob Mansfield's report on the ABC obscured the fact that it gave the Government precisely what it wanted—a resounding endorsement of Canberra's obsessions of the moment, downsizing and outsourcing—and accepted the already announced savage cutback to the ABC budget with barely a murmur.

Sure, Mansfield did not recommend that the ABC be abolished. Sure, he affirmed its importance and value, and rejected the notion of advertising on the ABC. It would have been astonishing if he had done anything else, given the overwhelmingly supportive response in submissions to the inquiry, and the body of research which shows widespread public support for the ABC, and opposition to advertising. Many of the recommendations, such as a revised charter emphasis on services to regional Australia and to youth, were essentially motherhood stuff. All in all, the Mansfield report was a brilliant public relations exercise; the Government must have rubbed its hands with glee.

And so to Australian content, and the implications of the Mansfield recommendations for Australian creativity and creative workers. Mansfield suggests closer relations between all government-funded arts bodies, the ABC included, thus making optimal use of "taxpayers' funds...with the aim of maximising the output of Australian expression (sic)". He sees scope for the ABC to engage more closely with Australia's creative community, not only or primarily in music broadcasting but in other arts areas as well, and to open itself much more to the world outside the ABC.

Hard to disagree; but more problematic is his conclusion that the most significant way of achieving this would be by the progressive 'outsourcing' of all television programs except news and current affairs. But the real objective is cost-cutting. And as has been widely pointed out, Mansfield offers no figures which would allow valid comparison between ABC in-house and external program costs. To reinforce his conclusion, he cites low ratings for ABC-produced drama and comedy, and quotes from a newspaper interview with independent producer Sandra Levy about the outdated look of ABC programs. (Levy rightly took exception to the fact that Mansfield did not seek her views himself but relied on a newspaper report.)

As an ex-ABC employee and a staffer on the earlier (and far more comprehensive) Dix review of the ABC in the early 1980s, I shared the then prevailing view that the cost of ABC television production, especially drama, was prohibitive, largely because of inefficient and entrenched work practices, and lack of turnover among creative staff. At the time, the independent production industry was flourishing, yet the ABC's use of independent productions was negligible, co-productions or commissioning of outside work virtually unknown.

Since then, however, much has changed. Many of the ABC's greatest critical and audience successes—programs like *Blue Murder*, *GP*, *Police Rescue*, *Brides of Christ*, and *Frontline*—have been co-productions with independent producers or production houses. Screening of local documentaries went from less than 70 hours over the whole period 1970–1980, to 58 prime time hours in 1995/96. The injection of new blood via co-productions also seemed to have a beneficial flow-on effect to the ABC itself. Many of the most successful and original programs of the last decade have been made in-house: programs like *The Gillies Report*, *Mother and Son*, *The Money or the Gun*, *McFeast*, *Phoenix*, *Janus* and *Club Buggery*.

In 1995/96 the ABC spent \$101m on non-news and current affairs production. Federal Government support for the rest of the industry through the FFC, the AFC, the Commercial TV Production Fund and other bodies totalled \$117.5m, and the value of industry drama and documentary production over the period was around \$500m. Mansfield chooses to see this as a sign of the industry's capacity to take on ABC commissions. But it could be argued that \$101m for production which can potentially be seen by all Australians via ABC TV and has thrown up much that is admirable, is relatively modest. And like the ABC, the independent industry has its failures: how many *Shines*, *Muriels*, *Ballrooms* or *Rats in the Ranks* do we get in return for government support for the industry?

ABC Managing Director Brian Johns' response to the outsourcing proposal was that it would weaken the ABC's capacity to compete as a broadcaster, and that Mansfield was effectively advocating that the ABC should lose control of content and ownership of copyright. ABC policy has always been to retain all rights to its programs, and these rights are undoubtedly its most valuable material asset.

But Johns seems to suggest that the ABC is incapable of negotiating deals with independent producers which will allow it to retain editorial control and keep a significant slice of the sales of rights in other markets. Admittedly, the ecstatic reaction of the independent production industry gives one pause, and the ABC's history of involvement in commercial enterprise is not encouraging. Nevertheless, it has been marketing the rights to its own programs for many years; some might say that greater engagement with skilled and experienced co-producers could even improve its income from this source.

In my view, however, a major shift to outsourcing presents more of a danger to creativity than to intellectual property rights. Historically, the ABC's record of innovation came from having people in-house with the time and the space to develop new concepts in a sympathetic environment. That many program formats pioneered by the ABC were later taken over by commercial broadcasters is an example of the ABC's research and development role in programs, and a means for the national broadcaster to extend its influence right through the broadcasting system.

For many years, the prevailing, bi-partisan view in Canberra has been that the ABC is fat and inefficient, particularly in television. And even after years of attrition, the culture of abundance and accompanying waste that developed in ABC television during the 1960s and 1970s has died very hard, while no-one disputes that radio has been cut to the bone.

Mansfield refers to staff and union resistance to change and "an insufficiently strategic approach by management"; comments similar to those made by Dix 16 years ago. But Mansfield also notes approvingly the flexibility and productivity of some regional offices and Triple J: in other words, change is possible, given stronger and better management and a recognition on the part of staff that unless the culture changes, the nature of organisation itself will be irrevocably changed to its detriment.

So is the answer to throw the baby out with the bathwater? Would it not be preferable to strike a reasonable balance between in-house and outside production? The ABC itself proposes a ratio of 70 per cent in-house to 30 per cent outsourced production within three years, with the ABC able to opt to 'purchase' in-house if they feel it offers better value. (This equates more or less to the level in the BBC, which has a statutory obligation to outsource at least 25 per cent of all programs.)

Mansfield concedes that his recommended emphasis on regional and local services has significant cost implications. There seems to be a contradiction here: you outsource so you can cut in-house production and flog off your facilities, yet at the same time you step up state-based services. If the ABC is to retain its state facilities, then surely they can also be utilised to develop specialisations in particular types of programs (eg drama, children's, comedy) produced for national consumption.

Outsourcing and sale of facilities on the scale recommended by Mansfield would spell death to existing ABC centres of excellence, like the Melbourne drama unit responsible for such productions as the groundbreaking *Phoenix* and *Janus*. Moreover, co-production deals with overseas partners will no longer be feasible for the ABC when it cannot contribute studios and facilities.

Significantly, the ABC's greatest recent success, *Frontline*, was widely hawked around all the networks but only the ABC was prepared to take it. The commercial and other pressures which apply to much of the independent production industry are not conducive to allowing creative people time and space. If the ABC no longer has the capacity to offer that opportunity, and has lost all the reserves of talent that it took many years to nurture, it will never regain them.

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## Essay

# Perverting Hollywood

Jane Mills elaborates the transgressions of *Female Perversions*

*For a woman to explore and express the fullness of her sexuality, her emotional and intellectual capacity, would entail who knows what risks and who knows what truly revolutionary alteration of the sexual conditions that demean and constrain her. Or she may go on trying to fit herself into the order of the world and thereby consign herself forever to the bondage of some stereotype of normal femininity—a perversion, if you will.*

Caption at the head of the film *Female Perversions*; a quotation from the book of the same name.

When psychoanalyst Louise J. Kaplan published her ground-breaking book, *Female Perversions: The Temptations of Madame Bovary* (1991), her indictment of the narrow, masculinist definition of perversion caused an uproar amongst traditional Freudians: women too can be perverse, she told them. Outside this fraternity this thesis seemed a little old-fashioned.

For this was the age of post-feminism and backlash; a younger generation of feminists were even more unsympathetic towards Freudian theory than many of their forefathers had been. They declared they had moved on from the narrow confines of sexual politics and were happy to work alongside sensitive new age guys to lead us into a second phase in which outdated views of sisterhood and society were replaced by Thatcherite individualism. Yet here was a book which, while challenging some of the tenets of psychoanalysis, was overtly both feminist and psychoanalytic in its methodology and message about female sexuality and gender roles.

Hollywood, which once manifested some signs of absorbing the female voice in films like Katherine Bigelow's *Blue Steel* (1990) and Ridley Scott's *Thelma and Louise* (1991), for the most part resorted to the traditional ideals of masculinity and femininity, of normative sexuality and the desirability of rigid gender roles—at least where women were concerned. While a film like *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (James Cameron, 1991) proposed the adoption of the feminine into the masculine, thus providing men with yet another territory of which to become the conquering hero, films such as *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven, 1991) and *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987) with their sexually transgressive—and therefore bad—girls, compelled many to work really hard to achieve an alternative reading against the grain. Outside Hollywood, feminist countercinema which had proliferated in the 70s and 80s, appeared muted. Chantal Akerman's feminist voice was hard to discern in her documentary *De l'est* (1994), the uncompromising feminism of Marleen Gorris' *A Question of Silence* (1981) was but a pale echo of its former self in *Antonia's Line* (1996), Bigelow became seduced by machismo and action in *Strange Days* (1996), and Margarethe von Trotta (*Rosa Luxemburg*, 1986), Jane Campion (*The Piano*, 1993; *Portrait of a Lady*, 1997) and even, arguably, Sally Potter (*Orlando*, 1992) seemed forced to blanket their once loud and often angry feminist voices beneath the sumptuous dead weight of the costume drama.

In the light of this recent history of cinema and feminism Susan Streitfeld's film, *Female Perversions*, feels both radically new and from a past era at one and the same time. Upon reading Kaplan's book, Streitfeld made the bold decision to use this feminist psychoanalytic study of perversities as the basis for her first feature film; it was a perverse decision by any definition.

Using imagery that owes much to Queer Cinema (Derek Jarman's and Isaac Julien's films, for example) the film opens with Eve (Tilda Swinton) as a high-powered, ambitious prosecuting lawyer, caught in a fantasy nightmare: she is walking a tightrope that promises to break and is tied in knots by a rope controlled by a Laisus-like King figure. As the narrative unfolds, we are shown how the female characters negotiate the way society distorts female erotic expression and challenge the myth that perversion is no more than a searching for forbidden kinky sexual pleasure, or the province of men alone. To list the *Female Perversions* that the female characters manifest in Streitfeld's feature—kleptomania, homovestism, extreme submissiveness, masochism, fetishism, sadism, voyeurism, compulsive eating, incestuous desire, self-mutilation, bondage—does no justice to the experience of viewing this compelling, visually powerful, and intelligently constructed film. *Female Perversions* is not simply 'about' kinky sex any more than a perversion is simply that and no more: "Perversions", as Kaplan writes and as proclaims the pillow on Eve's bed, "are never what they seem to be". And nor is the film which thematically and visually uses synecdoche, the displacement of the whole by the part, in the same way that the perverse fetishisation of a part object does.

Streitfeld has made a film which mediates on feminine and feminist obsession and the patriarchal repression that produces it. At the same time, lest anyone should be deterred from a movie with such an overtly intellectual agenda, we are drawn into a powerful family drama of two sisters played by Swinton and Amy Madigan (credits include *Love Letters*, 1983; *Field of Dreams*, 1989). Their painful and, at times, gloriously indulgent sibling rivalry shows and hides the love and hate they feel—for the self and for the other—as they try to fit into the order of the world, unconsciously binding themselves to the cultural, familial and social stereotypes of 'normal femininity'.

That what both book and film have to say is deeply subversive of traditional rigid notions of gender so beloved of Hollywood, was borne out by the problems Streitfeld encountered when casting Eve: despite the lack of non-stereotyped parts for women whose sexuality is not divorced from their character, no American actor she approached would accept the role. Forced to look across the Atlantic, she encountered Tilda Swinton who wasn't the right age. Streitfeld re-worked the script to accommodate her. This proved to be extremely intelligent casting: Swinton, (*Caravaggio*, 1986; *Edward II*, 1991; *Orlando*), possesses precisely the ambiguous qualities required to play a woman who



Tilda Swinton as Evelyn Stephens in *Female Perversions*.

seeks and rejects conventional gender definitions, who feels pride and pain in her femininity, and who denies and embraces her power and her weakness. Swinton's performance of a character who, at times, can be almost repelling, is mesmerising.

Streitfeld says that she, her designer, Missy Stewart (whose credits include several Gus Van Sant films), and cinematographer, Teresa Medina, were influenced by two films when creating the look of *Female Perversions*: Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Conformist* (1971) for the character of Eve, and Victor Erice's *The Spirit of the Beehive* (1973) for her sister Madelyn.

As if to demonstrate that the conscious intention of the filmmaker is only one—not necessarily very important—element in how we make sense of and gain pleasure from a film, Streitfeld revealed she had not realised that what these two films have in common is the attempts of their main characters to accommodate and survive fascism in Europe of the 1930s and 40s. To equate fascism with a patriarchal determination of gender roles may sound too simplistic. But with this insight *Female Perversions* makes it impossible to refuse an understanding of the perverse as a strategy designed to deceive those with power and to empower those for whom the very meaning of erotic love is threatened by a commercialisation of deviant sexuality and bizarre sexual acts.

Streitfeld has taken enormous risks in making this film; it refuses to fit into the order of the world proposed by Hollywood in which female perversity is usually naturalised as a definition of 'normal' femininity. It is a risk that pays off; the rewards to the audience in terms of pleasure are manifold.

*Female Perversions* is a Newvision Films release, currently screening nationally.

Jane Mills is Head of Screen Studies at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School and author of several books and articles on sexuality, gender and censorship.

## Column

## Cinesonic

The first in a regular series of columns by Philip Brophy

## Foreword:

## Looking for sound design in the cinema

A good formula for studying/experiencing contemporary sound design in the cinema: (a) if there's lots of loud sounds; (b) realism isn't that important; (c) the soundtrack was produced and mixed using hi-tech Dolby applications; and (d) the film is played in a theatre installed with a THX playback system—go hear it.

Sounds like it might be a blunt formula. For an engineer focused on fidelity and state-of-the-art technology, issues of aural narratology and plain content may hold no interest. A cultural studies analyst observing the socio-political ramifications of imaging in the public domain may find the hyper-material audio-visual core of cinema invisible and indistinct. The film composer trading in the craft of musical composition may perceive the chaotic cacophony of the film soundtrack too threatening and oppressive to the musical score. A sound artist contemplating poetic and philosophical tangents of acoustic phenomena may be aesthetically repulsed by the ungainly mix of ocular titillation and sheer sonic sensationalism in blockbuster cinema.

But film sound is all of the above perceptual streams and more. Practice any one of the above modes exclusively and you'll promulgate a limited reading of the essential materiality of sound. Consider: film sound is no single aspect of sound alone; it is multiple in every conceivable way. Film sound crazily manifests itself in a series of dimensional slashes across industrial concerns, star systems, monetary perimeters, symbolic histories, cliché terrains and experimental spikes. Every film presents its own one-off rule book on how sound might occur, for its soundtrack is uncontrolled and uncontrollable. Film sound is where the sonic grows moist in the darkness of consciously privileged images.

*The Island of Dr. Moreau:*

## The sonic destruction of a novel

There's one *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. It's a book. By H. G. Wells, no less. The kind of 'horror/sci-fi/fantasy' it's OK to talk about over a learned dinner gathering. And there's another one. It's a movie. Made last year. Hollywood stars, big budget, a department of scriptwriters and one fired director. Obviously, the book is so much better. How could the film be better? This is how.

The themes of the book and its three films (*Island of Lost Souls*, 1933; *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, 1977 and 1996) are consistent, clear and obvious. God, man, animals, science, behaviour, humanity, morality, drugs, ethics and so on. For many, 'grand' literary themes like these are clutched to their bosom like a child's snow dome: whenever they wish to see those themes articulated in life or art, they shake the dome for instant gratification, then look through the cascading flakes. But films are overpowering, overwhelming: when watching a film of literary origin, they sit in the audience and try to perceptually shake the film, to make it magically cough up a floating cloud of...well, literary-ness.

Conversely and perversely, the recent *Island* perceptually shakes its audience. It cinematically destroys its literary origin, doing so on two levels: the body and sound. Explorations and applications of both the body and sound are physically embedded in the film's audio-visual

texture, creating forms, shapes, presences and spaces bent on disorienting the auditor/viewer. And this is perfectly in keeping with a psycho-dramatic line which runs strong within Wells' story: how do man and animal perceive each other. The plain freakishness of the film's exploitation of every actor's body will have to be discussed elsewhere. Here, let's talk about the sound design and its fluid construction of presences and spaces within which are situated the film's key disorienting devices.

As Douglas (David Thewlis) recovers on a boat after being saved by Montgomery (Val Kilmer), he is vaguely aware of drugs careening through his body. He attempts to talk with Montgomery; their voices clash in a trans-Atlantic dialogue. Accent, grammar, timbre, sense, delivery and breath all perform solos on the other as Douglas' disjointed scramble for explanation splutters a sonic sheen across Montgomery's racy non-sequiturs. All of it is close-miked. Spittle, air and labials sprinkle our ear drums in detail. Their actual dialogue is a gasping collapse of meaning; in its place is an abundance of aural detail. This is the physicality of cinema sound design—foregrounding a moist vocal presence against crisp vocal projection. The spoken versus the written; the guttural versus the oratorical; the sound versus the word.

The dialogue editing of this scene is worthy of Glenn Gould's ruminations on the innate musicality of meandering talk. Yet this dialogue is framed by noise. Sprawled in the lower deck of the creaking, leaking boat, Douglas and Montgomery's dialogue swirls within a sonorous wood and water. Unseen liquid laps and booms at all sides; planks and breaches of wood groan and crack throughout the darkened space. In this druggy blur of ill-communicated speech, the material world bends across the multi-channel sound field. Arcs of noise follow the contracting/expanding of wood and the shifting volume of water. The air in the cinema is alive with movement—shut your eyes and the theatre is dimensionally warping. The spatialization is heady, erotic, sensational. More like the musique concrète of Bernard Parmegiani than the final mix of a big budget Hollywood movie. And it's more than a mere hi-tech gimmick: it is actively dedicated to destroying the verisimilitude of the screen's photographic images by rendering the soundtrack more dimensionally encompassing than the screen's illusionary scope for containment. Which is what film sound does every waking electro-acoustic moment.

This scene—about ten minutes into the film—aurally signposts the purpose behind the sound design for many scenes: the jungle surrounding Moreau's house; the underground chamber in the beast's domain; the nocturnal mutants inhabiting the moored boat; the tense atmosphere of the vivisection laboratory. Detailed movement is layered not to create 'background atmospheres' like some string of adjectives hanging limply at the start of a paragraph, but to cup and amplify the 'cinesonic' stage within which drama unfolds. Instead of existing as a flat scrim comprising amorphous sonic textures, crystalline sonic events simultaneously occur and shift to form a multi-dimensional construct as sounds move across space. *Island* consistently does this and especially utilises the alienating precision afforded by the discrete digital track (DDS) and its clarity in field placement within a mix intent on demonstrating these effects. In a sensitive Hal Hartley film about personal relationships, it might be out of place—too much aural competition with the 'meaningful' dialogue of actors endlessly warbling about their relationships. In a hedonistic, bombastic film starring Marlon

Brando with a bunch of real and unreal freaks who speak more through their bodies, such a sensationally unsettling sound design is poetically apt and viscerally appropriate.

On many levels, the film de-cinematizes its photographic effects. That is to say, it confuses the degrees to which it subsumes the real within the image. Specifically, this destabilises our external perception of what we might consider genetically normal or plausible. Take one ex-Adonis Marlon Brando, one hormonally spunky Val Kilmer, numerous genuine 'freaks', dress them all in freaky make-up, and one is left wondering who are the real freaks in this film? All in all, the visuality of *Island* conveys the effect of staring at your own reflection in someone else's cataracts: your self image is milky, distorted, alien. The film's sound design is as perfectly keyed to this opacity of its visualisation as it is to its collapse of articulate dialogue, its liquefaction of literary foundation, and its evaporation of grand themes. If *Island* is a story of physical transmutation and virtual morphology—from the human to the inhuman and back—what better means to manipulate and maintain this perceptual confusion than by inverting the visual screen with the aural space.

Consequently, the film charts two lines of transformation: humans becoming animals, and animals who were once humans 're-becoming' humans. It then cross-modulates these 're-becomings' with effects modes (optical, digital, chemical, cosmetic) and performative devices (vocal characterisation, facial expression, body stance). Again, this wavering visual status of the screen image is too complex to detail here—yet it's worth noting that this is the most fertile ocular terrain which allows the sonic to grow moist within it. Particularly, how the humans and 'humanimals' hear each other and mark the other's auditory

presence is recreated at key moments on the soundtrack. Herein lies the root of the sound design's symbolic logic: we in the audience are subjected to the acoustic perspective of animals.

Remember that in the bulk of the animal kingdom, sound defines the visuals that follow. This is most so in the jungle: a realm of invisibility, camouflage, aerial vantage points and bodily stillness. Making sound renders one seen; being seen means death through visibility. Therefore most sound in the jungle is a complex signage system for obliterating one's visual presence—throwing one off-guard, signalling to mates approaching danger. (The Brando connection reminds one that the only other film which actively incorporated this into its sound design was *Apocalypse Now* with its numerous jungle settings and its pioneering 'quadraphonic' sound mix constructed by Walter Murch.) Many jungle scenes in *Island* feature space being activated through sound aimed at the audience. This effectively creates a virtual jungle within which we are disoriented, trapped, frightened. Our pathetic sense of personal visual space is strategically attacked by the sound mix: we are the dummy point of reference for all panning and tracking.

*The Island of Dr. Moreau* is a messy, confused, aggressive, hysterical film. In accordance with the most basic of postmodern precepts, this makes it textually rich and materially ripe. This is not to say it's a 'rollercoaster ride', nor a call to celebrate imperception and presumption. Films like *Island*—there are many—are knowledgeable and informed constructs of audio-visual form, and as such are possibly more inventive and experimental than many examples of the cinema which stake those claims for themselves.

*The Island of Dr. Moreau*, directed by John Frankenheimer, sound designed by Harry Cohen

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## Essay

## Impossible loves

Anna Dzenis in love with love in the movies

*I believe in love. Sounds like a song, but I do. All my works have essentially been about some degree of love. It may be a word, but in truth it's a profound emotion that is in your body and your veins: chemical.*

Baz Luhrmann,  
*Cinema Papers*, February 1997

In your body, in your veins, and most definitely at the cinema. If you're looking for love one of the best places to go searching would have to be in our many movie houses. Not necessarily for love itself of course; but the pronouncement, the evocation, the revelation of love. Virginia Wright Wexman begins her book *Creating the Couple* with these statistics: according to her sources, 85 per cent of all Hollywood films made before 1960 have romance as their main plot, and 95 per cent have romance either as the main or secondary plot. For Wexman, the convention of 'boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl' and the trajectory from love to marriage "organises, indeed constitutes classical American cinema as a whole". In a most recent instance, Baz Luhrmann's version of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*—taking, as it does, one of the most famous of all 'true romances'—foregrounds the assumption raised by Wexman: Is love the same as it ever was?

Is it "some degree of love" that has moved so many filmmakers to resuscitate past texts and resite them in the present? Is it possible that the first reading of Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Henry James or Thomas Hardy was a formative moment for these film-makers—akin to a first love, or a first kiss? Last year much was made of 'the Jane Austen revival'. *Emma*, *Persuasion* and *Sense and Sensibility* found new images and a new audience. Our fascination with Shakespeare has been even greater. Most recently it circulated around Kenneth

Branagh's *Much Ado About Nothing* and his soon-to-be-seen *Hamlet*, the highly contentious and oft-woeful *Richard III*, the intensely passionate *Othello*, a light-hearted *Twelfth Night*, and a questing Al Pacino in *Looking for Richard*. There may be no end to these re-workings, and to the writings around them.

Baz Luhrmann continues this tradition, and it is in his inspired revamping of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* that critics have found good reason to give praise. "Quentin Meets William" or "Shakespeare for the MTV generation" are descriptions I've come across. One critic even speculated that the film could be titled *Montague, Road Warrior*. Its

Leonardo DiCaprio as Romeo in *Romeo + Juliet*

rapid-fire editing, speeded-up sequences, sampled music track, designer drugs, designer guns complete with family crests, its street fighting and gang warfare, is the energetic, frenetic, audacious postmodern world of Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*. For those not so familiar with the iambic pentameter, this visual iconography provides a reading—an equivalence—of a language that today might sound quite foreign.

Luhrmann has reinvigorated this ancient tale despite its poetic verse; indeed resurrecting and liberating its poetic verse. The film allowed me to dwell 'in love', particularly the problem of

'eternal, impossible love'. Whereas in Luhrmann's *Strictly Ballroom* we discover a romantic couple in spite of the world, in *Romeo + Juliet* no sooner than we have found them, we lose them back to the world again. We know this story and we wish for this couple, before they can even wish for themselves. But there is no space, no place, for their love in this world—no possibility that the gentle, tentative feelings they have for each other can have a life of their own. More than any other telling of this tale, I felt its social oppression, the weight of desire and circumstance, that could never be released.

Much attention has been paid to the evocation of this 'in your face' contemporary Shakespearean world. Beginning with a postscript—a tiny television screen dwarfed against an enormous black ground—where the newsreader tells us that "two star-crossed lovers have taken their lives".

Clare Danes as Juliet in *Romeo + Juliet*

And just as we start to make sense of this, that what has yet to be is already over, we are spun into a vortex with dizzying helicopter shots of the Montague and Capulet skyscrapers, stranded in a hazy, vague cityscape interspersed with commanding religious statues of great presence but uncertain significance. This is modern day Verona; flower-shirted Montagues—Miami-beach street punks—the dark funereal Capulets—street princes with vengeance in their loins. The world burns, explodes and everything is in danger. Even the Capulet masked ball races ahead of our ability to get a handle on it. A decadent ode to Fellini's *Satyricon* or a biting,

trashy, camp John Waters film? Probably both! Probably more. Our brooding Romeo downs Ecstasy. The giddy world of sensations, impressions overrides the world of bodily substance. What chance for love here? And yet there is love.

One of the more famous directors of modern love stories, Nora Ephron (*Sleepless in Seattle*), allows her lovers to find each other. I suspect, however, that it is the very transience, the fragile fleeting nature of true love, that adds to its difficult pleasure. The moments most sincerely felt in the cinema are the moments where we realise the 'deep impossibility' of it all. Clint Eastwood and Meryl Streep in *Bridges of Madison County* only had a few days—a few days that would last a life time. In *The People vs Larry Flynt*, the very last frames of the younger Courtney Love, dancing and laughing. How sadly I also remember the home movie footage in Wenders' *Paris Texas* and the sex booth whose glass wall separates a remembered love that could never be right. Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* also made me recall Leo McCarey's *An Affair to Remember* whose lovers are watched everywhere they go in their shipboard romance, whose love is even more longed-for because it is so impossible to have.

Love is such a fragile thing. In its bittersweet way, transient, as in the cinema, where we wait for the 'happy ending', the 'kiss' or 'embrace' that the film has promised. Where we wait for that moment in which we are asked to believe everything. In the prologue of Jane Campion's *Portrait of a Lady*, a group of modern schoolgirls talk of that moment, the moment before a kiss, when you see that face, coming towards you. That's the best part of a kiss, one girl says, the moment before. There is something achingly pleasurable in this passage of desire. That something so fragile it cannot last, can be endured, captured, remembered and relived forever. And so I go to the cinema, like so many others, out of respect for love, this longing for love; so fleeting, so passing, so precious.

## Letter to the editors

Dear editors,  
I am writing to rectify some errors of fact which appeared in the article "Curiouser and curiouser" by Lisa Gye in *RealTime 17 OnScreen* February-March 1997. There are so many distortions of fact the article loses all credibility. Ms Gye was working from early and unconfirmed publicity material and indeed many of the events which were promoted in that material did not eventuate; however clear and precise information was readily available, including programs published in *Beat* which is not only free but also ubiquitous with a print run of 80,000.  
To clear up some of the misinformation promulgated by Ms Gye:

1. The dance rave was an early proposal which was unable to proceed due to health and safety concerns raised by the City of Melbourne and its promotion was not mentioned in future festival publicity. In fact we did promote its cancellation but Ms Gye omits to mention this.

2. In what would have been a major coup and an Australian premiere, Stan Brakhage initially agreed to attend the *experimenta media arts festival* and an agreement was reached with the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, and the United States Information Service to co-present this visit. Unfortunately this tour did not eventuate due to circumstances beyond the festival's control, which among other things included the artist's ill health.

3. women @ art.technology.au appears as a supplement in *MESH: film/video/media/art* issue 10, 1996. It's unfortunate that Ms Gye did not take the trouble to investigate the material

generated for the festival and missed its existence.

4. The *experimenta media arts festival '97* was indeed made up of the events Ms Gye listed. She however omitted to mention the 32 installation artists involved in *short, sharp and very current* at the Power Station plus the selected programs televised on Channel 31 and the Advert program, a series of four 30-second advertisements produced by prominent digital artists and televised on Network Ten. The festival curated (or commissioned) all aspects of the festival except for *Burning the Interface* which was curated by Mike Leggett for the MCA in Sydney. *Experimenta* was approached, as Melbourne's peak multimedia body, to manage all aspects of BTI's exhibition in Melbourne and even presented it at Interact '96. *The Body Remembers* was commissioned by *Experimenta* and exhibited at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. Over \$89,000 of organisational funds were invested in the presentation of this major exhibition. ATOM staged its exhibition of finalists on our invitation to it to join the festival. It had previously no intention to exhibit the works submitted and welcomed the opportunity. It should be noted that, in addition to *short, sharp and very current* and *Domestic Disturbances*, *The Body Remembers*, the ATOM finalists and *Burning the Interface* would not have taken place in Melbourne had *Experimenta* not initiated (in the first two instances), funded and supported these exhibitions.

5. The only Australian retrospectives were films programmed to celebrate *Experimenta's* 10th year birthday and the last ten years of experimental screen practices in this country.

They served to offer a valuable historical base of experimental artforms and to help contextualise the contemporary works screened at the festival.  
6. With regard to the manner in which the screen programs were exhibited: all artists were made aware in their contracts that there would be multiple screenings on video and community television. Through a sponsorship deal, *Experimenta* secured for the Power Station a state-of-the-art cube wall from Image Design Technology. *Experimenta* received a vast amount of positive feedback about the use of the cube wall; many more people saw the programs exhibited via this mechanism than attended scheduled screenings, and it is evident that the use of alternative delivery methods was effective and more than satisfactory for most represented filmmakers and audiences.  
It is obvious Ms Gye has limited knowledge of the media arts or else she may have over-looked some technical shortcomings that come with exhibiting in a 'green field' site and actually reported on some of the great work exhibited by the artists. Furthermore, if she was as confused as she professes by the festival why did she not do what any responsible and professional reporter would do and speak with the festival director or other staff to clear up any misconceptions. One can only conclude that Ms Gye lacked the skills to make any valuable judgment on a media arts festival and like many who do not understand something respond with fear and loathing. Clearly Ms Gye was out of her depth.

Yours sincerely

Amelia King  
General Manager  
*Experimenta*

## Lisa Gye replies

Dear editors,  
Without wishing to engage *experimenta* in a game of Conrady ("I'm right!" No, I'm right!"), and mindful of testing the patience of your readers with petty squabbling, I do feel I should correct Ms King on a number of points of her response to my review "Curiouser and curiouser". Though not renowned as a critic of media arts, I feel as a lecturer in Media at Swinburne University, a practicing consultant in multimedia and as a Masters student at the Centre for Animation and Interactive Multimedia, I am reasonably qualified to critique a festival such as *experimenta*. Having assisted in the curation of *digita* for the Melbourne International Film Festival, I am also mindful of the difficulties of exhibiting media art, as I acknowledge in the final paragraph of my review. Far from responding with "fear and loathing" to media arts, I embrace them in all aspects of my professional life. I reserve my fear and loathing for the inadequacy of the exhibition and promotion of media arts by *experimenta*, as my review makes clear. While apparently happy to single me out, I wonder if Adrian Martin's criticism of the festival in *The Age* on 21/11/96 where he stated, "The selection of works was fine but the manner in which they were presented was careless, shoddy and demeaning" was similarly attacked by Ms King. Or are his credentials too well established to be so easily dismissed?  
Finally, Ms King questions my responsibility and professionalism because I had difficulty finding accurate information about the festival. Without mentioning unreturned phone messages, I should just point out that as a reporter one relies on official Press Kits being accurate. *Experimenta's* was not.

Lisa Gye

## Review

## techné cultures

Mike Leggett scans cyber exhibitions east and west

PICA's contribution to the opening of the Festival of Perth resolved that three days of art(iculations) was the way to go, and electronic media, including the *techné* exhibition, had pole position in the race for early attention. In Sydney's south-west, the Casula Powerhouse hosted *Cyber Cultures* an event which may well become an annual national survey of new digital art.

The variations on the term 'work in progress' is on view—processes of experiment, lines of inquiry, informal research into multimedia. And the tools themselves are subject to continuous redefinition as a set of technical and therefore aesthetic options. These parallel processes of evolution become content, the very notion of 'completion' is in question, thereby creating problems for visitors seeking 'product'.

### techné

This exhibition of new media art was co-curated by Michelle Glaser, and Rick Mason from IMAGO Multimedia Centre. *techné* combined the full gamut of current activity into four spaces at PICA, adjacent to the touring exhibition *Burning the Interface: International Artists' CD-ROM*, thereby providing a perspective across both shows and the astonishingly short period of five years. Two installations, a video lounge, and some 30 multimedia pieces—most produced since mid-1995 by international and mainly Australian artists—were available



VNS Matrix, BAD CODE

on six computers for interaction via mouse and keyboard. Of these, about one third were works from recent Australian graduates which, whilst demonstrating competency, did not always develop ideas or the potential of the medium beyond a well established mean. Graduating students are demonstrating the conflicts inherent in exploring the less-than-new media by not only pursuing the necessary research and development objectives, but also by trying to attract the attention of potential investors.

Other works displayed the broader and less literal investigations that need to occur at an advanced level in order to expand the use of multimedia. *Shock in the Ear*, devised by a small team led by Norie Neumark, places sound into the frame for careful scrutiny as the under-exploited medium amongst the multimedia. Fragments of sounds and sentences are triggered by mouse rollovers, movement across painted

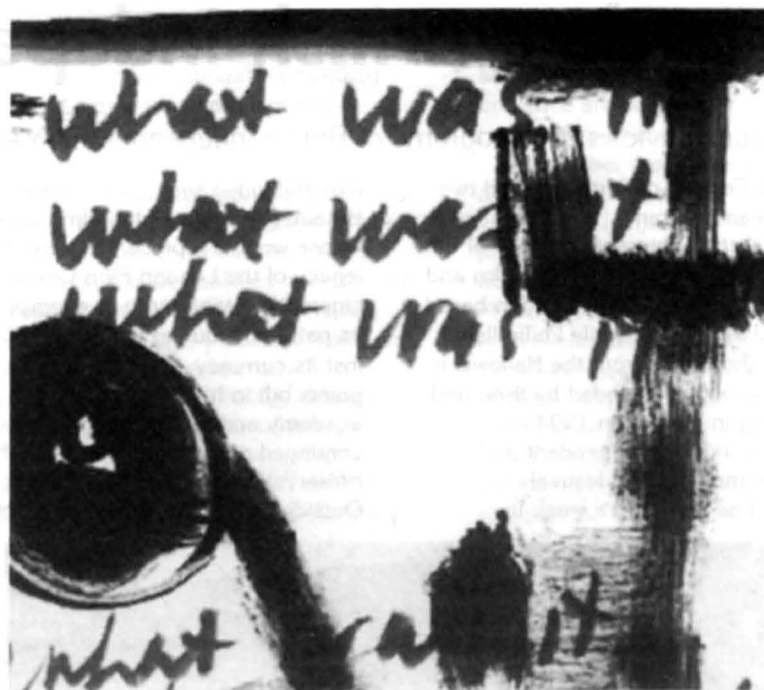
images and graphics—the cursor might contain a hand-written word: "how", "where", "what", the word repeated and developed in a cadenza of narrative and related and unrelated sound effects and music. Neumark's long association with sound works accounts for a maturity in the architecture of her poetry and the way it becomes performance, open to variation and nuance according to the response of the interacting subject. Similarly, the visuals perform in various juxtaposition, though not as lyrically. Instead of the *concrete*, the visual track relies on the expressionist, using typography and the obfuscation of reprographics. Navigation is complex, causing loops to repeat and leave you wondering whether you had influenced a flow or simply observed a pre-determined change.

Martine Corompt's *The Cute Machine* (also exhibited at *Cyber Cultures*), takes the spherical render into the kind of artificial life areas invented and perpetuated by Disney aesthetics, re-defined and re-distributed by Japanese comics' obsession with the Euro 'round-eye' infant-being, and identified by zoologists as neoteny. (Is that teeny as in tiny?) Well, infantile traits it seems under the Neotenic influence can remain with otherwise fully matured adults and become an aesthetic which Corompt demonstrates as a mutational form. The lurid pinks and sickly greens on the screen and the vinyl 'skin' of the installation are suitably unsettling,

reminding us of the proximity of bovine to beef, cherubs to nappies, round eyes to famine appeals...cute to lie.

Linear electronic forms in the video lounge did not all have those smoothly rendered surfaces. Sam Landels' *Hydra* revisited systems of representation based on persistence of vision, ingeniously adapting video technology to the formal task in hand. Strobing and fragmentation foregrounded the image as object and, with a dynamic relation to the frame, process.

*techné* demonstrated that artists have reached a critical mass in relation to interactive multimedia, particularly by visiting the web sites that had been bookmarked. The informative catalogue reveals that many of the new and younger artists have been trained straight into multimedia, without bringing the baggage of the Jurassic—this has clearly weakened some whilst liberating others, depending on their points of reference and I suppose, your point of view.



Norie Neumark, A Shock in the Ear

### Cyber Cultures

*Cyber Cultures* was curated by Kathy Cleland and David Cranswick through Street Level, which supports and advocates contemporary art initiatives for artists and audiences in Western Sydney.

The expansive physical framework of the Powerhouse provided draped nooks and crannies for video projector-based interactive installations, and a screenings area. Two seminar days and evenings of performance complemented this rich survey of new media work.

Thematically, the ten interactive installations were concerned "...with issues of human identity and its boundaries...", in the evolutionary sense. They were also linked financially: nine of the works represented the outcomes of the Australian Film Commission's investment in artists' projects; the Australia Council assisted with two.

Troy Innocent's *Untitled*, as the title suggests, is in development but advances loudly into the AL (artificial life) area. Innocent moves away from an obsession with shiny and globular entities towards the generation of (loud and shiny) sounds created by the visitor drop-and-dragging globular creatures into a circle projected onto a *camera obscura*-like table-top. It has something of the feel of an ornamental pond where the fish breed simply to provide the unsettling sounds of industrial mayhem!

*The User Unfriendly Interface* from Josephine Starrs and Leon Cmielewski assaults the sensibilities of gentle nerds with a lot of impertinence, puns and other slippery slopes designed to remind us in *faux* troglodyte style that the personal computer is a dubious thing. The customised casing looks ready to rip your eyes out.

Merlin Integrated Media's interactive CD-ROM, *Metabody*, documents one of the most interesting collaborations to occur in Australia last year between Stelarc, Merlin and Mic Gruchy, which included an 'electrifying' live world wide internet performance at Artspace last April. This interactive is encyclopedic, ranging from Stelarc's hook suspensions to the direct wiring of the audience. It is the snapshot of a career, but has built in the ability—via an internet connection—to not only update but also extend the means by which the audience may participate.

The long anticipated *BAD CODE* from the VNS Matrix team made a sneak preview, treading "a fine line between artwork and commercial prototype, aiming to inject alternative narratives and characters into a 'shoot-em-up' dominated games market". The All New Gen mob together with the DNA Sluts up against Big Daddy Mainframe (BDM) is the basic scenario that has been rehearsed some time now, and one has to

ask in these days of internets and intranets, how has BDM survived as the villain? Whilst 'the look' is intriguing, the feel for the game is obscure and it currently remains true to its title.

*Invert* is somewhat enigmatic. Lloyd Sharp's "organic artwork" is about organs...and other processes, and parts, and orifices...about various of our physical functions, vectored through the sensibilities of the artist's own experience of challenged health. It is an interactive partially using the game metaphor but mainly approached using Sharp's idea of the metaphor of "personality"—which could be another way of saying unpredictable. Hence the enigma. Whilst the piece is life affirmative and has amusing cursor devices that ambush one another on screen, its personality swings between the pedagogic statement and a visceral space of images.

This is quite unlike the clear spaces that are created in another internal journey, Isabelle Delmotte's *Epileptograph*. Large high definition images and shattering sound provide internalised glimpses of the experience of epileptic seizures, from which Delmotte suffers. Sequences of these images are shown on small video screens. (The process of making this work has also enabled the artist to reclaim to consciousness parts of the experience which are otherwise entirely erased from her memory.) Finally, a word description of the five stages of a seizure from the artist's point-of-view. As a totality, we comprehend, through the cognitive process, and at a safe distance.

Both exhibitions had major involvement from the Industry and Cultural Development Branch of the AFC, and a haggard of others. Audiences can now look forward to a period where, in the public spaces, work is prudently selected, where the time required for participation or even interaction with multimedia work is in relation to the kind of concentration that most people can sustain during a single visit. On-line participation, the promised connections permitting, will become like videos and television—subject to the vicissitudes of the audience in response to the matrixes of options. Whilst *techné*, gave us another glimpse of this future, *Cyber Cultures* not only celebrated the physically interactive exhibition spaces of Casula but enabled the socialisation of many of the exhibits, a step away from what one arts commentator has helplessly observed as the "diminished aesthetic experience of a video monitor..."

*techné*, IMAGO, at PICA, Festival of Perth, February 13-March 9

*Cyber Cultures*, presented by Street Level at the Casula Powerhouse, Casula, Sydney, March 9-April 6, 1997

## Reviews

## Up to date British independents

Sam Landels reviews two programs of British independent film and video at the Festival of Perth

The recent Festival of Perth featured two British screen programs. *What You See Is What You Get*, an international tour of the third ICA biennial of independent film and video, was presented by its London based 'selector' John Wyver, while Philip Ilson presented short films from the Halloween Society, a group co-founded by Ilson and Tim Harding in London in 1994 to showcase works by independent and student filmmakers. The festival enthusiast had less than a week to

film and video sector in contemporary Britain. For many of the filmmakers whose work is represented here, the legacy of the London Film Co-op and the cinematic *avant garde* as exemplified by its patriarchs during the 60s and 70s has lost its currency and definition. As Wyver points out in his introduction, it is the academy and the museum that have a continued and shared interest in the preservation of a traditional *avant garde*. Outside though, independent practitioners

The most extraordinary film in Wyver's selection is John Maybury's *Remembrance of Things Fast*, which wittily combines an overdriven surface play of digital effects with a humorous attack on mass media mindlessness and its implicit homophobic aggression. The video is a welcome remedy to the current obsession with surface and trickery for its own sake simply because it is able to parade off a seemingly endless palette of computer based effects yet maintain a strong sense of what it is trying to say. Tilda Swinton is cast as the mother of a dying AIDS victim; Rupert Everett delivers a fitting sermon on sex and technology; and elsewhere in this cyber camp pastiche, caricatures of vacant television personalities and Ku Klux Klan lookalikes labelled "Q" for queer, float over the grid of a nightmarish mediascape with billboards of neon queens and fluorescent dildo towers lurking in the background.

The closest thing in the Halloween Society program to match Maybury's work is a lively short animated piece called *Hermaphrodite Bikini* by Clio Barnard, which celebrates the surreal transformation of genitals belonging to a couple of ecstatic creatures who float about in wonderful blue skies all day turning red and yellow.

Other notable works in *What You See Is What You Get* include Christopher Harrison's *Puzzled*, a highly effective visual pun on the 'construction' of masculine identity, and Tony Hill's  *Holding the Viewer*, which along with Charles Garrad's *Inside Out* harks back to the formalist investigations of London Co-op member Peter Gidal, and the Canadian Michael Snow. The subject matter and meaning in both films rest entirely on the manipulation of the camera.



*Remembrance of Things Fast*

Isaac Julien's almost neoclassical *The Attendant*, made specifically for television, creates a dreamy elegy based on ideas relating to the transgressive depiction of black male sexuality. Set in an art gallery, numerous famous old paintings are transformed seemingly by magic to display sexual scenarios incorporating elements of gay desire (well oiled Negro men with feathery wings, bondage gear, etc).

Similarly confronting, albeit in a more direct way, is Sean Roe's *I Will Survive*, a funny yet poignant short film about the threat of AIDS featuring the Gloria Gaynor song, and which, as Wyver suggests in his program notes, "should be seen and not explained away in writing". Look out for it, you could even see it on your television.

*What You See Is What You Get*, selected by John Wyver, and *The Halloween Society program of short films presented by Philip Ilson*, Festival of Perth.

Sam Landels is a film and video artist who is currently completing an M.F.A at the University of Western Australia.



*The Attendant*

negotiate a dense barrage of over 50 titles. Wyver's collection was programmed into four nights of screenings, each with its own loose thematic such as 'Alive and Kicking' (the body and sexual expression), 'Cutting Edge' (centred on ideas of technology and representation), 'Modern Times', 'Metropolis' and 'The Outrage' (recent short pieces which use digital technologies in innovative ways). Likewise, the Halloween Society's offering, which is pitched more at the hip 'easy listening' (yes, that's what the program says) circuit includes the disposable 'Rave Cinema', 'The Cinema of Sex and Death' and the trash kitsch of 'Cinema de Lounge'.

Both programs are valuable signposts for the changing face of the independent

have increasingly embraced the exhibition possibilities of television, specifically program slots on Channel 4, the BBC and cable/satellite offerings from pan-European services and the United States. The contemporary independent movement has become shapeless and unidentifiable. Emergent technologies can be cited as a cause of this, but it is primarily due to the loss of an explicit leftist argument—the fragmentation of a polemical impetus—that has enabled artists to re-work and re-invigorate the preoccupations of the old *avant garde* within varied new formats. Certainly both programs display this development with a direct emphasis placed on topical explorations within the politics of sexual, racial and cultural identity in Britain during the 90s.

## From the ashes

John McConchie celebrates new media language

Even as the Gonski Report hangs poised like Poe's pendulum above the guts of Australia's Screen Resource Organisations, a new era dawns. One by one, with minimum fuss, they are opening their new multimedia studios for business.

The studios are modest. The intention is, after all, not the display of technological toys but a continuation of the SRO's common philosophy: providing the essential basics needed for the development and expression of ideas. At its best, this entails an exploration of the nature of the medium itself and no moment is as exciting as discovering the possibilities of a medium still in its infancy. The studios also testify a crucial step forward in resourcing this developing field, complementing the work of the Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT) on one hand and providing a recruitment base for the multimedia industry through connections with the Co-operative Multimedia Centres on the other. So what can we expect to see from these new resources?

Perhaps it is too early to say. The Media Resource Centre has established

an artist in residency program in tandem with its acquisition of the studio. Noted VNS Matrix collaborator and usually rudely masked Gashgirl, Francesca da Rimini, is at this moment building a new website. This places expertise, with the emphasis on content and process, on the premises even as the first studio bookings are being taken. Using relatively low-end equipment, I would expect the final product to exemplify da Rimini's typically simple but powerful economy of expression, the consequence of evocative concepts. When asked what she was working on, she replied: women in the Zapatista movement in Central America, Japanese dolls and ghost stories. Titled *Dollspace*, it will soon haunt various internet sites (*System-X*, *The Thing NYC* and *LambdaMOO*). Well, the beauty of this medium is its ability to marry apparently disparate topics in unexpected spaces.

It is perhaps an adage to say that postmodernism is the result of our inability to say anything new. This appears to me to be patently false: the ability to speak in a new way is inevitably to see things anew, to change

the essential relationship between language and the world. Others, such as the film documentarist Chris Marker, have studied the effect of 20th century technology on the process of political resistance and popular memory highlighting the role of technology to act as a prosthesis to memory, and its potential to serve as an antidote to the horrors of an historical amnesia that results from our very corporeality. Ghost stories could be an earlier version of this process, the ineradicable ashes of an otherwise forgotten trauma lingering as a signpost to its erased existence. And dolls? In *Sunless* Marker films a Japanese ceremony where broken dolls are collected and burnt annually, the avatars for our broken selves which must make way for the new. Marker is, however, an exception to the usual rules of production. The closer we move to this cyborg world of digitally enhanced memory, the more our films and television fantasies emphasise the machine in flight, glossing over the consequences of death or political struggle. Taylor Harrison's brief article "Weaving the Cyborg Shroud" (in Harrison et. al, *Enterprise Zones: Critical Positions on Star Trek*, Westview Press, 1996) theorises exactly this deferral of mourning and its affects in the space opera *Star Trek: the Next Generation*, where the very issues raised by the medium itself must be glossed over and

transformed into the entertainment of action.

All this does is confirm my enthusiasm for projects like Francesca da Rimini's, which offers some kind of beginning in the emotional enterprise, emphasises the need for access to technology based outside mainstream commercial interests, and sets out to explore uncharted possibilities of digital texts, new ways of speaking (and forgetting). This is also the charter of the Electronic Writing Ensemble, also based in Adelaide. As an ongoing affair, the ensemble has at its fingertips virtual connections with theorists and writers around the world, yet is never as delighted as when it uses what is to be found in its own backyard. Explore such concepts as the non-linear possibilities of hyperlinks, moving written texts back and forth in an apparent defiance of linear syntax, playing precisely with the effects of memory and temporality, on line at [www.va.com.au/parallel/](http://www.va.com.au/parallel/). The Ensemble (Linda Marie Walker, Jyanni Steffensen) will be collaborating on a project with ANAT later in the year, no doubt prompting a further report, at least in old-fashioned ink. In the meantime, these modest experiments forge their contributions to the future of digital communication and our commitment to the fusion of flesh with technology, as writing and as performance.

## Reviews

# John Tonkin: man or morph?

Vicki Sowry reviews *Elective Physiognomies* and *Elastic Masculinities*

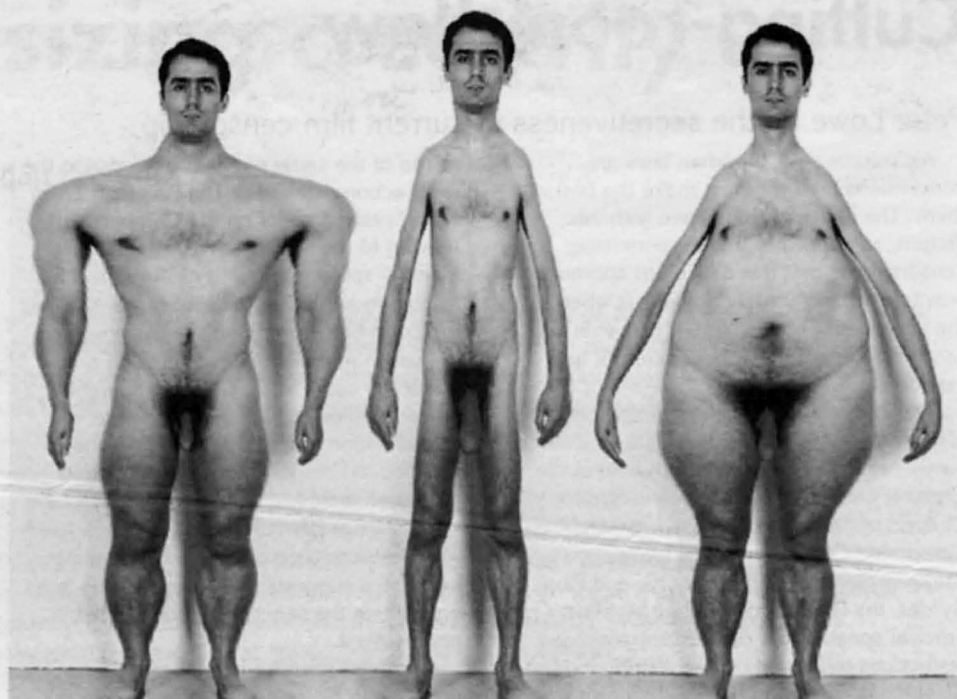
Using his body as a template, Sydney-based new media artist John Tonkin has created a corpus of static faces and morphing bodies which the viewer/user is invited to adjust, tweak and—ultimately—pass judgment upon.

Tonkin developed an interest in pseudo-sciences relating specifically to the body after viewing an exhibition of physiognomic drawings and artefacts in 1992. He was particularly interested in how such theories could interplay with emergent morphing technologies.

*Elective Physiognomies* and *Elastic Masculinities* are the outcomes of Tonkin's exploration into ideas relating to the face and body as sites of identity, in particular, identity which can be culturally mapped through the employment of

'scientific' modalities. Both works were recently shown at The Performance Space and at the *Cyber Cultures* exhibition at the Casula Powerhouse.

*Elective Physiognomies* comprises an interactive, authored in Hypercard, and a series of printouts of digitally manipulated faces and fictional DNA code. The interactive invites the user to prioritise a number of these faces (which use the artist's face as starting point, or source code if you like) according to criteria including most-to-least trustworthy, most-to-least intelligent, most-to-least homosexual. The interactive then tabulates the user's response against the combined average of all previous user responses to ascertain the consistency of response to each face.



John Tonkin, *Elastic Masculinities*

For Tonkin, this statistical component, while interesting, is not as important as the creation of an interactive structure which, through the user's navigation, gives rise to the ideas and themes of the piece. In this manner the task structure of *Elective Physiognomies* insists upon the disturbing outcome of codifying faciality to such levels of rigidity and generalisation.

Tonkin takes this notion further in his most recent work, *Elastic Masculinities*. Here, the artist uses his full body as a point of departure to question the perceived alignment of masculine attributes with particular body shapes. Similar to *Elective Physiognomies*, the piece comprises a series of printouts of fictional bodies alongside a Java-authored interactive. The user is invited to adjust the dimensions (height, chest, hips, etc) of a randomly generated body and is then asked to classify the constructed body according to sliding criteria which includes gentle/forceful, graceful/awkward, masculine/feminine.

*Elastic Masculinities* is currently at beta

stage; future versions of the work are intended to provide the user with an image of the statistically average body (again using tabulations of previous user responses) for each chosen position along the sliding criteria. In doing so, Tonkin hopes to prompt the user to question the validity of systematisation in such diffuse areas as gender and subjectivity.

The next piece in Tonkin's evolving body of work will investigate eugenics and genetic modelling as they relate to morphing technologies. Currently in development, the work stems from the artist's response to a perception that biological metaphors and allied evolutionary navigational systems are on the increase.

For further reference, the 1996 Ars Electronica network symposium—*Memesis: The Future of Evolution—is particularly useful*: [www.aec.at/meme/symp](http://www.aec.at/meme/symp).

John Tonkin, *Cyber Cultures*, Casula Powerhouse, March 9-April 6

## Elective Physiognomies



most trustworthy

least trustworthy

The **size** of each bar represents the amount of **variation** in the responses.  
The **smaller** the bar the more **consistent** the responses to that face.

trustworthy  intelligent  introverted  homosexual

click on the above categories to view the different responses

go to start

John Tonkin, *Elective Physiognomies*

# Towards an Indigenous screen

Lester Bostock summarises the key points discussed at a forum on Indigenous filmmaking

The ongoing debates surrounding Mabo and Wik serve to highlight that, among other concerns, the cultural rights of Indigenous Australians continue to be eroded. No less affected are issues relating to Indigenous filmmaking and representation on screen—Indigenous people have no control over their image and how they are portrayed on the screen.

A forum titled "What is the Indigenous Screen?" held at Metro Television, Sydney, in January provided an opportunity to address a range of important topics such: Who determines what is Indigenous screen?; Who is the owner of the image?—especially in terms of the ownership of the history of colonialism, and the appropriation of Aboriginal culture by non-Indigenous people; and How does the significance of image differ in the filmmaking when made by non-Indigenous filmmakers as opposed to Indigenous filmmakers?

The forum, which featured a number of prominent industry representatives, was programmed by Robin Cowburn and Gillian Moody, two young Indigenous people who are employed under a TEAME traineeship scheme.

Walter Saunders, Director, Indigenous Branch of the Australian Film Commission, opened the forum by explaining the unit's key role in establishing the short film initiative which developed into the groundbreaking series *From Sand to Celluloid*, in which Indigenous Australians told their own stories in their own way.

Pauline Clague, an emerging Indigenous filmmaker whose film was included in *From Sand to Celluloid*, identified intellectual property rights as a major Indigenous screen issue. Clague noted that the majority of film footage on Indigenous people is not in their control, and that it is in their interests to be in control of these images. Concerns were also raised that there is no international protocol on Indigenous copyright, and that authorities should determine a position on such matters so that, again, Aborigines can be given control over their images.

Cameron Goold, a multimedia producer, also expressed his concerns regarding ownership rights of Indigenous stories as distributed not only via the

internet, but through the media in general. Goold recently completed a national survey for the AFC on Indigenous representations on the internet, and found that of the approximately 300 web pages with Aboriginal content, only about 15 per cent of these have been actually coded by Indigenous people.

The main issues focused on who owns the story; the tendency of non-Indigenous writers and filmmakers to appropriate Aboriginal culture; and how Indigenous people are suppressed from voicing their opinions through film. An audience member asked where the white writer fits in, what role can they play. Most participants agreed that they should work in collaboration with Indigenous writers.

Tom Jeffery, the only non-Indigenous speaker on the panel, and an independent producer who has worked collaboratively with Indigenous filmmakers, said that a truly Aboriginal film has yet to be produced. He believes that the only way Aboriginal people can learn about the film business is to work on as many films as they possibly can.

We won't see what he would call an Aboriginal film until such films are made, produced and directed by an all-Aboriginal crew.

Questions were raised about where Aborigines fit in the mainstream media, and that access to the mainstream is a right to be granted equally to all sectors of Australian society. After all, there is no point in being told that you have freedom of speech if you are not allowed to talk—and Indigenous people have been largely excluded from expressing their views through mainstream channels. Tom Jeffrey agreed that it is imperative to have programs from an Aboriginal perspective as part of mainstream media.

So, what is the Indigenous screen? The consensus at the forum was that it should be Indigenous people telling their own stories in their own way; stories that come out of the Indigenous culture and its aspirations; stories that would, through the film industry, benefit all Australians.

What is the Indigenous Screen? was presented by Metro Television, Sydney, Wednesday January 29. Other speakers included Robert Maza, actor and writer, and award-winning filmmaker Darlene Johnson.

Lester Bostock, President of Metro Television, facilitated the forum.

## Reports

## Cutting-room flaw

Peter Lowe on the secretiveness of current film censorship

As Voltaire said, if human laws are conventions then we must make the best of them. The difficulty that I have with this dictum, as applied to the law permitting censorship, is that it is difficult to appreciate how tolerant our society actually is when the censor isn't obliged to tell you what (and more importantly, how much) it has censored.

The vexed application of the censorship laws in Australia in relation to film was the subject of a recent public forum held at the Chauvel Cinema in Paddington in Sydney. Chaired by David Marr, the forum—titled *Censorship Creep*—heard the NSW Attorney-General, Jeff Shaw QC, and Paul Byrnes, the Director of the Sydney Film Festival speak about current and proposed restrictions to film and video distribution.

The context giving rise to the forum was the recent discovery, albeit some weeks after its public release, that an advertisement in Australian *Hustler* magazine had been censored. The ad was a

re-run of the same one that gave rise to the legal action detailed in *The People vs Larry Flynt*, being a spoof on the Campari ad relating to the sexual adventures of Moral Majority spokesman, Jerry Falwell and his mother in an outhouse. Whilst Falwell lost the court battle, on the basis that freedom of speech in the US permitted such a politically satirical ad, no-one apparently told the Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC), the Federal body wielding the censor's scalpel. The OFLC permitted the ad to be re-run, only after the references to Falwell's "mom" were deleted. The decision to censor the ad is puzzling, because it suggests that the speech is free only where the sanctity of motherhood is not involved.

A similar exercise in censorship was undertaken by the OFLC in relation to the gay film, Bruce La Bruce's *Hustler White*. Apparently the OFLC found one line from the film, "Cut my buttocks, dear boy", as being too much for its fancy and the line

was duly cut. Perhaps it was the way that the phrase was said that the OFLC found worrisome, or it may have been because of the context in which it was said; indeed it may even have been because the phrase itself was found to have been pernicious. However, none of us will really know because the OFLC is not obliged to tell the film-going public precisely what has been censored. No, the film-goer is only advised that the film has been given a certain rating, either G, PG, M, MA or R. Of course, if a film is given the RC rating (as Jim Jarmusch's film *Dead Man* originally was before the OFLC's minder, the Classification Review Board, overturned the decision) it may be that no-one will be the wiser, as a refused classification rating may well be the end of the matter. Nothing more would be heard of the movie. In the case of *Dead Man*, I suspect that it was only because of the notoriety of the decision to deny classification to a movie made by such a widely known director that enabled the public to become better informed of the process of such censorship.

The OFLC has acknowledged that it has a responsibility to publish its classification decisions in relation to films, videos,

publications and video games and this it does on the world wide web (<http://www.oflc.gov.au>). Attempting to locate what had been censored in *Hustler White* proved a real eye-opener as the web site reference (T96/4125) to that movie only provides the most cursory details relating to its R classification. However, it does provide consumer advice that the film has "high level sex scenes". Beyond this reference, the on-line public would be none the wiser as to why the film was censored in the way it was.

Whilst the OFLC should be congratulated for making its decisions regarding classification of films as public as it does, the same cannot be said in relation to its failure to fully detail the reasons for requiring certain scenes to be censored. Censorship makes the greatest inroads into the fabric of society when it is carried out in such a furtive manner. It is only when the process of censorship can be seen for what it does (rather than for what it classifies) that the act of censorship can be put in proper perspective and better understood as being in the public interest.

*Censorship Creep forum, Chauvel Cinemas, Sydney, Thursday March 20*

## Big opportunities for small screen documentaries

Gillian Webb reports from the recent Small Screen Big Picture TV conference in Fremantle

The Small Screen, Big Picture conference held in Perth in February focused on the tough times ahead financially for the budding filmmaker, especially if some of the recommendations contained in the Gonski Review are adopted. It appears the hour is nigh for the independent filmmaker to attract the global market.

Andrew Ogilvie, a producer from Australian company Electric Pictures, agrees, but concedes that for the foreseeable future at least, the industry will continue to be heavily subsidised by the federal and state governments. He said that this is not an isolated problem—indeed the funding problems faced by Australia's film industry are encountered by most film industries around the world, with the exception of the really lucrative filmmaking centres of Hong Kong, Bombay, and of course, Hollywood.

Despite this, Ogilvie believes the Australian film industry should still endeavour to be more self-sufficient, which invariably entails selling ideas to international broadcasters. Australian documentary makers in particular, he said, have made a significant and very favourable impression on broadcasters across the globe, and should capitalise on this reputation.

Britain's Channel 4, internationally recognised for its cutting-edge television, is also renowned for taking on films and documentaries from first-time directors, priding itself on this ability to give filmmakers their 'big break'. Jacquie Lawrence, Deputy Commissioning Editor of Independent Film and Video at Channel 4, said, "There is pilot money just waiting for the first company who can convince Channel 4 that they have come up with a concept which fulfils [Channel 4's] desire for subversion, yet also has the popular appeal that any idea needs to compete for these mid-evening slots".

Similarly, the production department at NHK Japan receives a huge volume of proposals per day. Kagari Tajima heads up the co-production department, which, certainly by Australian standards, is massive. Each division (including drama, entertainment, culture and others) has 50 producers. In total, there are 800 producers. "Just like the former BBC", joked Tajima.

NHK has five television channels, and its total budget is a whopping US\$5.5 billion. However, despite an extremely large production budget and the ever-increasing demand for new programs, the process of selection of new material is rigorous, and competition is extremely tough.

Sixty per cent of proposals sent to NHK are simply asking for co-production money. The Japanese market is very big on 'spontaneous' wildlife shows and scientific documentaries. To Tajima and his producers at NHK, these are 'safe' topics. They believe there is too much room for controversy when cultural, political or social issues are commented on. He advised the budding documentary maker that a low budget series of 30 minute episodes is much easier for NHK to take on than two hour-long documentaries with high production budgets.

While the documentary maker must now make the most of any and every opportunity to sell his or her story to international markets, there remains in Australia a saviour of sorts for the independent filmmaker. He is Mike Rubbo, Commissioning Editor of Documentary at ABC TV in Sydney. Rubbo said that while the ABC's doors are open to all manner of ideas, he is particularly impressed by a passionate commitment to a project. Some people, he added, genuinely believe in documentary as a genre, not just as a stepping stone to a career in fiction, and that is a large part of what may inspire his department to take on a film.

"Documentary makers are the biographers of a nation", said Rubbo. "It is the stitching together of these stories that make a community."

In Rubbo's experience, too many documentaries are based on ideas that are easy to pick up on—common themes, such as people in trouble and so on. He explained that the ABC loves documentaries that break into an "inner sanctum" of sorts—involving sectors of the community which don't usually talk to the media. It is also good, said Rubbo, for the filmmaker to ask himself: Does the documentary include compelling characters? Does it have a strong storyline? What about closure? Is it local, or can it have a much wider impact? Will it rate well? Do you as the filmmaker have a deep conviction about it?

Rubbo believes that if it has all of the above, not only will the ABC be likely to pick it up, but the film will sell on to other markets. He encouraged the filmmaker not to "think too much of these markets and just do your craft well". If the film is truly worth its salt, it will look after itself.

*Small Screen, Big Picture TV conference, Screenwest, Festival of Perth, February 21-23*

## Queensland film industry takes action on restructure

Robyn Evans reports on some recent developments

The Queensland film and television industry has been offered a unique opportunity to inform state government policy and be instrumental in the design of their new government funding agency following moves by the Treasurer and Minister for the Arts, Mrs Joan Sheldon, to restructure the Arts division in the Queensland government.

This opportunity comes as a direct result of vigorous lobbying by industry following the announcement on March 5 that Film Queensland (FQ) and the Pacific Film and Television Commission (PFTC) would be merged as part of the wider restructure. While the film industry welcomed news of the merger, which would end the split focus in government support, initial plans for the restructure were met with strong opposition.

With echoes of the Gonski report's lack

of understanding of the importance of creative, cultural and professional development, the government originally outlined plans to establish a Queensland Film Commission that would not have a development function. It was envisaged that the PFTC, whose sole function is to attract off-shore and interstate (and largely fully-financed) productions to Queensland, would continue in this 'commercial' role, whilst the foundations of the locally-based industry, development schemes funded by FQ, would be absorbed by the broader Arts Office portfolio. Following the vehement response of industry to these plans, the Minister has agreed to undertake wider consultation with industry on the proposed structure of the new Commission.

At an industry forum on March 17th, Arts Policy Adviser Philip Pike invited the

industry to elect a working party to advise the Minister and an implementation team on appropriate models for the new commission. He indicated that the implementation would include reviews of national and international models of government support to film industries. Filmmakers attending the forum acknowledged that this approach represents a commitment from the state government to support the local industry, and offers an incredible opportunity for the film industry to 'create' a government agency that is truly reflective of its needs.

The current mood of the industry is one of cautious optimism. Those involved directly in the lobbying of government are keen to point out that without the swift response to the proposed moves, the merger would have been enacted with little or no consultation, as was the case when the two organisations (PFTC and FQ) were originally formed. While the adoption of a consultative process reinforces the Minister's statement that the restructuring is intended to benefit the artist, there remains concern that the emphasis on off-shore investment, and the proposed move to

marginalise the key roles of creative and cultural development, reflects a basic misunderstanding of the way the film industry functions. Filmmakers at the forum agreed that 'educating' the Minister about the industry was going to be a key function of the working party.

Queensland's local production industry has grown considerably in recent years, thanks largely to initiatives by FQ. Since they introduced a production investment fund, the percentage of local production in Queensland has risen from just 5 per cent in 1993/94 to 28 per cent in 1994/95, and 38 per cent in 1995/96. With several Queensland producers very close to green light on major drama projects these figures are expected to rise further in the next twelve to eighteen months. Events in Queensland such as the 5th International Documentary Conference, to be held in Brisbane in November, and the continuing growth of the Brisbane International Film Festival, further highlight Queensland's arrival in the national and international film arena.

The proposed restructure offers the opportunity to consolidate and expand this recent growth, and that is what the local industry will be working towards.



## Previews

## Matinaze '97

Sydney Intermedia Network (SIN) will present its seventh annual survey of Australian screen art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, April 5-12. In addition to the regular film and video component, this year's *Matinaze* will also include a multimedia exhibition of interactive CD-ROMs and a forum/presentation by three highly acclaimed new media artists.

SIN, formerly the Sydney Super 8 Film Group, has been promoting the innovative use of film, video and new media since 1990. *Matinaze*, a major showcase for experimental film and video, has continued in the tradition of the earlier organisation's hugely popular annual Super 8 film festivals which began in 1980.

The film and video program (screening Saturday April 5, repeated Saturday April 12) now comprises work produced on a variety of formats including U-Matic, SP Betacam, 16mm, and computer animation. Highlights include John Tonkin's *man ascending*, Marilyn Fairskye's *Plane Torque*, Paul Winkler's controversial *Time Out for Sport*, and Miriam Stirling's take on Peter Greenaway, titled *Wednesday, 11th May, at 1pm*.

SIN's newly appointed director, Alessio Cavallaro, is especially pleased that

*Matinaze '97* will provide the Australian premieres of CD-ROMs by Megan Heyward and Sally Pryor, and the Sydney premiere of Norie Neumark's interactive. "These are impressive works, and particularly interesting in that sound design is a major element in each of the productions", said Cavallaro.

The three artists will demonstrate and discuss aesthetic and technical aspects of their work at a forum on Sunday April 6. Heyward's *I am a Singer* explores notions of memory, culture and identity. The interactive's user assists a pop star with amnesia to reconstruct her identity through media reports, diaries, anecdote and dream. Pryor's *Postcard from Tunis*, a rich audiovisual collage that reflects the artist's impressions of Tunisian culture, is essentially about inscriptions: ancient and contemporary Tunisian scripts and drawings as inscribed through the computer interface. Both CD-



Miriam Stirling, *Wednesday, 11th May, at 1pm*

ROMs were featured in the New Talent Pavilion at Milia, the major European multimedia exhibition held in Cannes earlier this year. Neumark's *Shock in the Ear* is a sound-centred interactive of "shock aesthetics" which describes deep and abrupt physical, psychic and cultural change. The gallery installation version of *Shock in the Ear*, with multiple computer screens and "sense sites", will open at Artspace, Sydney, on April 17.

A week-long interactive multimedia exhibition in the foyer area of the AGNSW's Domain Theatre will include recent works

by Bronwyn Coupe, Ross Franks, Janet Merewether and Lloyd Sharp, as well as Neumark's and Pryor's CD-ROMs.

Events such as *Matinaze* are vital for the continuation of a vigorous screen culture. Internationally renowned Australian video artist Peter Callas—who was on the event's selection panel with interdisciplinary media artist Nola Farman and screen culture commentator Annemarie Jonson—noted that "it's very important to have survey exhibitions like *Matinaze* on a regular basis...to see what other people are making in a non-competitive context". Alessio Cavallaro explained that *Matinaze*, like other SIN activities, is about cultivating the talent and profile of both emerging and established independent screen practitioners, and developing broader audiences for their work nationally and internationally. He emphasised that these and other activities by related screen culture organisations will be severely affected if certain funding recommendations contained in the Gonski Report are adopted. Celebrate innovative Australian screen art at *Matinaze '97-'98* might be too late.

Sydney Intermedia Network's *Matinaze '97*, April 5-12, Domain Theatre, level 1, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. For further information contact Sydney Intermedia Network, tel 02 9264 7225 or email [sinsite@ozemail.com.au](mailto:sinsite@ozemail.com.au)

## Sunshine site

## Mary Gilliver outlines Brisbane's eMedia event

From humble beginnings, brainstorming in West End cafes 18 months ago, the Queensland Multimedia Arts Centre (QMAC) has grown from a core of seven to nearly 200 members, creating a strong support network for Queensland's fast-growing art and technology community.

The success of projects such as the Multimedia Arts Forum at which 150 people braved thunderstorms last April to attend workshops and lectures and *Byte the Big One*, a series of workshops and concerts broadcast live to TV and the internet in November has helped solidify QMAC's role in serving artists.

In May and June of this year as part of the Brisbane Fringe Festival, QMAC will present *eMedia*, a festival of Brisbane's emerging and electronic arts with a hefty program of exhibitions, film showings, seminars, workshops and performance art. The festival is designed to enhance the emerging arts and technology

industries in Queensland by assisting artists in creative development and distribution while also showing businesses multimedia market potentials.

*eMedia* will inhabit various sites around Brisbane, the major event set for the *Grand Orbit* on Sunday, June 8. *Overload* will inundate the senses with exhilarating artwork and fast-paced, techno rhythms. Satellite link-ups will beam participants into New York for interactive seminars from some of the city's new media artists; experts around the world to discuss technical, commercial, creative and philosophical developments in multimedia. *Overload* will also launch three of Queensland's most exciting art websites: the Queensland Museum, Brisbane City Council's *Suburban Stories* and *Artscape*.

Elsewhere during *eMedia* the Griller Girls will take over H Block Gallery at QUT with a multimedia exhibition spinning off from New York art terrorists Guerilla Girls. The festival will also host the Queensland premiere of Mic Gruchy's new documentary, *Stelarc/Psycho/Cyber*. As a development project, QUT Communications Design students will create an *eMedia* commercial to be aired on Channel 7.

QMAC president, Scot Thrane says "*eMedia* is designed to provide a structure for artists to create, develop, produce, exhibit and distribute their work. Queensland doesn't have a central multimedia core. There are many different groups and they all do their respective bits but they're not all interconnected yet. This festival has been initiated so that the artists can have a place to create work and distribute their art. Queenslanders haven't realised the potential of their content yet. We've got things happening here that aren't happening anywhere else. Equipment like QANTM's Silicon Graphics studio—there are only three of those in the world and one of them is in Queensland. *eMedia* is providing a pathway for artists with no computer experience to be able to work on any level of technology they choose".

According to electronic artist Paul Brown, Brisbane resident for two years, "I think there's a far more egalitarian art scene here than in southern centres. It has helped a lot of arts communities. John Tonkin came up here on a residency a couple of years ago and he was quite amazed at the number of mature-age students embracing new media technologies. It was clearly part of

an encouraging Brisbane culture".

Brown is concerned about the so-called brain drain of Australian artists shifting overseas and Queensland artists taking their talent south and hopes that *eMedia* will help stimulate the state's industry. "*eMedia* and QUT's Communications Design course and other initiatives will make it attractive for artists to stay in Australia. Being exposed to what's being produced is very important for an emerging art, which is why *eMedia* is important for students. When you've only seen a small amount of work with a new medium it's very hard to know where to push the limits and where the potential is. It is a fundamental relationship between the Arts and Industry which makes up the foundation of the *eMedia* philosophy. Neither can survive without the other and when united they form a powerful cultural force. It is hoped that the energy created by this union will provide Brisbane with a showcase of what's really happening in the nether regions of our mother boards."

*eMedia Brisbane, May 23-June 9. For more information contact the Queensland Multimedia Arts Centre on 07 3236 9111 or email [mary@qmac.org.au](mailto:mary@qmac.org.au).*

## Classic grassroots

## Annemarie Jonson on the forthcoming St Kilda Film Festival

The St Kilda Film Festival, running April 24-27, will comprise a more focused, smaller selection of films in this, its fourteenth year. According to director Peter Kaufmann, the 1997 festival will aim for quality not quantity, with fewer sessions overall than last year, built around several thematic programs.

Kaufmann says this is a bumper year for local entries. Over 400 films were submitted from throughout Australia for selection. In a new initiative—a guest curator's program—Australian filmmaker Lawrence Johnston (*LIFE*) has been invited to curate a program of new and retrospective short films. Entitled *Confessions of a Film Maker*, the program includes short international and local

films with an intensely personal take in their storytelling or subject matter. *Inside Out*, the directorial debut of Jason Gould, son of Barbra Streisand and Elliot Gould, will be featured, as will Werner Herzog's film on the post-Gulf War fires in Kuwait, *Lessons of Darkness*, and Merrilee Bennett's late 80s short, *Song of Air*.

The *New British Cinema* component of the Festival will include four programs of short film, developed by the AFI in conjunction with the Arts Council of Great Britain, the BBC and Channel Four. The programs explore the interface between film and other artforms. In *Dance for the Camera*, choreographers and directors work together responding to the challenge of making dance translate

effectively for what was originally a TV audience. *Sound on Film* showcases short film collaborations between composers and filmmakers, in which the music and image are integrated and have equal importance. In the *Picture House* series, several auteurs, including Paul Schrader, Atom Egoyan and Raul Ruiz, respond to the inspiration of paintings which hold special significance for them: Ruiz, for example, stages a bizarre dialogue between the Chinese painter Shi Ta'o and Velasquez' famous painting *Las Meninas*; while Atom Egoyan develops an intimate take on Arshile Gorky's *A Portrait of the Artist with his Mother*. The fourth program is the self-explanatory *Animate!*, which features a range of animation styles and media from computer generated imagery to handpainted film.

From May, the British programs together with the award winning Australian films from the Festival will tour

to Sydney, followed by Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Hobart.

As Kaufmann points out, the St Kilda Film Festival is an important forum for showcasing emerging local filmmakers. In the past, the festival has screened works of luminaries such as Tracey Moffatt, Emma Kate Croghan, Gillian Armstrong, John Ruane, Geoffrey Wright and Jane Campion. The festival's role in showing the works of emerging artists, and more broadly its contribution to Australia's diverse screen culture, is particularly salient in the light of developments such as the Gonski report, which threatens major cuts to the funding of grassroots screen culture organisations, festivals and publications. Catch the St Kilda Festival while you can.

*St Kilda Film Festival, April 24-27, Astor Theatre and the George Cinema. For further information call 03 9419 1931 fax 03 9417 4475.*

## Film reviews



Children of the Revolution

**Children of the Revolution (M)**  
directed by Peter Duncan  
a Village Roadshow release  
currently screening nationally

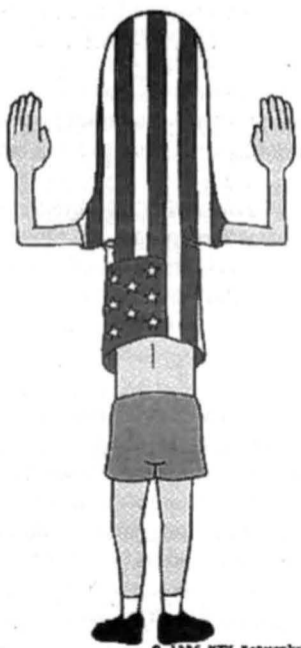
*Children of the Revolution* is as energetic, rough, bold and catchy as the T-Rex song from which it takes its title—with considerable irony. Its black comedy has a kinship with the early films of Dusan Makavejev. Like Makavejev, first-time director Peter Duncan is irreverent without being nihilistic.

The power of the demagogue, Stalin (F. Murray Abraham), is not only political but magical/religious. The links between sexual energy and political fervour are amusingly depicted by young Joe (Richard Roxburgh) and policewoman Anna (Rachel Griffiths). When Anna sees Joe becoming more like his infamous father, it is in keeping with the tone of the film (and the cruel absurdities of history) that she finally, unknowingly, marries the man who was directly responsible for the slaughter of her grandparents.

*Children* manages to be clever and comic over the trifles for which people lost their lives. Stalin walks into a room sniffing to detect anyone smoking (he is trying to give up). His apparatchiks stop what they are doing (crying over Joan's letters), only to start again when he leaves the room. In a nutshell we have the suspicion, dissimulation and denunciation endemic to a system where, as Nine (Sam Neill) puts it, "People are shot for excessive breathing".

As for Judy Davis' Joan, from the moment she is removed from a picture show, shouting "Bullshit, this is pure bullshit!" while Robert Menzies speaks on the newsreel screen behind her, she doesn't waver. A passionate idealist, she maintains her Communist faith, despite the evidence of history. Sexism long outlasting Communism, Davis still has to contend with the 'difficult woman' tag; in *Children*, she plays the 'difficult'—indeed, dangerous—woman for all it's worth. But she also gives Joan a vulnerability. Like her husband, Welch (Geoffrey Rush), we too miss the 'Tender Comrade' when she is gone.

Lorraine Mortimer



Beavis and Butt-Head Do America

**Beavis and Butt-Head Do America (M)**  
directed by Mike Judge  
a United International Pictures release  
currently screening nationally

Beavis and Butt-Head are everything the Frankfurt School warned us about. Slack, sex-obsessed, and illiterate, this pair of TV-addicted headbangers milk a remarkably simple formula: dress naff, behave badly, and find innuendo everywhere. Created by Mike Judge, who takes directorial credit here, Beavis and Butt-Head became instant adolescent archetypes after appearing on MTV in 1993. Even though their reputation precedes them, their visibility in Australia has been surprisingly

limited. Apart from a few video clip cameos, we have until now seen precious little B&B on mainstream screens.

The story lurches from one outrageous act of idiocy to another, as our luckless miscreants cut an irreverent swathe through American iconography. Las Vegas, the Hoover Dam, the Grand Canyon, and the White House are just a few of the sacred landmarks and institutions subjected to the extreme consequences of Judge's juvenilia. Refusing repression at every step, the film unfolds like a stream of unconsciousness, best exemplified by Beavis's caffeine-induced logorrhea ("I need a tepee for my burmhole").

Bum, boob and stiffy jokes are all perennial favourites, but difficult routines to work for any length of time. Relying for their estatic effect upon sudden offence to social propriety, incessant transgression wears awfully thin if it does not revisit normality. As with music-video clips, full-throttle infantilism is perhaps best appreciated in three minute bursts. Yet the sheer pace of narrative transition, a well placed sequence of Big Daddy Roth-inspired psychedelia, and a relentless volley of dumber-than-dumb sucker punches, all combine to propel this comic rollercoaster into unprecedented depths of anal hilarity.

Jeff Gibson



Gabbeh

**Gabbeh (M)**  
directed by Muhsen Makhmalbaf  
a Newvision release  
screening nationally from April 10

When a tale of love bubbles on the Iranian silver screen, it is a mystery if not a miracle. *Gabbeh*—a vivid depiction of an Iranian nomadic romance—is such a mystery. An 'overnight sensation' in Europe and the United States, *Gabbeh* is one of 13 films written and directed by the talented Muhsen Makhmalbaf, several of whose films have been banned from screening in his home country.

The film begins with an explosion of colours. In a picturesque bucolic scene, a marvellous Persian carpet embroidered with an image of a couple riding on horseback floats downstream amongst other ornamental carpets.

'Gabbeh', Kurdish slang for carpet, is also the name of the heroine of the film, a charming nomadic girl who falls in love with a horseman. She is caught between an oppressive patriarchal system and a ruthless father who keeps her from marrying her wooer. Frustrated by her father's continual deferment of his permission to marry, she elopes with the horseman—despite her father's threat to shoot her if she does so.

Makhmalbaf has demonstrated amazing boldness in choosing what is, in Iran, such a sensitive and provocative theme. Tinged with poignant melodrama, the magic of the film lies in its rustic simplicity; in its combination of colours, sounds, and nomadic music; and in its enigmatic blend of symbolism, naturalism and surrealism.

*Gabbeh* epitomises quality Iranian cinema forged against the censorship and anti-cinema push by the ruling theocracy.

Ehsan Azari

**The People vs Larry Flynt (MA)**  
directed by Miloš Forman  
screening nationally

Much has been written about the film *The People vs Larry Flynt*, that it glorifies the adventures of an epic pornographer; that it depicts the triumph of free speech over censorship; and that it exemplifies the best and worst of anti-establishment politics.

One criticism, above all others, remains perplexing precisely because of its inanity, made more profound by the fact that the criticism was made by a highly intelligent critic, Gloria Steinem. She says that the film is inaccurate; that it distorts the life of Flynt, the garish publisher of *Hustler* magazine (aka Larry Flynt Enterprises), by omitting amongst other things to mention the salient point of the child abuse allegations levelled against him by his daughter Tonya Flynt-Vega.

Whilst I've struggled to survive the collapse of the grand narrative I must say that I hadn't noticed that, as part of the debris, the accuracy of the Hollywood oeuvre was in doubt. I had always taken for granted that the films that I had seen had always gilded the lily, had never depicted anything save in a half hearted and erroneous manner, and were bedevilled by an unswerving insincerity to the notion of historical truth.

That said, the film represents an important contribution to the debate about the nature and extent of the control of media in the US and, need I say, Australia. It is a debate which has become more relevant due to censorship 'creep' making a comeback as an essential plank of the non-thinking person's political platform. Certainly, it is true to say that Larry has come a long way since he advertised at La Guardia airport that *Hustler* was the "magazine that nobody quotes".

Peter Lowe

## Newsreel

**Australian Film Commission Women's Program - New Imaging Technologies Support Scheme**

The Women's Program of the AFC is inviting applications from women working in the area of new imaging technologies to apply for one-off grants to upgrade their skills. The scheme is designed to target women who wish to extend their expertise in areas of digital production; filmmakers wishing to transfer their skills to multimedia development and artists already working with new media. Further enquiries: tel: 03 9279 3400 or toll free 1800 338 430 <http://www.afc.gov.au>

**Australian New Media Art To Tour Europe**

The largest touring exhibition of Australian new media art will screen at *Video Positive 97 (VP97)*, Britain's premier new media event to be held throughout April and May. *aliens.au* comprises three installations, CD-ROM works, two 70-minute screening programs and a range of internet sites.

The selection presents an Australian cultural kaleidoscope with works as diverse as Brisbane artist Gordon Bennett's video-based installation *Performance with Object for the Expiation of Guilt*, which draws both on traditional Aboriginal painting styles and the dot screen of contemporary reproduction technologies; the video *Seven Sisters Dreaming* from the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association Productions which shows part of the dreaming story as danced, sung and told in the Pitjantjatjara language; Paul Winkler's *Time Out For Sport*, and Ian Haig's computer animation *Astraturf*, which takes an amusing look at the madness of unharnessed technological development from the perspective of a country with one of the highest take-up rates of new technologies in the world. Other installations are Lyndal Jones' *Spitfire 1 2 3*, the most recent in her *From The Darwin Translations* series, which is an exploration of sexual selection; and Jon McCormack's *Turbulence*, an interactive collection of abstract thoughts, simulations, ideas, information and poetry which simulate natural forms and processes.

The CD-ROM collection will include *The Cute Machine* by Martine Corompt, *Planet of Noise* by Brad Miller/Mackenzie Work, *Invert* by Lloyd Sharp, *GMS (Genetic Manipulation Simulator)* by Patricia Piccinini, and *Drome* and *The User Unfriendly Interface* by Josephine Starrs and Leon Cmielewski.

Curator and project manager of *aliens.au* is Linda Wallace of the machine hunger company. The internet site address of *aliens.au* is <http://www.anat.org.au/aliens>.

**Submissions sought**

KHOU Channel 11, Houston, USA. Serious consideration will be given to broadcast quality works: videos, documentaries, shorts, film work, animation, performance art, sketches, quicktimes, etc. All formats. Contact KHOU Ch.11 c/o Bret Branon 1945 Allen Parkway Houston Tx. 77019. [bbranon@ns.khou.com](mailto:bbranon@ns.khou.com)

**Digital Artist Research Program**

The Computer Studios of the South Australian School of Art, University of South Australia. 1997 residencies are being offered for artists to do research for the computer area and also to produce a body of work for developing current concerns. For more information contact: Ron Rowe, University of South Australia, South Australian School of Art City West Campus, North Terrace, Adelaide 5001

**Call for Entries**

**The New Festival, New York, June 5-15**

The 9th annual New York Lesbian & Gay Film Festival is currently looking for Queer artists' works to include in an exhibit of computer-based art. Submission can be Web, CD-ROM, and hard drive based. For more information [glyph@panix.ios.com](mailto:glyph@panix.ios.com) or [newfest@gramercy.ios.com](mailto:newfest@gramercy.ios.com)

**The Media Resource Centre**

**Multi-media Digital Production Facilities**

The MRC is constructing a digital production studio. If you're burning to know how to: access the studio, participate in digital workshops, prepare digital costing, join the Artists in Residence program, initiate cross cultural/cross platform art projects, have a say in the studio construction. Contact the MRC: tel: 08 8410 0978 [mrc@mediare.com.au](mailto:mrc@mediare.com.au) (source:MRC)

**CODE RED**

A current and hotly debated discourse pervading contemporary computer culture is the theme of evolution and memes. The prevalence of this topic has come about as computers and technology become more and more intertwined with everyday life. *CODE RED* will explore these issues from both practical and theoretical positions. An intensive 'Code Red' forum/workshop weekend will be held at The Performance Space, Sydney in November 1997.

*CODE RED* is being curated by Julianne Pierce. As with the Virogenesis project which ANAT has been running for the last 2 years, international speakers will also tour around Australia to conduct workshops and present lectures. For more information contact ANAT, tel: 08 8231 9037: <http://www.anat.org.au/>

**Exposure Short Film Festival**

Brisbane's 4th *Exposure Short Film Festival* is calling for entries for short film and video work (under 30 minutes) to be screened in July. Closing date April 16. For more details contact Film Queensland, tel: 07 3224 4077

**Maniacs of Disappearance: Video Messages from Japan**

Curated by Kazumo Abe, Yukiko Shikata and Christophe Charles, this selection of video art from the 90s explores how electronic images are treated in contemporary arts and performance; how image media are considered in conjunction with film, video and computer graphics; how the human body and sexuality appears

in them; and if bodily senses will be extinct and replaced by a cybernetic world. Artspace, Sydney, April 10-May 3. tel 02 9368 1899, email [artspace@merlin.com.au](mailto:artspace@merlin.com.au)

**Shock in the Ear**

An interactive CD-ROM sound-centred installation by Norie Neumark (artistic director) in collaboration with Richard Vella (composer), Maria Miranda (painting and screen design), Greg White (programming) and David Bartolo (interface design).

In *Shock in the Ear* sounds, music, stories and performances are interactively remixed and repositioned by the user/audience in a way that allows memory and montage to re-articulate their meanings. The project broaches the hierarchy in western culture of vision over sound and the way multimedia art also generally fails to engage with the artistic possibilities and particularities of sound. The work plays with "shock aesthetics"—is shock as an aesthetic of sensory and perceptual repositionings (so crucial in modernism and avantgarde art) possible at this moment? How can shock aesthetics be re-articulated to catch us unawares, catch our unawareness, and re-engage us? Artspace, Sydney, April 17-May 3. tel: 02 9368 1899, email [artspace@merlin.com.au](mailto:artspace@merlin.com.au)

**Eat Carpet's Auteur TV**

A 13-week strand featuring the early works of major international and Australian directors including Martin Scorsese, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Jane Campion, Gillian Armstrong, Krystof Kieslowski, Jean Renoir, Clara Law, David Lynch and Peter Greenaway. Each short film gives an insight into the early obsessions and themes that informed a generation of filmmakers and film lovers. Series curator Claude Gonzalez, himself an obsessed film lover, enthuses that "what makes *Auteur TV* so special is that it is made up of short films full of passion and creativity, not driven by commercial criteria... It will include rare and 'lost' works" many of which were difficult to find. A unique viewing opportunity, starts Saturday April 5 (following the *Cult Movie*), SBS TV. Easy to find.

**Wild Spaces**

The second Sydney International Environmental Film Festival will encompass a broad range of topics including Indigenous and social justice issues, environmental campaigns, wilderness adventure, deep ecology, and natural history. Screenings at the 'Mount Eagle Iron Works', 150 Wilson St, Newtown, May 30-June 1. For further information, call 041 9972 427.

**National Screen Arts Touring Network**

Sydney Intermedia Network (SIN) is currently facilitating a consultancy that will investigate, negotiate and report on the practical aspects of establishing a sustainable national circuit for the presentation of innovative screen arts programs in Australia. The consultancy is funded by the Australian Film Commission through the Industry and Cultural Development Branch, and is being undertaken by Brian Doherty (project director), Susan Charlton (marketing and sponsorship) and Maria Haros (merchandising). The consultancy will negotiate between existing elements of the screen arts infrastructure—state art galleries, contemporary art spaces, screen culture organisations, film and video libraries, curators and artists—to establish a shared vision of how best to network individual resources in order to achieve a high profile delivery vehicle for screen arts in Australia. The report will be completed by late June, and much of the data gathered will be available as an immediate and ongoing resource on SInsite <http://www.ozemail.com.au/~sinsite>.

**Screen Culture Links**

Film and Television Institute (WTI) (FTI)  
<http://www.cleo.murdoch.edu.au/gen/fti/fti.htm>  
email: [r\\_shanah@cleo.murdoch.edu.au](mailto:r_shanah@cleo.murdoch.edu.au)

**Media Resource Centre (MRC)**

<http://www.mediare.com.au/mrc>  
email: [mrc@mediare.com.au](mailto:mrc@mediare.com.au)

Metro TV email: [metrotv@5054.aone.net.org](mailto:metrotv@5054.aone.net.org)

Open Channel Co-operative Ltd  
<http://www.openchannel.org.au/>

experimenta media arts  
<http://www.peg.apc.org/~experimenta>  
email: [experimenta@peg.apc.org.au](mailto:experimenta@peg.apc.org.au)

Sydney Intermedia Network (SIN)  
<http://www.ozemail.com.au/~sinsite>  
Email: [sinsite@ozemail.com.au](mailto:sinsite@ozemail.com.au)

Australian Film Commission (AFC) <http://www.afc.gov.au>  
Sydney: [info@afc.gov.au](mailto:info@afc.gov.au) Melbourne: [afcmlb@mpx.com.au](mailto:afcmlb@mpx.com.au)

Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS)  
<http://www.aftrs.edu.au>

Australian Teachers of Media Inc (ATOM)  
<http://www.cinemedia.net/ATOM/>

Australasian Interactive Multimedia Industry Association (AIMIA)  
<http://www.aimia.com.au/>

Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA)  
<http://www.ozemail.com.au/~caama1>

Queer Screen <http://www.magna.com.au/~queersr>

Women In Film and Television (WIFT)  
<http://www.afc.gov.au/sca/wift/wiftoust.html>  
[wift@womenz.net.au](mailto:wift@womenz.net.au)

# The crow and the well

E.C. Brown quizzes Wesley Enoch about the QTC-Kooemba Jdarra collaboration on Louis Nowra's *Radiance*

Long before reconciliation, there were boundary roads. Wesley Enoch is leading Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts back into the cultural heartland.

Kooemba Jdarra—'good ground' in the Turrabul languages—have recently collaborated with the Queensland Theatre Company in a production of Louis Nowra's *Radiance*. Playing in the Cremorne Theatre—part of the Southbank Cultural Complex—the production raises many questions about displacement, authenticity, and authorship.

*Radiance* deals with the return of three Murri women to North Queensland, ostensibly to scatter the ashes of their mother. A disparate trio, they unfold their wretched histories to each other while shaking some not fully decomposed skeletons from the family closet. Enoch believes the play to be about hope, and while I found a gentle humanity in Nowra's exploration, I also found his cultural autobiography writ so large upon the story that it rendered the core of the play impenetrable. I put it to Enoch that the anthropological reality had been overshadowed by the author's own cultural baggage.

"I think the first point is to interrogate the assumptions with your reading of the piece, in terms of what is the Aboriginal experience. The argument comes down to authenticity and who holds the forms of representation and in this case we've allowed Nowra to do this, to create these characters for us to play. One of my big arguments is that as Murri people we must control our forms of representation. But what makes an Aboriginal work? Is it the writer? The director? The actors? Is it something like *Brand Nue Dae* or *Corrugation Road* which is actually written by an Aboriginal writer, but directed and designed by non-Aboriginal artists? When is it a creative position and when is it an interpretive one?"

Storytelling has become a very complex business in the age of political correctness. As we watch and listen with an almost alarming sophistication, storytellers can no longer be assured of an automatic suspension of disbelief. I was interested in Enoch's decision to program *Radiance* for such an important collaborative venture.



Deborah Mailman, Lisa Maza and Roxanne McDonald in *Radiance*

Paul Aurisch

"I started reading and it was interesting the level of retrospection which Aboriginal playwrights have. A number of plays were set in the 50s or 40s or even earlier, and sometimes gave no sense of hope. They were very much looking at the pain and the hurt. I'm not arguing that was a bad idea, but I wanted a piece that was more about hope and the future. Also, we didn't have the time to commission a play. I felt that it was good programming in being a play about Queensland and having a sense of place that was familiar to us. It acted as a metaphor for me, in terms of a form of

reconciliation, that until we can get our stories told, there is no future together."

Wesley Enoch is very conscious of his company's "rocket ride to the top" since its inception in 1993, and is eager to engage the wider theatrical community in critical dialogue. It can be a potentially damning situation for critics to open up the territory around indigenous issues and I put it to Enoch that perhaps even the structures of the industry were not as user-friendly to Murri people as they could be.

"I think there's a level at which a lot of Kooemba's work escapes the level of criticism that it really needs to survive. The

biggest problems are those of being smothered with kindness. Some people put on their kid gloves to talk to us and any kind of discussion comes from a place of white guilt. I think the challenge is to say 'What questions does the work raise?' and allow people to answer them. Often I find that opinions that are given come from assumptions we don't share. Contextualisation of the work is so important. So I guess the work raises questions; to ask those questions, and to hear answers from lots of different sides, I think helps everyone."

The Southbank is a site of ongoing displacement: the original (and perhaps most decisive) of the mid-19th century, and the second, more insidious displacement which occurred in the lead up to Expo '88. Does Enoch sense a keen irony in performing on such a contested site?

"Displacement happens in so many ways. The most obvious and the easiest to handle is the movement from one place to the next. It's devastating, but at least you can hear it and see where you move, unlike the philosophical movement—the Pauline Hansons, the changing psyche of the country, the retrospective nostalgic aggression. Sheer demographics mean that we have no influence, no matter how right our argument, no matter how much the injustices are shown to be there. Ultimately it's about a sense of justice and a sense of a story needing to be told, and how we are going to tell that story. That's going to take time. Maybe it's something that takes generations, but we do have to work toward that. *Radiance* is the small step."

Enoch is steering Kooemba Jdarra into what he sees as a consolidation phase where the company's artists can create works that are a reflection of their cultural backgrounds, as well as their professional aspirations. It's a delicate balancing act of which Enoch is well aware.

"A story. The crow and the well. The crow tries to drink the water, but can't reach it. Other crows try, but can't. So they keep dropping rocks into the well until the water rises to point where they can drink. I'm just putting in rocks at the moment. I'm most probably not going to be the one who drinks. I don't know if I'm putting in the right rocks. I'm doing the things I think are right, and people will judge me later for that. I think there is a lot that does get achieved, but any kind of legacy will be defined by the next generation."

*Radiance*, written by Louis Nowra, directed by Wesley Enoch, Queensland Theatre Company in collaboration with Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Arts, February 27-March 29; touring Townsville, April 10-12; Ayr, April 15; Cairns, April 18-19; Mackay, April 22-23; Rockhampton, April 26; Gladstone, April 29-30; Nambour, May 2-3.

# Mixing as dancing, and watching as dancing, and ...

Linda Marie Walker experiences a new theatre at Doppio Teatro's *DJSquat*

Saturday night I went to *DJSquat*. A dance event organized by Doppio Teatro in Elder Park, Adelaide, for the youth festival called *Takeover*. The event was a technological experiment. A mix, as in DJ-ing, of images from web sites, live improvised singing with four musicians, a serial performance by the amazing 'e' party, fashion, dance music, dancing, and crosses to *Squat* events in Bologna and Milano.

Teresa Crea, the artistic facilitator of this, and her small group of dedicated workers pulled together a truly exciting occasion, a type of theatre hurtling into existence, and without the label of alternative, and without the determination of alternative, but rather with the consequences of a montage practice (like bringing together La Fura dels Baus, a ballet William Forsythe may have dreamed, and John Cage on bass). This sort of embracing vibrant situation is unpredictable and risky. Unlike 'the theatre' or 'the theatrical', rehearsal here means 'performance'. Timings are arranged, sure, so as to give structure within which to work (like a jazz standard), with artists having their parts to play and then, when this is plotted, what remains in great abundance is the life, the breathing, of how that 'play' is generated or happens.

I love techno dance music, the overwhelming deep thumping. So using this as both the under-and over-pinning of a theatre for youth, and the rest of us, is a powerful and robust platform upon which to explore, invent, etc.

*DJSquat* was research, a particular method of research using the world via the web as the performing space, both as character and as audience. A way of activating the exchange capacity of the internet without forcing the politic, of interactivity. *DJSquat* then was a multimedia event which did not have to announce itself as such, it could only be that. This seems to me, with the continual overuse, or directional and demanding nature of the desire for and of the word, as if a policy, that when multimedia shapes a particular artform, it is interactive in an infectious way. As a result, the contaminating potential comes easily and with energy. A certain wild risk is integral, things working and not working together, making something unplanned, and everyone noting breakdowns and coincidences for the next time.

The catalogue introduction reads, in part: "As a result of Gomma's visit to Adelaide for the UTLC conference during which he spoke of new social movements, and our recent contact with Italian underground youth culture, we have become very

interested in exploring the relationship of new technologies to community. Consequently this has led to a search for new cultural expressions. Much focus has been given recently to the highend <sexy, glossy> of the 'multimedia spectrum' but an equally interesting phenomenon is occurring at the poorer, grungy-community end. It is finding a powerful expression through the *squat* movements, the dance/multimedia parties and other 'innovative' events... The Australian Festival for Young People has allowed us to marry their (Re)search with our (Re)search into a public event... a dance party with a live net link to *squats* in Italy (showcasing some artists and technologists working in the field."

And some of these were: the group 'Brewed' with Libby O'Donovan (vocals) and Julian Ferraretto (violin), and others; Michael Carn working with video feedback; Lynne Sanderson's web site (<http://sustenance.va.com.au>) and Aaron Love (a dress sense, believe me) live; The Electronic Writing Research Ensemble with Teri Hoskin at the wheel, putting 'text' on the big screen (<http://va.com.au/ensemble/djsquat/>); the amazing 'e' party, not just any old lettered adventure, but a whole social architecture (agitprop) in the field, the footy match of dogma: <http://dove.mtx.net.au/~andypc:1>

mean, Andrew Petrusевич is a world wonder); Martin Thompson doing video-conferencing lab-tests, and on and on. (I am being brief, when each element requires detailed attention.) There was Robert Petchell the audio director, and the fashion designers—Amanda Karo, Heidi Karo, Jessica Pierce, Carol Norton—and make-up by Julie Henderson. And the tech (anchor) marvels Virtual Artists (Jesse Reynolds and Dave Sag), there in their glorious leather gear. Look, at this point go to the site: <http://www.va.com.au/djsquat>.

This is a review that cannot do the event justice. As there is something difficult and unapproachable about an 'experiment' that is the 'application' and the 'result'. It 'means' disturbance, in the motions and tensions of parallels, or paralLelo, the name Doppio Teatro gave the initiative. It means many and curious things and non-things at the same instance, as if all corners are active to the same intensity of the centre. I guess I missed as much as I saw. It took me a while, for instance, to work out where HMC, the 'real' DJ, was positioned.

As watcher, I was fascinated not only by the performers both on and off the stage, and moving fluidly from one 'stage' to the other, but by the banks of computers and the technicians with their headphones and with the screens lighting up their faces. And I enjoyed leaving for awhile, going out to the foyer/bar, leaving this theatre, this circus of highly skilled performers, and ordinary punters who were, and who became aware of being, a fragment of the process, and were not threatened or pacified by this, and who slowly wanted to be a spectacle themselves, or stay a tiny quiet act seeing sometimes an image which might have been themselves looking at themselves.

# From local and global

Keith Gallasch talks to Teresa Crea about Doppio Teatro's announcement of *ParaLlelo, Performance at the Cross Roads*

**KG** *In the past Doppio Teatro has been a bridge between cultures. What's changed in the 13 years you've been at work to prompt this new direction?*

**TC** What's changed is the way we live in the 90s. We've always been questioning what's going on in the community and it's been good to be focussed in the Italian community rather than on a mixed, broad cross-section of Australian culture. The sense of Australian national identity is being blown apart by globalisation. I know that word is a cliché but what we have are very specific local identities and we have the global, and nothing in between.

Our Italian community is being impacted by this. First generation Italians can now sit in Australian loungerooms and watch commercial Italian television. It has become part of their world and it's at the same time that Italian culture in Italy has become more pluralistic, part of Europe, using more languages, looking outwards to a multicultural Europe. Recent arrivals to Australia come with their fax machines, plug in and they're connected to Italy.

**KG** *So new technology is becoming part of Doppio Teatro's work not because it's there but because it's an integral part of migrant and cross cultural experience?*

**TC** It's a natural expression.

**KG** *Why invoke the parallel instead of the sense of difference that has been so predominant?*

**TC** Each word is an expression of a moment. That debate, of difference, created a sense of dualism, of black and white, either/or, conflict between two poles. It's no longer two poles, the world is much more layered, it's not a binary set up. We might have needed to see it that way in the early 80s, say.

**KG** *To see that migrants were treated in a binary way, as the other? That they needed to declare their difference and the rightness of their culture?*

**TC** That's right. The culture is still contested, but now more complexity is admitted.

**KG** *Part of your new 'manifesto' cites Jeremy Rifkin's *The End of Work about the arrival of a third industrial revolution. Your response is to propose a convergence of "diverse new artists working in new forms and new approaches to artistic forms, as well as the development of new business models better suited to the current...fragmented economic order". It's unusual, even these days, to hear**

*artists speak of business models.*

**TC** I got sick and tired of hearing funding bodies telling artists to get their business sponsorship packages together. So I thought let's turn it around and own it rather than being dominated by the jargon. Let's go out and dialogue with business and be realistic. We're not flagship companies, no one's going to hand a small organisation a cheque for \$50,000. What the arts can offer business is creativity, lateral thinking.

**KG** *Especially in technology? The new technology is desperate for ideas in the way the old was not?*

**TC** I don't know how we do it yet, but the spirit is there. For *DJ Squat* we've generated \$60,000 of equipment, in-kind support. These are new and real links.

**KG** *Is *DJ Squat*, with its young dance party audience/participants and its on-line links with Italy, a one off?*

**TC** We have to experience it first and go away and think about it. Initially it was a workshop looking at what artists were doing in the new technology. It's an experiment, like a work in progress and it's taking shape. The performance style is the dance party and the mix is becoming the product—I'm quite fascinated with this idea—the director is like the mixer, a catalyst, and it's a new role. I want to document it successfully to see if it can be used as a new form.

**KG** *Will there be a permanent site set up?*

**TC** The links are already happening between Italy and Australia. It would be good to get a residency going while we're dialoguing constantly with Bologna. It'll take time to get outcomes but the site is already developing. First, I see it as the structure for a performance in the future, secondly there's the links between the artists for new dialogue.

We've also connected locally with a group of young people in a squat who want to convert it into a performance space. They were living in the old La Mama theatre in Hindmarsh abandoned after the director Bruno Knez died. They've used any available technology—old turntables and projectors. The visit of Gomma from Italy last year pointed out what was happening here before our eyes. The global parallels were already there, inevitably in the current economic and cultural climate: young unemployed people dealing with technology in their own way.

**KG** Does this signal an internationalisation of Doppio Teatro, working from a very specific cultural base? What happens to the performance work which the company is so well known for?

**TC** *ParaLlelo* is an initiative which we are slowly phasing in. We still have extensive tours of our performances and there is a strong community identification with the company.

*Adelaide-based Doppio Teatro was joint winner with Bangarra Dance Theatre of the 1993 Sidney Myer Performing Arts Award. Artistic Director Teresa Crea was awarded the inaugural federal government Cultural Diversity in the Arts Award in 1995.*

## Believing the future

Richard Murphet talks to Kate Cherry about Playbox's *Theatre in the Raw*

Despite continued stubborn resistance from its practitioners, Melbourne theatre does not look well. Things are different around festivals. Shows, practitioners and companies come out of the woodwork. But the constant week in week out diet of a range of work which creates a performance culture is no longer available. There are small companies that have been producing interesting work for a number of years, but without more than occasional project funding and no permanent theatre space to develop within, they struggle to come up with the next show. It's to their credit that they occasionally keep doing so. As for non-linear, multi-modal new performance work, it is rare indeed at the moment, despite the city's great tradition in it. We need a space like Sydney's Performance Space to encourage it here and to provide a venue for such work from interstate.

In the midst of this, a couple of ventures stand out for comment, for their belief in the future. One is the constantly fearless survival and expansion of La Mama. More of that in the next issue of RealTime. Another is the *Theatre in the Raw* project at Playbox.

*Raw* has developed quietly into a key focus for emerging writing talent. It began several years ago in its Sunday afternoon slot as an encouragement to actors who had small projects they wished to air. Under Michael Gurr's guidance it gained its present focus on new writing. With Playbox Associate Director Kate Cherry at the helm it has gained a new energy and direction that is reflective of her own passion for theatre and determination to see it thrive. *Raw* is still playwright-driven, as an offshoot of Playbox that is its strongest suit. But it does also give opportunity for exposure to directors and actors.

The format is simple. Writer, director and actors are paid for one day to rehearse and present their show in the Beckett Theatre on whatever set is in at the time. They rehearse for five hours, perform (Sundays at 3 or 5:30, Mondays at 6:30), then engage with the audience in an informal talk about the showing. They have a technician to help them mount it and Playbox publicises the works in their *Theatre in the Raw* brochure. The audiences are usually around 40-50, made up of those of the show's company can draw plus a small stock of Playbox faithfuls. Selection is made by Cherry on the basis of scripts submitted and/or applications made to her.

Sometimes a show comes fully organised, sometimes she puts writer and director together and helps them find a cast. This latter way can throw together practitioners from different generations and different backgrounds and often leads to later collaboration.

The *Raw* showings are not seen by Playbox as tryouts for the main season although it has happened that a play presented in one is finally produced in the other—Robert Hewitt's latest play for instance. In that sense, *Raw* could be seen as providing a false start to playwrights—a reading which goes nowhere. But as Cherry says, this is intended as present encouragement not future commitment. Cherry sees it in wider terms than this. She is making connections between *Raw* and other organisations—eg Melbourne Workers' Theatre and the Fringe Festival—in order to forge links and to develop her larger dream: "the idea is that we foster the development of creative people and that hopefully the plays and actors will go on to work in a myriad of places, so that Playbox is surrounded by great things happening which challenges us to be better and to use people we haven't seen before and to forge new contacts".

In the present circumstances, the image of a myriad of places seems idealistic at best but in the mouth of Cherry the statement is more than a publicity blurb. As the daughter of Wal Cherry, the artistic director of Melbourne's influential alternative theatre of the 60s, The Emerald Hill, she has it lodged in the synapses. And her greatest concern, since returning from a developing career as a director in California to work at Playbox, is the disenfranchisement of her own generation—the thirtysomethings—from the Melbourne theatre scene. "I look around institutional theatre and I don't see people my age in the audience, I don't see people my age running things. I should. The generations before us got the chance. My personal mission is that *Theatre in the Raw* reminds people from all ages and cultures that they are welcome in this building and that their work should be in this building." Through her initiative and the support of director Aubrey Mellor, Playbox is seeking thus to widen its base. *Theatre in the Raw* is one specific but necessary platform for the revitalisation of Melbourne theatre. And the rough, informal presentations lets the gems shine through.

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.....a more interesting journey.....

# Vision and reality: a check

An e-mail exchange between Don Mamouney, artistic director of Sidetrack Performance Group, and Keith Gallasch

At the recent Sydney meeting between Australia Council Funding Division staff and annually funded companies and organisations about triennial funding, the phrase "reality check" recurred with a painful frequency, reminding us of the increasingly pragmatic demands on our artistic vision. So I thought it opportune to run a reality check on Sidetrack Performance Group at a moment of change.

In a country where, however much desired, theatre and performance ensembles are curiously short-lived, Sidetrack has been a model of sustained and acclaimed ensemble work in theatre and contemporary performance practice. However, economic and political pressures and shifts of artistic purpose are reshaping this most determined of companies. Is the vision still there?

KG I gather that Sidetrack has been going through some substantial changes, both in terms of management and artistic policy. Is this a new stage, a break from the past, or part of the Sidetrack evolution from its earliest days?

DM The notion of evolution I think best applies to recent developments at Sidetrack. We remain after 18 years a vital company because we have always been prepared to adapt to developing circumstances and to provide ourselves with new challenges. Perhaps a greater degree of pragmatism has replaced an earlier idealism yet the underlying project remains. The community aspirations of the early Sidetrack are no longer addressed as directly as they may have been once. Yet we continue to foster a sense of community through our involvement with Addison Road Community Centre and Contemporary Performance Week (CPW) is an important

community activity of another kind. Our works continue to see Australia's cultural diversity as a given, and we remain committed to the necessity for theatre to address its moment in a language appropriate to it.

Nevertheless we are going through a phase of shifting emphasis. Since 1990 our practice has had an experimental edge and hasn't been particularly concerned with gaining a broad acceptance. We now want to embrace a more accessible approach to performance to see if we can muddy up the mainstream a bit. This is partly in recognition of wanting to increase the income base but also a genuine desire to speak to a more diffuse public. In line with this we have a new management team headed by Paul Cate as General Manager, Lauren Sarti as Administrative Assistant and Mémé Thorne as Associate Director.

KG Sidetrack has engaged in a range of work in recent times (site work, neo-realist drama, new media, dance) always in a performative context and with a broadening spectrum of interesting collaborators working with your ensemble. Has this diversity felt coherent to you, is it the way you will continue to work, or are you inclined to develop a particular aspect of the company's work (eg the image and movement experiments with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Dance Company) and will it be with an ensemble?

DM I don't really see Sidetrack embracing a particular style of work like say Sydney Front once did or Gravity Feed seems to have done. Different approaches, it seems to me, enable different outcomes. Sidetrack should be able to continue to support a whole range of contemporary work. I like to make work myself and I am also

interested in making opportunities for others. Derek Kreckler's *sit.com* is a very idiosyncratic work yet it came out of an interplay between Derek and Sidetrack. Formally it couldn't be more different to *Heaven, its not for angels* yet both works illuminated particular aspects of contemporary being. The *Frontier Stories* project was interesting in that we made a work which was very much influenced by our coming together as distinctive groups. It would, I believe, have been a very different work had it been the work of a single company. I certainly hope these collaborations have not been the last.

At the moment we are not working from an ensemble base, although we haven't abandoned that as a preferred way of working. Not having an ensemble for the moment allows some flexibility. For example, *Country Love*, which will be performed upstairs at Belvoir St Theatre in June will have a performance company of seven while *A Long Way From Paris* will be performed by a cast of two.

KG We don't hear much about artistic vision in these days of fast capitalism and corporate strategies. How important is vision to you as an artist and how would you describe your vision for Sidetrack for, say, up to the year 2000—not only a millennially attractive date, but also curiously akin to the Australia Council's offer of triennial funding of arts organisations from 1998.

DM Most of my own work as an artist has involved an attempt to understand the present through the act of theatre. To hold a particular moment up for scrutiny, to say to a sensitive and discriminating other (audience) is this; does this, accord with your experience? Theatre remains for me

the chosen medium because it is still the only art that, in theory at least, is able to speak truly to the present. Strangely one needs to keep on envisioning theatre as a contemporary art form.

There is no doubt that corporatism is the prevailing ideology and arts organisations have been caught up in it. Curiously its propagators appear to be more interested in organisational accountability than creating conditions for the arts to flourish. This enhanced corporate approach springs from an understandable desire to appear more equitable in the use of available funds. For the organisations that receive triennial funding there is the promise of greater funding stability and we welcome that yet along with this is the danger that too many companies will be undermined. In this climate we can no longer risk a practice based on experiment. We have to adapt our creative strategies to ensure the survival of the important aspects of our project.

Sidetrack will continue to play an effective role in the development of contemporary theatre and performance in Australia. This year for example we have begun an effort to build CPW into a much higher profile event. It has been expanded to a nine day format which will make possible a greater emphasis on production values in the performance program and allow for more time and space to be given over to forums, seminars and discussion. There will also be at least two international workshop programs. In future years we are planning to further increase the profile of contemporary approaches to performance by inviting more interstate and international artists to participate. The vision is that CPW continues to nurture new practices while at the same time involving an enlarged public. We are also looking to develop ways that we can further promote some of the artists and groups who participate in CPW on a national and international basis.

*Sidetrack's CPW8 is scheduled for September. Look out for details in RealTime 19.*

# Embracing the labyrinth

From a conversation with director Jenny Kemp, Zsuzsanna Soboslay enters Brian Friel's *Molly Sweeney* prior to its Australian premiere at the MTC

The postcard Richard found for Jenny details a park where leaves fray in a wind. On park-benches, three George Segal figures sit back-to-back, wrapped in white plastered bandages, icons of isolation. Two look forwards, one sits behind. Are they talking?

—Can I feel you/Can I touch you/Can you understand me

—Perhaps we should sit facing each other/Why/Why not/Why?

In her study by the sea of Saints, Kilda lapping her waters, Jenny Kemp sits at her desk, this first card beneath her windowsill. The second is of an English box maze entered from three points through a hedge that looks like rubber, a surreal and displaced worldliness to this 'O' reminding me of one of the Delvaux paintings by which she is often inspired.

Within the maze, the centre is blind: the square where we should meet; where a community should dance; where perhaps we come from all three corners, as if we are boxers entering the ring.

—I win, you lose/You lose, I win/You...where there are three of us, deciding, where there are three of us, who fights whom? Who can possibly win? Whose hand is at stake in the ring?

There are three characters in Brian

Friel's play: blind Molly, husband Frank, and Dr Rice. Three figures turned inward rather than to each other (so rarely to each other) to reflect on their blind pasts and far from pellucid future worlds.

Molly is Mary, Mare, mermaid, sea goddess of the watery womb of chaos, the blood of the cup, the original pagan Holy Grail. She is Galatea plunging underwater to escape the ogre Cyclops guarding her life with his single-eye.

Frank is the Cyclops, the noisy Pan treading over All. Agile and obstinate, with an ability to doggedly pursue badgers, goats, and the mystery of blindness, but not to perceive. Paddy Rice is the doctor he resurrects from oblivion to give her back her sight. Through Molly's operation he regains distinction as a surgeon and re-emerges from his own blindly sorrowed underworld.

Molly's father is also crucial, a not visible yet powerful point of holding and defining of her world. He hangs the child Molly upside down in his garden and gets her to orientate her place through imaginal colours. He names the flowers, like Dionysus (she passively following him); when she hears the murmuring otherworld, he clips her, saying: What stream? I can hear no stream! Guess again!

(Naming is the first sin. This comes to me, Zsuzsanna, one day as if a dream. Soon after, I feel the pain of choosing one word, the physicality of it killing all the other

possibilities at that point in time.)

She learns to match her world with others', not her own, and this aspect is exaggerated when first she regains sight. She sips their fruit, matches their names. She remains unconscious of her own choices, she cuts her teeth on their fears. Her surname Sweeney means Echo; the frivolous girl Hera punishes by condemning her to repeat only what others say. She married Frank because he asked.

Only at one point does she think to stop the operation, expressing her doubt in a wild hornpipe that sees her reeling round the lounge room which should be, but miraculously isn't, demolished by her dance. Yet Frank stops the music, she stops her dance. What is it that he fears? In some way she is Enemy. She manoeuvres without toppling the sighted world.

The role model for the play (from Oliver Sacks' study of the blind) is a man; this wo/man describes her sensations of equivalence and embracement when she swims. But the playscript doesn't tend to focus on the power of her world (or of sound), but on visual metaphors of contest and contrast: burrowing, emerging, dark to light, looking for end points, exhibiting a profound distrust of internment, confinement, and things not visible (like perhaps the swelling of a belly for birth). The source material, by contrast, is abundant with descriptions of the experiential dimensions of time, space and reality not to the sighted, but to the blind. The moral journey is pointedly on the machinations of the sighted in assuming the hegemony of their world.

The play's structure holds it characters in a triangle, their "talking cures" looking backwards and inwards, "seeing" or "not seeing", understanding or not understanding. I am intrigued by the

seeming restrictions of this play's form, as Jenny Kemp is a stage artist whose spatial compositions shudder with slippages, her *Black Sequined Dress*, for example, a slide-slip into a tunnel between hurt, doubt and dreams. She tells me she's interested in what each is doing during the others' reminiscences. I doubt this will be a production where the Segal figures remain wrapped to their seats.

There has been a girl sobbing in the corridor: who is she?

There has been a girl dancing underwater: what is her name?

Molly has inherited a name meaning creature of myth and counterpoint to the dominant journeys our oldest heroes made. She is Echo shredded by a frustrated Pan, only her voice left pining. And yet, this is a very different play from the MTC's preceding programmed play, the pot-boiler *Wait Until Dark*, which no matter how well-done runs the tired vindication of a vulnerable (also blind) woman's courage in outwitting a sighted prowler by being clever with her light-switches and (by ear) plunging in the bread-knife.

She has to win; she's the heroine, she has her allies. In *Molly Sweeney*, there is no guarantee anything resolves; but in a strange way, the now asocial Molly survives in her own world, conjuring the meeting of ghosts and dreams, impenetrable like Segal's wrapped dolls, yet within that bubble, her own triumph with a wicked taste for repainting memory with licence and licentiousness that can't be stolen.

*Molly Sweeney by Brian Friel, director Jenny Kemp, Melbourne Theatre Company, April 24-May 31.*

# Planning the fall

Margaret Davis reflects on the evolution of *Spilling Bodies* for her Two Planks and a Passion company

People fall in love, they fall from grace, fall ill, fall pregnant, fall in, fall out. This falling fascinates director-writer Margaret Davis. But it's not just the gravitational metaphors we frequently resort to that intrigue her, it's the real falls, from children stumbling to adults plummeting from mountain sides, and what happens psychologically in those moments that also engage her.

As well as being one of that rare breed of writer-directors in Australia (Jenny Kemp and Bogdan Koca among them), Margaret Davis also falls into an interesting space between playwright and performance-maker in this age of hybridity. She's written four plays, "but each time the process is different. With *Spilling Bodies* I did a lot of interviews and a workshop for two weeks, but the idea was not to come up with a play. It was more to see where we could take ideas physically, which ideas lent themselves to movement, what concepts were relevant".

KG So what did you give the performers to work with?

MD Not much at all. Where relevant, I played them interviews and we discussed concepts like: can we still speak of fallen women in the 90s? I used some free improvisation and movement work and we painted. We also went to pre-school and looked at children falling and talked to people in nursing homes (we didn't watch them fall).

KG It's unusual to hear of performers working through painting.

MD I used it to unlock key images, in my



Two Planks and A Passion in *Spilling Bodies*

Heidrun Löhr

case a vortex-like funnel spider web...maybe with a safety net at the bottom...or you fall through. I didn't want to go away and write a play that explains all this but to sense what was possible physically or in an image

KG Where do you locate yourself? Are you

creating a play or a performance work?

MD I find it really hard. I've written plays but this is not a play as such although there's a lot of text, as much as in a play. A lot of it's in italics or bold indicating movement. But it's not a physical theatre piece. I'm not exploring the physical. I'm interested in the emotional extension of physicality.

KG How do you shape this encyclopedia of falling as it emerges?

MD It was loosely structured—Monday, we'd do 'falling in love'; Tuesday, 'falling from grace' and so on—and ideas, concepts and images would emerge. I started to shape the material around each of the four performers.

KG Around their own personalities?

MD No, though there is one story I use from the workshop. I create characters.

KG Which puts you more in line with playwrighting practice.

MD I let each performer have a story. I didn't want to appropriate anyone's story, interviewees or actors. All of that became background. One character emerged almost like a short story. Another was informed by the true story of a man suiciding but surviving when he fell on and killed a passerby. That's become a thread and connects the two male characters in the piece.

There's a wonderful serendipity when the stories intersect. Each performer has a main story and the others play roles in that story.

KG You have characters, but do you have a plot? Do you set out to resolve character and audience anxieties?

MD I don't do that but an audience still needs a journey even if it doesn't have a naturalistic logic. There are stories being told in *Spilling Bodies* which give it shape, and there's the journey of age—the child just learning to walk, and life after 60 with its dread of loss of control, of confidence, of fear of the fall from reason. Gripping, hanging on, emotionally and physically, becomes very important. People are banished to nursing homes after a fall. The child falls and that's part of learning to walk. The ageing adult falls with embarrassment and looks behind for what caused it, looks for cause and effect.

KG How do you place the audience in this scenario?

MD Although we don't do aerial work as such, we are using ropes and a harness and height, and a design that places the audience as if off balance, looking into a vortex. But the falling is also in the scenes and in the language. There's a crucial mid-play scene where the main character, an epileptic photographer, tells someone she loves them. They don't respond. She is 'dropped' in that moment, she 'falls'.

*Spilling Bodies*, written and directed by Margaret Davis, with Annabel Giles, Shayne Francis, Anthony Cugin, Tony Poli; *Two Planks and a Passion*, *The Performance Space*, Sydney, May 17-June 1, 8pm, Sundays 5pm  
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## In the flesh

Virginia Baxter previews The Partyline's new work

Years ago, before mad cows and salmonella outbreaks and killer salami and deadly mosquitoes, I began to notice that the Health and Self-Help sections of bookshops had been growing disproportionately and the hordes of edgy browsers in shades were starting to get out of control and spill over into Poetry and Philosophy. I never spotted them, but the women from The Partyline must have been there jotting frenzied notes from books like William A Ewing's *The Body*: "Why do we discern a rising tide of unease even panic? Is it that the body as we have come to understand it, no longer exists?"

The Partyline is a performance company working with the semiotics of female bodies and space. Company member, Peta Tait is a theorist and senior lecturer in theatre and performance at La Trobe University. She's also written two books on women's theatre (*Converging Realities* and *Original Women's Theatre*) and has a particular interest in writing for physical and image-based performance. In its premiere production *Appearing in Pieces* at The Performance Space (1995) the company created a work about the absent female body in which the translated words of French feminists reverberated with the panting acrobatics of performers and an echoic vocal score by Christine Evans. In its new work, *Whet Flesh*, they take on the sexual body in an age panicked by disease, an era rife with social and medical assumptions that transgressive and queer bodies are the sole agents of contamination and death.

In *Whet Flesh*, performers move between the worlds of science and sex, caught in a continuum which promises discovery as much as it threatens death. Visual and aural triggers bombard; *Whet Flesh* features work created

specifically for the piece by multimedia artist Linda Dement, photographer and installation artists Jane Becker, and Rea, a photographer working in computer-generated digital imaging. Sound design is by Liberty Kerr and lighting by Eterpi Soropos. Costumes are by Angus Strathie.

The Partyline creates performance with the body as its subject. Physical theatre? Although director Gail Kelly has been working in the area for over 15 years, starting with her work as Artistic Director of Canberra Youth Theatre in the early 80s, she prefers not to be tucked too neatly into a performance niche. She has devised works with many different kinds of performers including dancers, actors, physical performers and rap singers. In the last four years, she has helped establish a couple of new companies—The Partyline and Club Swing, the latter's sexy *Appetite* has devoured Australia and Europe. The performers who constitute The Partyline (Celia White, Simone O'Brien, Terese Casu, Barbara Clare Totterdell and Stacey Callaghan) draw on a sophisticated performance vocabulary using skills from trapeze to Suzuki gathered from their years of experience in the profusion of physically-based companies across the country—Circus Oz, Legs on the Wall, Etcetera, Fractal Theatre, Flying Fruitfly Circus, Sidetrack, Death Defying Theatre, Club Swing, Rock n Roll Circus, Zen Zen Zo, Stalker.

So at last, in these tightrope days of de-regulation, the healing balm of performance, a chance to put *The Hot Zone* down and take our fears for a walk in public.

*Whet Flesh*, *The Performance Space* May 1-10.

## Voicing the truth

Mary Morris tells Keith Gallasch about her new play *Voices* for Deckchair Theatre

Knowing already that a good story attracts Mary Morris and drives her playwriting, I take a different tack and ask if music and musicality are of particular interest for her in the making of *Voices*, her play about a women's choir in a prisoner of war camp in Japanese occupied Sumatra.

"I think I've always had a good ear for music and my father was one of those 'Come on, give us a song, Bobby' type of singers. I can come up with a lyric at the drop of a hat and trust a composer to come up with the music. I'm not formally trained, but what I'm saying is, I'm not afraid of music.

"But I'd say with *Voices* I'm concentrating on the narrative. Angela Chaplin's getting in an amateur choir, which is very appropriate to the story, and they're working with the musical director. I haven't written in any directions about how the music is to be used. I totally trust Angela and the musical director."

I remark that there have been shows over recent years that are really dramatised concerts. Mary says, "There are no songs in *Voices* for songs' sake. But the title is important. Originally it was *With one voice* but that was also the name of a Fremantle choir, so we had to drop it and the play became *Voices*. And that's what it is, voices, purely voices. There is no additional music, no tapes. The play's soundscape is made of voices. The voice does everything".

Each play has its specific challenge, invariably surprising even the most experienced playwright. In writing *Voices*, Mary was dealing with a true story, and the tension between truth and drama, she says, "became overwhelming. I did too much research and blew it in the first couple of attempts to write the play". But the truth alone was problematic, "dealing with the mythology of war and women at war. I went to Singapore for the 50th Anniversary of the Fall of Singapore to be with the members of the choir who survived. These are remarkable women, Australian icons, who share a genuine bonding that transcends words. And their memories are identical. They tell exactly the same story because they've spoken about it and celebrated it so often".

How then, I ask, momentarily invoking the limited conflict model of playwriting, do you get at another level of truth with which to make drama? "In the early versions my own political agenda—war is bad, etc—hampered the work. I had to drop it, it wasn't what they were concerned with. According to these women there was 'no conflict between them ever' and this was in a camp of 600 women—Dutch colonialists, British imperialists, Eurasians, Australian nurses, nuns. One woman said to me, 'All I got sick to death of was the bloody sound of women's voices!'"

So what drives the play? "Internal longings. Surviving deprivation and insult and transforming them into achievement and salvation. Sinking to the bottom and then rising to the top and how music helped them do that. To survive they had to drop petty quarrels, so the mythology of never quarrelling ever was true in a sense. These women bonded stronger than families, than mother and daughter, sister and sister."

Do the Japanese play a pivotal role? "At the moment they are represented by whistles, whistles to work, whistles to stop singing. This might change but I'm not keen to have scenes with baddies on stage. The one male actor in the current draft represents a male prisoner in another camp who figures in the imagination of the central woman character. There's the story the women tell of a moment when they heard a carol being sung in the distance one Xmas. It was the men on their way to work singing this song for the women".

Mary is particularly pleased that Deckchair have chosen to perform *Voices* in the old Fremantle Prison. It's a venue with resonances for the subject matter and an interesting acoustic for the choir. She's philosophical about Bruce Beresford's film on the same subject, although clearly she would have loved to have had a go at writing it, given her detailed knowledge of the women and their collective story. Of course, there's no reason why film and play should eclipse each other, occupying such different spaces and offering such different experiences, and, most likely, different truths.

Mary Morris is the award-winning writer of *Two Weeks with the Queen* and *Too Far to Walk*

*Voices*, written by Mary Morris, directed by Angela Chaplin, Deckchair, Fremantle Prison, May 24-June 14. Touring venues in metropolitan Perth and down to Mandurah

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### Enquiries

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# Unlikely Lorca

Zsuzsanna Soboslay reviews *Yerma*

It's an interesting quandary: how to update an almost tribal Spanish classic about love, lust and people either complacent about, afraid of or almost overcome by the circumstances of their heterosexual coupling, for an audience which is hip, contemp, homo-hetero-auto-erotic and sits a bit askance at all these women wanting and popping babies (by the minute!) and trapped in circumstances a slothful turtle would have left long ago. Why? Why? Why do this play? At a time

when Deb Cox is under fire for (supposedly) depicting the biological determinism driving her yearning thirty/forty-somethings women in *Simone de Beauvoir's Babies* on the ABC, *Yerma* packs them in at PACT as Rachael Maza's yearning is played out live. The "live music" by jazz great Dale Barlow didn't happen the night I was there: yet the torch songs a cappella only accentuated (as blues songs do) our contemporary taste for the solitary in struggles and emotions, whilst

the play (as all Lorca's do) remains driven by cultural and religious group forces that bewilder his protagonists. This, not individual passions, is the primary struggle of the play. ("I suppose some women do really want to have babies," says a man to me afterwards in the foyer!)

The play in fact has great sympathy for the blind leading the blind unable to smell the way out of their predicaments. Lorca's songs are bloody and dangerous: they show unconscious pulses driving women and men into tragedies of history against awakening humanist consciousness. The cloying, familiar and complacent comfort-routine of the women at the river washing clothes is the strongest image left me of the production. The rhythm of their work shapes them and

collectively limits their thoughts which shape and feed their lack of perception and empathic comprehension (of Yerma's situation). The routine of men's work offstage and the burning crucible of family, religious and moral pride is the implicit force referred to but here unrealised. I am more touched by the tender touch a gay man makes on his lover's back, feeling his bones, in the audience front-pew; I felt no such touch of tenderness from the stage and miss feeling Lorca's bones.

*Yerma*, by Federico Garcia Lorca, directed by Sarah Carradine, with performers Rachael Maza, Frederick Miragliotta; designed by Lino Alvarez; lighting by Shane Stevens; music by Dale Barlow.

# Subscribing to the new

Elaine Acworth and Raimondo Cortese open new theatre seasons

Canberra's *Season at the Street*, a subscription program of six innovative theatre and music theatre works, opens with Elaine Acworth's *Bod*. Acworth, a writer of exquisite dialogue and fierce ideas, and someone who has visited Tibet and has a commitment to its cultural survival, has produced a script epic in scope and intimate in detail. *Bod* traces the life of a small village over 30 years, a village that produces a reincarnated spiritual leader and suffers the incursion of the Chinese army and the demise of its indigenous culture. This play has been seven years in the making. I had the pleasure of working on it briefly as dramaturg in 1995 and was impressed by its ambition, its sense of magic and the ability of Acworth to translate an alien culture into something real for us, even if ultimately other. A new generation of Australian playwrights is bringing personal immediacy and political topicality to a stale theatre scene, Acworth is one of these. *Bod*, directed by Carol Woodrow; Wildwood Productions; May 1-10.

The balance of the Street Theatre program includes: Bits Theatre's production of Michael Gow's *Furious*, June 19-28; Tango One 60's *Anima Mundi*, a Chamber opera for Two Voices, July 24- August 2; Eureka Theatre Company's production of Deborah Oswald's *Gary's House*, August 21-30; Stopera's *Two Shorts*, a chamber opera double bill of Kurt Weill's *The Tsar Has His Photograph Taken* and Viktor Ullmann's *The Emperor of Atlantis*; and the Company Skylark/Playbox production of John Romeril's *Love Suicides*. (The publicity cites "the tradition of *Antigone* and *Romeo and Juliet*" as the antecedent for Romeril's play. However, the photographic images are distinctly Japanese and the double love suicide is a much more frequent motif in Japanese culture than in the West. And Romeril has been spending just a bit of time in Japan.) *Season at the Street* looks like a good investment in largely local talent. Let's hope Canberra responds. I particularly like the programming of theatre and music theatre works; it reminds me somewhat of Lismore's NORPA in its breaking the mould of

conventional theatre seasons by offering audiences a broader spectrum of forms and warming that audience to innovation.

Sydney's Griffin Theatre Company, under artistic director Ros Horin, has made a considerable impact over the last few years, especially in 1996 with virtuosic works and truly adult themes from Hilary Bell and Andrew Bovell. Horin keeps in touch with Melbourne where she once worked with the APG and has occasionally directed there in more recent times. The judicious mix of Melbourne and Sydney works is rare, revealing and refreshing. She's previously programmed Bovell and Johanna Murray Smith from Melbourne and now it's 29 year old Raimondo Cortese (who first grabbed attention at The Performance Space here a couple of years ago with *Lucrezia and Cesare*). Cortese is particularly interesting given his life beyond the theatre as a writer of poetry and for radio, television, performance art, and he's about to have his first book of short stories published: *The Indestructible Corpse and Other Stories*. Three plays make up his *The Fertility of Objects and other plays*, ranging across murder and seduction, compulsive consumption and loneliness. Again, a distinctive ability with language marks him out as special. Griffin, The Stables, April 3-May 4.

Also in the Griffin program are the welcome return of Hilary Bell's truly frightening and morally demanding *Wolf Lullaby*, as part of a national tour by Performing Lines (the Stables, July 18-August 3); Johanna Murray-Smith's moral twister, *Honour*, August 1-30 (this play has been picked up in the US and UK); and award winning poet and playwright Jennifer Compton premieres her *The Big Picture* (October 16-November 16) a complexly funny account of an Australian female underclass. That young and female writers, and talented writers of diverse practice constitute the Griffin line-up is indicative of the new strength in Australian playwrighting. KG

## Letter to the editor

Dear Editor,

I write in response to the article *Street Theatre seriously* written by Carolyn Connors about the Not Yet It's Difficult Company performance of *Melbourne Festival Training Squad* in the outdoor theatre program of the 1996 Melbourne Festival (RT#16).

At issue throughout Ms Connors article is the representation of the body. She refers to "nine impressively fit bodies in identical black Lycra caps... (who) performed synchronised sequences..." and later, "Unsmiling, sweaty, unidentifiable in their uniforms and unyielding to audience input..." The accumulation of such characteristics and these and other behavioural traits "ultimately glorifies a particular human body type in a fascist way."

*Training Squad* sought to co-opt and transform body-images of corporate ideology by multiplying them to the point of banality and absurdity. Hence the uniformity of the theatrical costume and the individual performer's costume of musculature. The subsequent inability to identify the individual is essential to the building of a package plastered with sponsorship signage (in this case, Tattersalls). The squad becomes the product. The reproduction of the product, ie the single, social body of 'impressively fit bodies' is intended to draw attention to the relationship between sport and corporatism. The body is the instrument and the criteria on which recognition is achieved: the body-as-product and brand-name. This is, in fact, the essence of bodybuilding, the sport which concluded both shows at Southgate and the Arts Centre. The bodies of the performers implode, unzipping costumes without manual assistance and puff up into grotesqueries of bulging muscle, prominent veins and thick red necks. The corporate state/physical body overheats. At this point the audience physically interacted with the performers, feeling up the overblown bodies, taking pictures of/with them, soliciting them and congratulating them. The deflation of the corporate body reveals humanity within the individual.

Another reading of the body in *Training Squad* may be provided in the prologue and epilogue to the Arts Centre Forecourt Show, A sweaty *Training Squad* rode the escalators down into the red-and-gold Smorgon Plaza of the Arts Centre to coincide with ticket-buying procedures for the well-suited and fur-coated opera and theatre-goers. The objective was to juxtapose the codes of power of the dress/undress of the performer/athletes with the highly resilient coding of the Victorian Cultural Consumer. The dysfunction of the image was enhanced by the declamation of the Training Squad: "this is not opera/this is not dance/this is

not drama/this is sport/this is art/art is sport/sport is art" to the Necklaces and Cravats making their way to *Die Frau Ohne Schatte*.

These are two alternative readings of the body in *Training Squad* formulated during rehearsal, the performance season and after conversations with the NYID company and the many spectators who generously contributed their own points of view. There are of course many other possible readings and no correct ones. Unfortunately Ms Connors offers only one reading and by absence infers there is a correct reading. Her failure to negotiate others indicates a fundamental lack in her critical faculty. To use her own words, her critique of the representation of the body in *Training Squad* functioned within "an unbending, narrow and dangerous band".


Finally, I wish to take exception with the assertion "the MFTS was frequently described as fascist". Apart from the fact Ms Connors omits other frequent descriptions such as "parodic, silly, ironic, witty, aggressive, uncompromising, intimidating and absurd", I am most concerned that the adjective 'fascist' is used so loosely. Bereft of contextualisation it begs the reader to assume a number of qualities which may or may not be appropriately assigned to *Training Squad*.

When I use the term it is in relation to my family's political background. My grandfather escaped the Blackshirts in 1928 by stowing away in the hold of a ship from the port of Napoli. When he finally arrived in Australia he was one of many Italians to establish the anti-fascist Club Matteotti in Melbourne. When an individual or community finds itself in fear of an aggressor, a common and useful way of dealing with that fear is to paint the aggressor as a figure of fun. To my grandfather those he described as fascist were given the respect due to a group who could destroy his community but were characterised as fools for their lack of an independence of thought. Dangerous clowns. The politics of the state.

The proposition of NYID is to mine at the coalface of social events. In *Training Squad* patterns of power are worn on the surface precisely to make them available to critique. It may be appropriate to refer to another *RealTime* contributor, Trevor Hay, who in RT 10 issued a warning to would-be critics of contemporary performance practice: "The difficulty, once again, is that we focus on the stereotypes themselves and congratulate ourselves on simply recognising them rather than noticing their possibilities for meaning".

David Pledger  
Not Yet It's Difficult Company, Melbourne

wildwood



# BOD


TIBET
The Land of Mystery Stirs on Stage

BY ELAINE ACWORTH


'It is my hope and dream that the entire Tibetan plateau will some day be transformed into a true peace sanctuary.'  
- The Dalai Lama


DIRECTED BY CAROL WOODROW  
DESIGNED BY AMANDA McNAMARA

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# Between the lines

Clare Dyson reads Cherry Herring's *Intimate Letters*

We arrive at the performance on a busy street at night. Brian Lucas is sitting opposite us at a small table, writing. Cars obscure our vision. Candles, a table, earnest writing, lots of smoking. This is Brisbane's industrial area. His presence nearly causes an accident. Milling about on the street opposite we are handed a program folded like an old letter. Inside are instructions and guides to letter writing from Routledge's *Complete Letter Writer for Ladies and Gentlemen*. Looking across three lanes of traffic, Brian is still smoking and writing.

*Intimate Letters* entices and suggests. All the works are short—small windows into other people's lives. Are we to be voyeurs of their intimacy? Letters are the starting point for this show, curated by Shaaron Boughen.

We are ushered up a narrow staircase and find ourselves in a small first floor warehouse. Incense hangs heavily. Murkiness cloaks the space. We are in someone else's room. A shaft of light struggles through the pungent smell and settles on a crumpled letter that has been dropped on the floor. Electric shadows project on the wall in front of us what we have just witnessed live on the street below: Brian writing. The heavy Gorecki music adds to this overwhelming atmosphere. This show is a constant play with shadows and light, with reality and recollection.

Brian Lucas begins by forcing us into watching vulnerability, exposure. His enormous frame is surreal in such a small space. There is too much of him, but his nudity is neither vulnerable nor small. Crouching on a shelf, he unfolds himself to step onto the floor, chanting the words from a child's game, "I wrote a letter..." He moves forward in the corridor of light,

slowly singing, "...and then I must have dropped it". Slowly moving toward the rectangle of light he stumbles upon the letter he dropped. The piece is clever and simple. The dancer consumes your attention whenever he is on stage. He mixes intensity and humour into the same piece and makes it work. He leaves the stage with a bittersweet joke.

John Utans' piece begins with projected images of a young couple. The back of her neck, him laughing. Sleeping. The two of them lying together. We are forced to choose between the images and the shadows of dancers. The two performers slowly move from behind the screen in the middle of the stage. They are young, both wearing white underwear. The movement is tentative, slow. Shadows and reality. She is restrained. He is fluid. The duet progresses in tempo. The sinewy movement becomes familiar. Their inexperience is endearing. They show us the gestures of lovers. New lovers. Sitting together. Sleeping. The choreography reveals innocence and captures naivety. New emotions. I am shockingly reminded of the morning hours spent with a lover.

Scotia Monkevitch has created a work from a letter written to the unborn child of a friend. It is a personal issue: a ritual of sorts. It is a prayer for the safe journey of a child. The space is beautifully set behind a gauze screen, but as a performance work, none of the intention is clear. Slow movement and repetitive text. I give you back your word. A phrase endlessly repeated. This work is reliant on the merging of movement, text and design but results in none of these elements working well together. The detached music and repeated words alienate, clouding the original intention, making it difficult to enter the world of the performer.



Sara Brown and Shannon Anderson in *Intimate Letters*

In the corner of the room a cage is revealed. In Gail Hewton's piece a woman performs simple gestural movements around its periphery. The cage is restricting and menacing. Is it her mind? Society? A relationship? Or all of them? She breaks out of the cage only to crawl back into it again. Defeated, she slowly unfolds a plastic barrier to surround the cage. Janacek's music has clearly been imposed on this work, incongruous with the building of tension, detracting from the woman's emotional journey. The final image is the strongest: the woman is naked, revealed, isolated and captured in the centre of the now opaque cage. A defeating but beautiful image.

Shaaron Boughen's work retains obvious links to the original inspiration: letters written in 1928 to her stepmother from a boyfriend the family was unaware of. The work begins with a man and a woman

sitting on separate piano stools in front of projected images. The images are of the same couple on a stool together. The couple in the film begin a duet of intimacy, trust, weight, beauty, punctuated by flashes of black. Moving carefully. The couple in the film have a private life. The couple in front of us do not move until the film ends. Their duet is dislocated, as if they have just missed each other. They are in the same space and yet are unable to interact. The couple do not touch throughout the live duet. This work is simple in construction but effective, and the film highlights the performers' strengths. The boy leaves the room and the girl slowly walks down the external stairway. The piece ends with a projected image of the girl walking across the road below us to sit at the table where Brian Lucas was originally writing.

Moving away from conventional modern dance, these choreographers have made work that takes the audience on an emotional journey and it is refreshing to see dance that is looking to be more than vaudeville. Shaaron Boughen has curated a show that feels like one work with many journeys within it. She has made musical choices that mostly work and Matt Scot consistently created magical lighting. Without funding or the time to research and rehearse adequately, independent artists often have to show work that is two dimensional. This show had a fantastic sense of continuity, of unity, but more time to reveal another layer would add to some of the works presented.

*Intimate Letters, Choreographers Brian Lucas, John Utans, Scotia Monkevitch, Gail Hewton, Shaaron Boughen. Curated by Shaaron Boughen. The Cherry Herring, March 12-16*

*Clare Dyson is an independent choreographer who lives in Brisbane. She has received an Australia Council grant to develop a collaboration with a visual artist and a composer.*

# Material imagination

David Williams at rehearsals of Alison Halit's *To Run—Sand* in Melbourne

*Direct images of matter. Vision names them, but the hand knows them. A dynamic joy touches them, kneads them, makes them lighter. One dreams these images of matter substantially, intimately, rejecting forms—perishable forms—and vain images, the becoming of surfaces. They have weight, they are a heart.*

Gaston Bachelard

In a cavernous iron warehouse at the back of the old Brunswick brickworks, behind the vertiginous chimneys of the kilns and the blackened skeletons of derelict machinery, an island of moist white sand floats in a sea of powdery grey brickdust and rubble. Prefiguring its future performance space in the city, the rehearsal space for *To Run—Sand* has been installed in the bowels of an abandoned industrial workplace—a site still palpably ghosted by its former function, and by those that worked and sweated and dreamed there. The only sounds now are the muffled wingbeats and cucurucus of pigeons far overhead. Until the digging starts.

Every session begins with digging. The island of sand, both setting and generative source for this dance-theatre performance, is on the move again. The impact of footfalls and bodies disperses the sand, it flows outwards, a slo-mo crystalline liquid. We rebuild two mounds, one as conical as a Hokusai Fuji, the other slightly flattened, volcanic. Our digging is punctuated with jokes about (im)possible careers with Vicroads. The remaining sand is raked, and the rehearsal begins.



Evelyn Switajewski in *To Run—Sand* (rehearsal)

Bachelard called "intimate immensity". At moments it suggests a pocket of coastal dune or beach, a lovers' retreat, a children's playground, or an island of enchantment and imprisonment, like Prospero's; at others, it becomes battlefield, labour camp, post-industrial wasteland, mountain range, moonscape—or desert, that core postmodern metaphor for the nomadic and the dis/appearing. And it is the fluidity of the sand's topographic referentiality that allows the performers (and those watching them) a remarkable associational freedom in narratives enacted and images inhabited.

Material is generated primarily through games, tasks, structured improvisations and free play; once Alison has set up an activity, she rarely intervenes. Images cluster around primordial transformations of status in the flux of inter-relations: playing, working, running, fighting, falling, burying, birthing. The three performers are developing quite different relationships with the sand, each one contradictory and polyvalent. And it is the materiality of these relationships that generates narratives, images and 'characters'. Today Evelyn's actions suggest elegant entrapment, a kind of perky buoyancy against all the odds, like Winnie in Beckett's *Happy Days*. Adrian is both ever playful and consumed by reverie, encumbered by the gravity of possibility; with the smile of Sisyphus, he moulds his desires and memories in the sand. Yumi is explosive, she leaps and digs with an energy that

irradiates far beyond the outer edge of the sand—but her contact with it is consistently light, she touches and brushes with quiet patience and focus.

In many ways, the group's recognition of the sand's active role as trigger and co-performer celebrates Bachelard's "material imagination", which, "going beyond the attractions of the imagination of forms, thinks matter, dreams in it, lives in it, or, in other words, materialises the imaginary". In Bachelard's phenomenological poetics of the elements, matter ("the unconscious of form", the "mother-substance" of dreams) reverberates to become "the mirror of our energy", producing images "incapable of repose".

In rehearsal the sand becomes a register of the actions and emotions that it has elicited from the performers; it mirrors their energy. Intimate, substantial afterimages of what was are retained within what is, although these trace impressions of the contours and gravities of presences-now-absent are always temporary, fleeting. Like memories, like identities, the marks in the sand are continuously overwritten or partially erased. But in the materiality of the instant, for those that work and sweat and dream there, they have weight, they are a heart.

*To Run—Sand by Alison Halit, performed by Adrian Nunes, Evelyn Switajewski and Yumi Umiumare at the Economist Building, Spencer Street Power Station, Melbourne, April 8-20, April 22-27, April 30-May 4. For further details and bookings, phone (03) 9525 1634.*

*David Williams teaches performance studies at the Victoria University in Footscray. He is Artistic Adviser for To Run—Sand.*

# Seen moves, silent power

Rachel Fensham 'live' at Company in Space's *The Pool is Damned*

Performances utilising new technologies or an 'interactive' media environment are like waiting for Godot. *The Pool is Damned* opened with an explanation of the set-up—the cameras, the computer system and crew connecting us to Perth—but because it was five o'clock in the afternoon our solo audience at Perth Institute for Contemporary Art was the technician, who duly sent us a cheery wave. And at midnight in Melbourne, when the audience in Perth were comfortable, the dancers had been performing in the vault for a handful of friends. The potential of this project is to merge dance with video via teleconferencing through which audiences can share a focus or trigger special effects that might also change the dance.

In spite of this virtual possibility, I was pleased to have seen the first incarnation of this piece as Part 1 when it was presented in the haunting brick shell of the 'economiser building', Melbourne's first power station. Nineteenth century dirt floors and mortared walls provided a context that contrasted sharply with the digitised programming system projected on large video screens. Here, the itinerant audience encountered the dancers in suddenly illuminated lightwells, sometimes stamping their frantic signals better in the distortions than in the darkness. There was also an urgency about it, compounded by its immediate address to



Trevor Patrick, Andrew Morrish, Company in Space's *The Pool is Damned*

the race debate then at fever pitch in the mass media.

For almost 15 minutes the sound-modified text of Pauline Hanson's maiden parliamentary speech filled the air whilst dancer Trevor Patrick slowly outlined the rhetorical style of rage—his images on a large screen becoming vitriolic, red, blue; or baboon-like in an x-ray vision of hollow cheek and bared teeth; and a silver foil effect turned him into a robotic magnification of power.

A series of cameo performances each

worked with gestural vocabularies to frame modes of contemporary social hysteria. Hellen Sky's crippled posturing of the socialite, the embrace of charity and pity—the crossed fingers, the licking of thumbs, the nervousness of smoking and the ineffective peace sign suddenly becoming the pointed gun. Memorable was Lucy Guerin dressed in Barbie pink shirt and red plastic mini with her mop of hair rolling and vibrating between two poles against a sky blue background. Her frantic washing of hands—to get rid of

stains—replaced by a clutching and pecking. Pressed against the wall, she counts desperately—two fingers to lips, one in mouth, one zips lips shut, five cover mouth, 10 curl up into a ball.

And a duet of corporate masculinity between John McCormick and Trevor Patrick made you ignore the screens and become interested in these two slight and suited men holding each other up, pushing, clutching, hugging and then saluting. The Caucasian and the Asian in the embrace of patriarchal capitalism. The complexity of the issues at stake—the rhetorical vocabularies of racism and their manipulation of the public—seem to have been eroded in Part 2. Presented in more intimate, more pristine circumstances the 'virtual trial' overtook the performed event. To counteract audience confusion, there was now an actor, who set out to normalise the technology and simplify the objects and structures of racism. He tells us, too directly, about "the politician; poli-technician who thinks that in their fish and chip shop they have the truth".

But unexamined were the silent technologies of power enacted in the spaces between performance and video. Clever technology can both disintegrate and construct the power of the speaker but it cannot replace the subject-dancer's capacity to reveal the gaps between real and imagined effects. When a train passed overhead, in this brick bunker underneath the city, the rumbling was louder than the computerised sound and the walls trembled against my back. My fear then was of being trapped in a world where audiences were compelled to watch mediated images whilst all around the bricks fell.

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# Dance actual and virtual

Eleanor Brickhill and Sue-ellen Kohler discuss Company in Space's *The Pool is Damned: Trial by Video* and Garry Stewart's *Helmet*

Early aspirations of Company in Space for this venture included not only simultaneous interactive transmission to Sydney, Perth and Brisbane of *The Pool is Damned: Trial by Video*—staged live this month in Banana Alley Vault 10, Flinders Street, Melbourne—but also the performers working from each of these scattered places. Using time variations between cities, there might have been a kind of piggy-backing of performers flying around the country, simultaneously creating a nationwide net of live activity and simulacra. Logistically a nightmare, of course, but if big ideas don't always come off, the effort to realise them can produce brilliance.



John McCormick, Company in Space's *The Pool is Damned*

The permutations of Pauline Hanson's maiden speech shaping national consciousness have become the stuff performers dream of, rendering visible the issues of belief and truth and how they operate within the media's shifting parameters. I anticipated something special, as I sat ready to watch the Sydney performance, waving briefly to Lucy Guerin as she put her lipstick on in Melbourne. The performance began there, for me, without any sense of a division of boundaries, because I had anticipated that somehow 'interactive' augured a different kind of involvement.

Two screens: one vertical and one across the floor which was strewn with sand. The sandpit attracted any child within crawling distance. A video camera on the ceiling squashed children and other patrons' wandering images flat against the vertical screen, somewhat scrambled and delayed. The vertical screen menu directed that movement across the sand would activate sound events in Melbourne, and you could also acquire other information, such as titles and participants' names.

Mentally picking my way through the technology, I caught on that the work was divided into sections: *Speech* (a solo by Trevor Patrick), *Dissent* (Hellen Sky), *Translation* (John McCormick), *Diplomacy* (duet, John McCormick and Trevor Patrick) and *Trial* (Lucy Guerin). Each dancer had originally developed a kind of character using their own gestural vocabulary, and this gesture was then treated and transformed into the images we saw. The sound collage was a portentously shredded and rebuilt version of Pauline Hanson's maiden parliamentary speech, also partly manipulated by the audience at selected moments of interaction. But Andrew Morrish's character of the Orator provided a mostly untreated voice-over explanation of events.

★★★

EB Sue-ellen, you saw the original live Melbourne performance as well as the Sydney transmission. How do they

compare?

SE Rather than in those rough-hewn vaults in the Economiser Building, the video performance was staged in an old tunnel underneath Flinders Street Station. It really seemed to make the ideas clearer, having the bodies positioned there with the technology. The impact was so much richer, and the issues seemed much closer, more felt. The highlights for me were definitely Trevor Patrick and Lucy Guerin's solos. But you missed so much of what Trevor was doing when you only saw the video. I couldn't even get a sense of it.

EB Yes, that ominous pointing, like some angel of death, it seemed so epic, but you weren't quite sure why. I guess the subtitle is apt, *Gesture, Race and Culture on Trial*. What people make of gesture, although it may not be related to the truth, becomes the truth.

SE Well, you understood why in the live performance. The live bodies spoke so much more eloquently than the technology alone. Especially during Trevor's solo, you

could hear words from Pauline Hanson's speech, not the actual speech, but a distorted version. He stood on a pedestal. Above and in front was his huge, silver glowing distorted image. But you also saw Trevor, the person, a live, normal, cool body, and you realised just how unlike him the distortion was, even though people might still say that's him. And not just the performers, but the subject matter itself is totally mediated by the technology. When you see both together, there's the possibility of a different level of understanding.

EB Believing what you see and hear. I loved the oration, Andrew Morrish talking about teflon suits, persuasive speakers, how we need to believe: "I believed everything that was written...I believed that Spot could run". Our capacity to learn and understand language and gesture depends on a capacity to believe that what we hear and see is true.

SE In Trevor's dance, with his live presence, the video screen, and the distorted sound, you get confused as to where the authority is coming from. Then you see it's about manipulation, all those Hitlerish gestures. Manipulation by the media, and by politicians. There seemed no freedom, no freedom of speech.

EB I found the interactivity disappointing. I think it was more fun for the technicians running around and setting it up. In the end there wasn't much to do. I was all prepared to get up there and jump around, but all you could do was play with the sound. I was hoping for a different kind of interactivity, enough so maybe you could talk to dancers while they were actually performing. One's imagination sets impossible tasks.

What was Hellen Sky doing in the section called *Dissent*? It was hard to know what sections were about if you didn't read the program. I remember she was wearing pearls, and I remembered Pauline Hanson's photograph. And once again, those epic gestures had to mean something, but what?

SE I didn't really get a sense of what the

performers were doing through the video, but I remember that sense of distortion. For instance, with the sound, all those words from Hanson's speech, some like 'multicultural' stood out. They took on a new kind of currency.

EB The distortion and complexity becomes the point, doesn't it? I don't think most people know what was actually in Pauline Hanson's speech, or what she meant by it. But there's been so much talk, everyone thinks they do know (Frontline recently demonstrated that really well). People interpret speech and gesture in ways that make them happiest.

SE And Lucy's solo, in the Melbourne version, was emotionally so strong. She made me feel that the effort to communicate, with those anguished gestures, seemed doomed to fail. We were all on trial.

EB In the video, it was hard to see what she was actually doing. I guess that's the point too. Like Chinese whispers, you remember the clearest gestures best—like the slash across the throat, the red dress. That's a distortion of the message. People had to sweep the sand from the screen to see her.

And maybe the fact that it's *A Trial by Video* means that we miss a lot of the detail of what's really going on. When witnesses speak via video in court, it's because they are fragile or vulnerable for some reason, like young children. It's easier for a child to cope in a court when they don't have to experience all the frightening detail of the flesh. At the same time, that's a distortion of the real message, without all its emotional nuances. News clips about current events are generally all the information people get. You know it's tampered with, and yet you have no option but to accept it as genuine information, at some level.

And what about the body in Garry Stewart's *Helmet*?

SE It wasn't a brilliant piece, but it was more than 'arm and leg dancing', to coin a phrase. I think it made sense in the context of Foucault, the medicalisation of the western body—showing freaks, bodies pushed to extremes, and our cultural obsession with that. In the context of all those elements, the way it was designed, the mixed media, the costumes, I could enjoy watching the movement, and for once, dance that's extreme, hard and fast and pushing bodies to a level that ordinary bodies never even dream about, it actually made sense.

EB I wondered how purposeful Garry was in using that western modern ballet material, and those extreme physical states the dancers needed to go to, to perform his particular choreography. Justifying that by using yoga to demonstrate just another kind of 'freakish' physical state one can aspire to, seemed thin to me. I don't feel he took the philosophical implications of any of that material into account.

SE I think he made a real effort to stand outside the language, to comment on our culture's need for those extremes, pushing the excitement boundaries, and I like that, but I suspect that he really does love the physicality more than the discussion of it, even though he couches his desires in that questioning kind of way. I could appreciate Craig Proctor's yoga demonstration (I hate it when yoga is called 'contortions'), but it bothered me slightly that the context Garry offered gave it no meaning other than contortion, extremity and abuse.



Lucy Guerin, Company in Space's *The Pool is Damned*

But I don't know whether he had complete control over everything. When you're about to perform, a lot of things happen that you're not really author of. So, maybe it was a happy mixture of many people's input.

EB Perhaps it was accidentally interesting?

SE It doesn't matter whether it's accidental or not. The issues raised are worth thinking about.

*The Pool is Damned: A Trial by Video*—*Gesture, Race and Culture on Trial*, Company in Space. Conceived by John McCormick; score, Garth Paine; lighting, Greg Dyson; cameras/photography, Gary Sheperd, Oliver Uan Qiu Wang; computer graphics, Luban White. On-line from Melbourne to PICA, Perth; Experimetro, Brisbane; and The Performance Space, Sydney, March 4-15

*Helmet*, choreography by Garry Stewart, designed by Brett Chamberlain, Daniel Tobin, The Performance Space, February 3-14 1997

# Converging spaces and merging forms

Tony Osborne at Deckchair's *I am Nijinsky* and ID339's *The Living Room*

I am confused about the space I am in. Several weeks ago this room was much smaller. I've never known the PICA performance space to extend so far (seemingly to infinity), but stretch away it does and its angle and the images projecting onto the division add to my confusion. In *I Am Nijinsky* Stefan Karlsson is Nijinsky, sometimes. I'm sure that this space was smaller when I watched ID339 move around *The Living Room* they created back in November.

Can this be the same space? On that occasion there were corrugated cardboard walls as obviously flimsy as the facades of so many human relationships. This dancing trio's fragile relational world orbits around their (and our) omnipresent host, David Hobbs. He spins discs, plugs and unplugs lights, moves and removes furniture. I expect him to give us the Terry Jones grin

at any moment, but no Pythonesque clichés here.

The angled wall in front of me is hinged and I am witnessing a new episode in Nijinsky's life opening, with the space, to reveal an oblong (one that Vaslav's obtuse creativity may not fit into)—all around is monochrome. He dances or Stefan Karlsson does. His partner is Margrete Helgeby. I've seen her dance before. It is her. But only Karlsson confirms his identity. Then subverts it. They dance in real space as some other dance overlays their presence. (How did they do that?) These are phantoms I'm seeing—a virtual Karlsson and Helgeby—spirits of themselves floating impossibly away from real time.

There was none of this virtuality with *The Living Room*. I knew where I was! Bill Handley's foot-tapping, Paige Gordon's obsession with the marking out of the floor,

feet on the ground! I know this hop-scotch cum Olympic pool game, it's familiar. When the mediocrity becomes too much, oppress or compete. Handley restrains Gordon. She thinks she is free he pulls her back again. Why? Hobbs organises some music, something from the modern jazz catalogue on a monaural gramophone just like my Dad had in the 60s. He needs to change the lights—he tugs on the double adaptor. This show is so low tech it's nerve-racking. Paul Johnson starts a card game. I'm feeling the claustrophobia now, the cardboard walls have been erected to stand one third of the way into the space. I want to cut my way through them, get away from the interminable swish of the ceiling fans, the looks that pass between the performers and the conversations that go nowhere.

Now Nijinsky begins to collapse. His various mentors and 'friends' (Boris Radmilovich and Claire Jones) discuss his dilemma as Karlsson contextualises the historical Nijinsky within his own 1990s symbolism. What did this man mean to dancers? What does the Nijinsky canon represent? I'm feeling closed in again but this is the crowd around me causing my discomfort, tonight is a sell-out.

As I leave I wonder about the theatre of Sally Richardson moving toward dance and the dance of Paul Gazzola's ID339 moving toward theatre. It's an important shifting of ground. I suspect that the two genres cannot continue to be successful without amalgamation. The design conduits



Margrete Helgeby and Stefan Karlsson in *I am Nijinsky*  
Ashley de Prazer

provided by the expertise of such people as Gary Chard and Graeme MacLeod may provide the route along which these journeys will travel.

*The Living Room*, ID339, PICA,  
November 26-December 1, 1996

*I Am Nijinsky*, written by Sally Richardson,  
produced by Deckchair Theatre and Sally  
Richardson, Perth Institute of Contemporary  
Art, January 8-February 1, 1997.



Paul Johnson, Bill Handley and Paige Gordon in ID339's *The Living Room*  
Performance Photography

## Into the unknown

Fiona McLean at Alice Cummins' *Broadcast Dancing*,

*falling from grace*—It is the place she dances from which is so astonishing—a place where decades of maturing consciousness, of lived and stored experience, are all wiped clear. Her feet have never touched the

Australian Ballet at His Majesty's...an arts grant, *No Sugar*, protests at the brewery...The words themselves suggest connections, and Alice, as she speaks them, colours and redraws the links from memories in her bones and skin and organs. 1950...1965...1970...1990. Behind the tumbling mix and match—and sometimes over it—a slower, stranger history is projected. We see close-ups of a giant, watching eye; a nipple puckered like a sunflower; wet and hairy flesh-folds that are only possibly an armpit.

*lullaby*—I remember the asymmetries, a dance of intimate, ungainly beauty: Alice folded over from the hips, one arm stretched downwards, the hand turned in and resting on the floor; Alice on her



Alice Cummins performing *falling from grace*

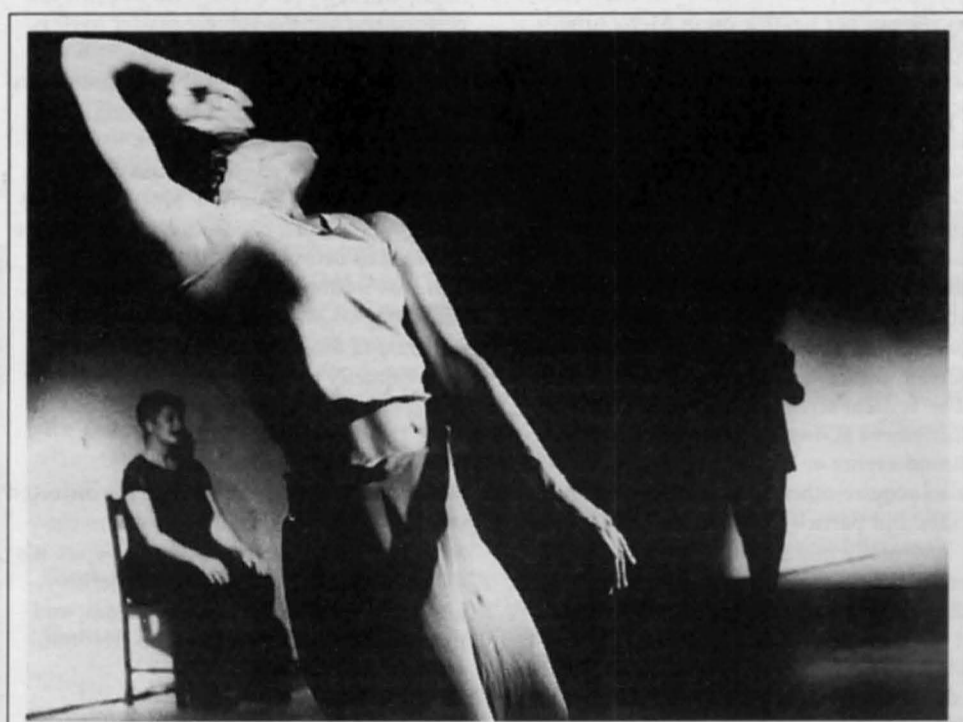
Suzi Wild

ground. She has never cried or smiled. There is nothing, no one else, but her. Yet all through the piece voices speak. Their recorded discourse is a familiar one of donors and surrogates, implanting and freezing, of hungering and dying for a baby. It is the kind of talk in which sometimes I engage. But not now. Now, I am absorbed by the dance and the words serve as markers of how far away that talk is.

*moebius loop*—Atomic tests and ballet exams...*Camelot*, moratorium marches, The

back, limbs raised to plough the air; stretches which luxuriate like yawns; explorations of the kind which dreams pursue, curling back upon the past without object or intent in view. Within the confines of a spotlight island, within the boundaries of her skin, Alice is tracing threads to the unknown.

*Broadcast Dancing*: Three new works by Alice Cummins, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, December 4-8, 1996



Heidrun Löhr

The challenge of writing about dance was one of the topics for The Performance Space's *anti-static* forum (the whole event will be reported in *RealTime* 19) at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. I don't write about dance, but sometimes I feel compelled to, just as Virginia Baxter did in *RealTime* 17, reading Melissa Fenley's Sydney Festival performance from another angle, the face). Seeing American Jennifer Monson's remarkable contribution to *anti-static*, with its absolute shifts from nuance to explosion, from interiority to consuming gaze, from the mundanely material to the spiritual, made me re-think/re-experience Rosalind Crisp's *Six Variations On A Lie* (Ormeo Dance Studio, March 7-9). *Six Variations*...is a diminuendo, from physical explosion to stillness and silence, a vast and exhausting release, the dancer's bursts of energy recurring less frequently, more slowly (revealing their choreographic and especially gestural shape). Against and eventually into this pattern, Ion Pearce plays a delicate cello composition while a very pregnant Nikki Heywood sits still, watching, muttering a barely intelligible mothering 'are you okay?/pull yourself together' type tongue. A third accompaniment is a sole male figure climbing down a ladder and crossing the performance area with a parcel towards an unspecified destination at slowest Butoh pace. While this variation seemed too familiar, the Pearce and Heywood presences were rich in the evocation of a dialogue between pent up physical force and the ambiguities of advice and consolation. In Rosalind Crisp's work the meaning and source of emotion is not always clear, and for some that's distancing. But she is one of Sydney's most idiosyncratic self-choreographing dancers, and, for me *Six Variations*...got closer to the release of an essence.

KG

**PADMA MENON**  
dance  
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**"Redefining Parameters"**  
**1997 PROGRAM**

**"Sangam"** May 2,3 Ralph Wilson Theatre, Canberra

Traditional Indian dance, music, food - be transported to another space and time!

**"Agni Forum"** May 31 Company Studios, Canberra

Open rehearsal and forum of "Agni" before it tours to Sydney. For the senses and the mind.

**"Agni"** June 2-15 Newtown Theatre, Sydney

The Company will take its ground breaking work of 1996 to Sydney for 9 performances. The work will feature 5 powerful performers including Padma Menon and music specially composed by the popular Australian band "Sirocco".

**"Laya"** October 8-18 Courtyard Studio, Canberra Theatre Centre Made to Move Canberra

"Laya" will be the Company's spectacular new work for 1997. It is a collaboration between the Company and acclaimed Flamenco performer, Diana Reyes from Sydney. The work will weave the passion, mystique, music and dance of 2 strong cultures into a new equation.

for further information about the Company's 1997 program, please ring sonia dowhy on 2578756 or fax 2578244.

## From the inside

Dancer Jane Diamond writes about the creation of a new work by Perth's Fieldworks.

Fieldworks is a Perth based performance company founded and directed by Jim Hughes. Since 1988, the company has produced innovative dance/theatre works with a commitment to the research and development of new ways to present contemporary performance. Reflecting Jim Hughes' background in visual and performing arts, Fieldworks' productions are multi-faceted, dovetailing film, music, installation, design and performance. They are also site specific, exploring the performance possibilities of unusual spaces.

In the new work, *I Lean On You, You Lean On Me*, the performers (dancers Sete Tele, Shelley Mardon, Paul O'Sullivan and myself, along with blues musician Ivan Zar) journey through the grand Edwardian architecture of the Old Peninsula Hotel in Maylands. We look closely at the lines, intercepting points, chiaroscuro of light and shade, areas of depth, perspectives and vanishing points, immersing ourselves in the factual and imaginative history of the space. Stepping inside the lives that have passed from door to door, the events, conversations, we construct a story of the space. To me the space is like a lover. I am intimately connected to its textures and surfaces. I experience a sensuous knowing, an emotional relatedness.

From these sensations, images, memories and knowings that seep from this personal contact with the space, the content emerges. This content deals with human relationships. Exploring both the subtle and overt aspects of human foibles and desires we roll and spin off walls, thrusting out into the greater space or, as couples, perform soft, sensuous duets on top of a

large refectory table, or in the weight of heavy red velvet drapes. Door frames, window ledges, the table—above and below—the walls become the setting for the dynamics of human relatedness. At times the movement is small and detailed,



Fieldworks' *I Lean On You, You Lean On Me*  
Ashley de Prazer

gestural, strongly motivated by a personal narrative, at others it is strong and vigorous.

The performers are at the centre of the work, co-creators of the performance, each moving from their own historical centre, revealing an individual kinesthetic



Jim Hughes

experience of the space. The work is not about demonstrating virtuosity or even thinking about what the movement 'looks' like while being executed, but being finitely aware of the intention and sensation of images that oscillate into clear, powerful movement images.

Underpinning Fieldworks' practice is a somatic approach to the body, which encourages a highly tactile and sensuous way of moving. Somatic awareness is like navigating one's self through an unknown terrain, a place where enormous physical and emotional information lies. Here, the experiences of the individual are housed in cells, fluids, tissue and bone. Deep physical memory or somatic connection brings us closer to the self that inhabits the body. It is from this place of awareness that we improvise, moving, using dialogue, sound and voice, revealing fragments of experience, memories, somatic remembrances, which are pulled together to form solos and duets.

Coupled with the complete use of the architectural space, there is a filmic quality as the piece is slowly woven into a non-linear narrative, a montage of moving images, speaking of the waxing and waning of human relationships.

*I Lean On You, You Lean On Me*,  
Fieldworks, Old Peninsula Hotel, 219  
Railway Parade, Maylands (opposite  
Maylands Railway Station), Wednesday-  
Sunday 16-27 April, 8.00pm

## Flexing video muscle

Linda Carroli reviews *Artrage* at Brisbane's IMA

In the Institute of Modern Art's newly dedicated multimedia and video lounge, The Red Room, sits a computer terminal, while a row of cast-off armchairs from the Queensland Art Gallery faces a video and monitor from which the ABC's trademark 'r-r-r-a-a-a-age' roars. A sprinkling of balloons left over from the opening night party and carefully placed astroturf complete the threadbare-with-flair look of Brisbane's only electronic art garden.

The Red Room's opening program featured *Artrage II* produced/curated by Kim Machan for the ABC. *Artrage* is a compilation of 30 very short (not more than two minutes) video artworks from 27 artists produced for television, specifically, for broadcast during the midnight to morning music video program, *Rage*.

In its entirety, *Artrage* is like a 'festival', a sweeping survey of style, production values and content from some of the country's better known artists whose practices include painting, installation and new technologies, as well as video and film. It's curious to see how they have responded to the challenge of video and also to the idea of producing work for television rather than for the artspace. As a result, it's difficult to characterise this compilation beyond its stated purpose which was a series of works to be broadcast between music video clips on *Rage* to a predominantly young audience. Despite this, the *Artrage* concept must be working: this is after all, its second incarnation.

Viewing these works in a gallery seems like seeing them out of context: not interspersed like commercials between an eclectic array of music video clips, not in stream with the ether of televisual

information, not slouching on the couch at 3am, weary and a bit pissed. You don't get the same element of risk, slippage or disruption from the anticipated fare, nor the 'vector effect' where art can share space with more popular cultural forms, mediated by its presence in a televisual field yet nevertheless confounding and hybridising the normative nature of television production values and programming. Sited as such, the works have a liminal and transgressive quality which imposes on its television environment and audience, as well as positing a differentiated aesthetic space within the tele-medium. Similarly, these pieces operate to extend and challenge visual literacies within a tele-literate mass audience.

Some artists, including Destiny Deacon and Fiona Hall, Geoffrey Weary, Jon McCormack, Bill Seaman and John Conomos, have opted for differently considered cinematic and performative styles which deliver poignant and poetic narratives of oppression, autobiography, loss and forgetting. Others have responded with pieces which seem to appropriate, pastiche and bastardise the forms typical of television commercials, news, drama, documentary, comedy and video clips as in the works of Tim Gruchy, Maria Kozic, Bernt Porridge, Ross Harley and Carol Rudyard. Implicit in many is a quality of irony and parody. Jay Younger presents a group of girls in flouncey pink dresses. They squat on the ground and merrily skip off, leaving a line of lurid pink poos. It's a reference to the 'sugar and spice' of little girls, the consumer culture that's built around the feminine from childhood and its contradictory relationship to the abject. In *Dead Board*, Scott Redford makes light of the 'boredom' endemic to

contemporary popular culture (and perhaps youth) by sawing a surfboard with the word 'dead' across it in half. It's a futile gesture which only temporarily alleviates the boredom; while intact, the surfboard was at least an option.

Some of the works' political and sexual content are such that they might jar against television's constructions of identity: like Julie Rrap's *Sniff*, a close-up olfactory inspection of an unshaved female armpit or Linda Dement's foray into the feminine abject, where slashes across the skin metamorphose into a mouth. As it opens, it becomes more vaginal and inviting, revealing blade-like teeth. In Gordon Bennett's *Fingers*, his hand is dressed in union jack printed shorts and it performs to the camera under an accusing and compelling voice-over. In a mock strip show, the shorts are kicked off and the thumb is tucked between his fingers in a simulation of a penis with which he confronts and assails the video camera/audience.

Distinctive in *Artrage* for utilising new technologies are works by John Tonkin, Elena Popa, Michael Strumm, Patricia Piccinini, Tim Gruchy, Ian Haig, Peter Hennessey, Marion Harper and Troy Innocent. They bring to video other concepts of technologically-mediated and simulated imagery. These works sit within the series, not as an edict which subordinates and subsumes the 'lesser' technology of video, but rather as works which reinscribe time and space, consumerism and nature, reality and hyperreality. They interject and impose an altered set of connections, meditations and possibilities which require negotiation in a postmodern, technologised terrain.

Removed from its 'television' context, *Artrage* is viewed as a compilation of video art of which Machan says, "each work is self-contained and is ready to be compared with its context, other works in the series and other works by the artists". You definitely get

a sense of the flexibility of the video medium, its importance as an artform and the diversity and nuances of video art practices, intersecting with and providing critiques of performance, popular culture, cinema and new technologies. As such, the artists' voices are visceral, insightful and powerful.



Padma Menon

Arunas

In her new work, *Agni*, Padma Menon takes as her inspiration, fire and its powers to energise, consume and consecrate. *Agni* features five performers including the choreographer and combines Indian and Australian contemporary dance forms. The music composed by Sirocco is inspired by the rhythms of the Indian desert state of Rajasthan. *Agni*, Newtown Theatre, June 4-14, 8pm, June 15, 5pm.

# Desire and footy

Maryanne Lynch discusses art, life and football with curator Chris McAuliffe

*Sundays were for sport when I was a child. At least the morning, with World of Sport wedged in between mass and a leg of lamb. And when I say sport, I mean footy, Australian Rules footy. Lou 'The Lip' Richards, 'Captain Blood' (Jack Dyer), Ron Barassi and others holding forth about Saturday's games; the handball competition; and stocky, inarticulate footballers attempting to counter the banter as they clutched a little frilly something 'to take home for Mum'.*

*Eyes on the Ball: Images of Australian Rules Football* is an exhibition examining the relation between Australian society and Australian Rules football. It draws together a collection of works spanning this century in an analysis of the fissures of personal, social and national identity. In conversation with curator Chris McAuliffe, the search for identity and the desire for Collingwood to win the 1997 Premiership emerge as equally important and equally flawed.

ML Tell me about the exhibition and its background.

CM I was always a fan of football and of art, and I tended towards a cultural studies approach in what I was doing as an academic or as an art critic. I went to the footy a lot, and I went with artists, and you just realised that people were doing it.

ML Doing what?

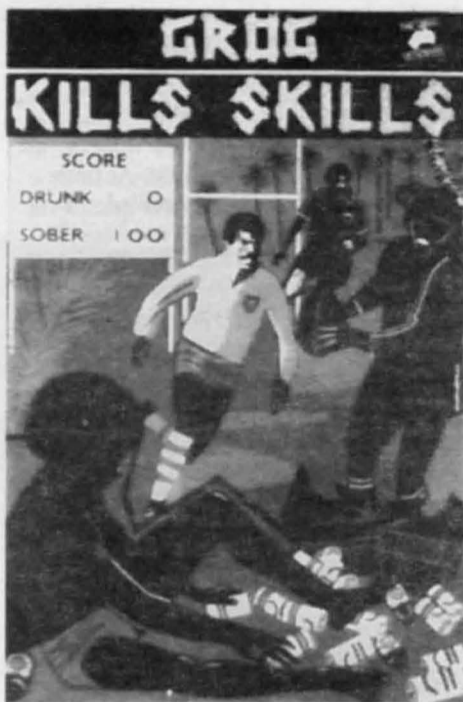
CM Doing images of sport but primarily football. I'd come across an image in the mid-80s, a John Brack painting from 1953 called *Three of the players*, which is a portrait of three Collingwood footballers, and I'd just kept an eye out since then. Football was also something that increasingly I came to see as a way of focusing a lot of methodological issues, about how you talk about art and culture, and also a lot of issues to do with your good old post-colonial smorgasbord—race, gender, the spectacle, commodification of culture, the conflation of leisure and consumption. That whole raft of issues that just keep surfacing again and again as nodule points of debate or self-definition in contemporary culture.

ML What was the process of selection?

CM My initial premise was that it wouldn't just be images of football. I was much more concerned that it be about the cultures of football; that it be about the viewers, that it be about the physical sites,



Redmond Cheer Squad 1982/3



Marie McMahon/Redback Graphics, *Grog Kills Skills*, 1987

that it be about all the ways images were made of it, and how it entered consciousness.

ML How many works in the show?

CM Just under fifty. They're primarily two-dimensional media. But that also incorporates photography, cartoons, caricatures, comics, prints, drawings and post cards. Within the three-dimensional media there's sculpture and clothing, and some work verges on installation. I didn't want it to be limited to the visual arts strictly understood, but ultimately the pragmatics of exhibition did bring it back more or less to that. I wasn't interested in the museum distinction between art work and artefact, and put in things like costume, a run-through banner, music and newspaper photography. My argument is that they're all cultural practices and they're all signifying practices, and so there's no point subdividing them. Just put them all together and look at the way they operate.

You can put a cheer squad duffle coat from the 1980s and a football-parody costume from the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras march in 1995 next to one another, for example, and you can say one's legitimate culture and one's so-called marginal culture, but both can be regarded as a theatricalising of the self, both are about persona as public performance. Instead of having these two polar opposites, they actually meet and they're both about versions of fanaticism. And so on.

*There's a photograph of my three brothers, standing in order of height and age, all wearing Collingwood football jumpers. It was the tenth birthday, I recall, that signalled the arrival of a 'real' football and a jumper. Each brother then chose the number of his favourite player as his own. My father took the photo, and I stood beside him watching. It didn't occur to me to feel left out. None of my brothers—or my father—was the full forward type at the best of times.*

ML Does that mean you primarily focused on the cultures of football, say, the culture of gender or race, or was the art itself under interrogation?

CM What tends to dominate are images about being at the game or trying to understand the game or cultural or economic or political issues that surround the game. There's a painting by Mary Alice Evatt, for example, that was done in 1937, of a Collingwood versus St Kilda game, and from the point of view of an art historian

it's an interesting painting because it's by a woman and it's of a footy game, but also it's done within the very strict confines of the George Bell School, which she was attending, and it was set as homework. And there's a definite attempt to subordinate the game to certain compositional principles. One of the figures in this pack of players going for a mark is a direct lift from a Matisse painting. You can look at it in terms of the resonances that come out of someone grafting mass culture onto a nascent modernist artistic culture in Melbourne in the 30s. But of course there's that perennial question of what women's relationships to the game, to masculinist culture, are.

If there was a thing in a nutshell about the show for me, and not to sell the artists short, but I think there's a general tendency to assume that if you want an image of Australian identity you're going to get it in spades with footy. The artists all go there thinking, "Okay, I'll just stand in the outer at the footy and Australian identity will be revealed to me", and it's not. They actually have to work really hard.

ML Why do you think that is?

CM The easy answer for me is that there isn't an identity out there merely to be spotted and named. It has to be constructed. And the artists realise that they actually have to come up with these incredibly complex metaphors. So, you get a hell of a lot of images of deserted footy grounds!

ML It's contrary to the expectation of what art about football would be.

CM Yeah! You've got a very cartoonlike image of Kardinia Park by Glen Morgan, which shows all these fanatical Geelong supporters at the game, but then on the back of it is written "Kardinia Park. Worst facilities in the VFL". You look at it from the front and you think, "This guy loves being at the footy", and then you look at the back and he's saying, "Aren't we smucks for going here?" I think that's the sort of resonances you often get. The artists are saying, "Yeah, we do act out identity here, but it's a commodified identity or it's a ritualised identity".

ML And you find a common ambivalence about identity, whether it be personal, social or national, between a work in 1901 and a work in 1996?

CM There's an Arthur Streeton from 1889 called *The national game*, which is on footy, and what I argue is that even though he obviously set out on the assumption that football embodied national identity, the painting actually fails to come up with an image of national identity, partly because Australia isn't even federated at this point, so he hasn't got an iconography, partly because the structures of national mythology precluded national identity being found in an urban setting.

ML Are you reading the failure into the painting?

CM You can't even see the game! It's failed literally in that you cannot see anything in the picture that would give you any clue as to why this was the national game. That's in the painting but it has to be teased out in the exhibition.

ML How have you teased it out?

CM The hanging is orchestrated around five themes: gender and sexuality, commodification, community, abstraction, identity. It's all in the signs. Sometimes it's as simple as putting four images of abandoned footy grounds in a row on the wall.

ML What about the fact that football is not played everywhere?

CM While certainly Australian Rules football mightn't be the most powerful metaphor in New South Wales, it is elsewhere, especially in Tasmania and the Northern Territory. Rob Moss, this Alice Springs artist, for example, did this drawing of people watching a footy game. And it's all about Aboriginal football and the way it's community-focused, but then there's all these peripheral figures at the back of the crowd, and you realise that it's as much about marginalisation. It's stronger in some States than others but the metaphor still holds.

*One of my brothers married into a fanatical Collingwood family (with the prestige of an uncle who played in the 1958 Premiership), and it's as if he's migrated to another land. We barracked for Collingwood but this is something else. I watch my niece and nephews as they troop off to the game every winter Saturday, coated, hatted and scarved, and I wonder what the weekly trip to the game means to them. They're too young to answer me, but will they ever know?*

*Eyes on the Ball: Images of Australian Rules Football* curated by Chris McAuliffe. Co-ordinated by Waverley City Gallery. After touring to Swan Hill and Adelaide in 1996, the exhibition goes to Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, March 1-April 27; Campbelltown City Art Gallery, June 28-July 28 1997; Geelong Art Gallery, August 29-October 5.

Chris McAuliffe is a Melbourne curator and art historian. Maryanne Lynch writes for performance. Both were born into Collingwood families.



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# Give it to me, white boy

Fiona McDonald looks at Gay Art at the 1997 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras

Queer theory has described sexual identity as a performative identity that constitutes itself through a range of encoded visibilities and invisibilities. Two of the curated exhibitions that formed part of the 1997 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras responded to these concepts by putting together exhibitions of works constructed around relations of seeing and being visible. These exhibitions aimed at contesting the privileged spectatorial gaze of the commodified artwork by operating in a different, more reflexive encounter, requiring in return the visibility of the viewer's look.

*Juice*, curated by Wayne Tunnicliffe at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, included artists working with ideas of altered proximities—of physical space, of looking, of materialities or surfaces. Christopher Dean's *Aspic Realism* reworked the suburban-materialist-fetishism-as-degendered-infantile-signifier by stretching queen-size chenille bedspreads and then painting (neatly) over them in an act of performative camp desire or regendering.

Jane Trengrove's *Sex Fluffies*, two sex-toy soft-sculptures of pink feathers and black fluff, one with latex bead and one with latex orifice, where set upon museum plinths and labelled so as to instruct the viewer to "Stroke...Blow", "Squeeze...Enter", respectively. The cuteness or seeming pliability of their initial appearance transmutes into an engagement of tactile negotiation.

David Rosetzky's white-flesh-tone painted wall and modular vinyl cube-seats formed an unmarked, discrete, transitional space, possessing the flatness and absorptive qualities of its cosmetic referent. Embedded in one of the vinyl seats, a video monitor ran a loop of *Luke* in a continuous shot-from-above close-up of having facial cream smoothed on and then wiped off in an exchange of alternate viscosities. In this

work the invitation to visibility could be a resistance to disclosure—or simply a masquerade of blandness.

The approach toward intimacy with the viewer that Trengrove and Rozetsky invite was somewhat thwarted by the inevitable white cube format of the Project Space itself, as the works are positioned within a curatorial framework of irony rather than in the erotic framing that their discrete spaces and domestic resonances also suggest.

The gallery space of Raw Nerve, the venue for *Bad Gay Art*, curated by Robert Schubert, was converted from the front of an ex-community-hall-type building and comprised three rooms of varying sizes joined by a hallway/corridor and walk-through toilet, forming altogether a set of linked passage-spaces. Installed in these spaces, the work of Andrew McQualter, John Meade and Scott Redford created a sequence of tactile, claustrophobic and emptied-out spaces. The experience of these sensory, mind spaces was enhanced by the confusion of the spatial boundaries between functional and exhibition spaces within the gallery itself. There were no contemplative distances, you cruised this show.

John Meade's objects occupied the smallest space in the gallery. Suspended from the ceiling, pieces of bio-morphic hardware (fibreglass balls, chains and rubber extrusions) partitioned the space at upper body height, filling most of the room area and forcing the viewer into the too-close theatricality of the club space in order to negotiate the installation.

Andrew McQualter's *Slow! Slow! Quick! Quick! Slow!*, was an installation of 70s beige meeting 90s Seiko in a fully-furnished coupling (or coupledom) of modular box partitions, curtains and scatter-cushions. Curtains lined the walls on three sides framing a space that

appeared empty of anything other than the obsessively normal—yet signed by the high tenor of its beige overload and by its visible scatter-signage in the floor arrangement of the objects within the space, coding it as well with the visibilities of street contact.

Scott Redford's wall-text paintings invoked from the negative spaces of abstraction the unwritten, other (gay) masculine. In *Untitled (Keanu crying for River)*, the names Keanu and River are stencilled in half words at the top and bottom of the frame (the other half of the name deframed) mimicking a formalist moment of high-abstraction. These works, flattened-out and cartoon-like, (half) named, graphic presences on the walls also trace out their negative space desire line of

undisclosure, absence and refusal, with a resistance made palpable by the environs of *Bad Gay Art*.

Perhaps the dialogue between these two exhibitions suggests that reworking irony through a gay margin does not contest issues of institutional commodification and that behind the gestures of Queer is a need to reconfigure the spaces and economies of cultural practice.

Or, as the text of one of Andrew Ewing and Eugene Hoh's billboards in Taylor Square reads: Smooth as silk. *Give it to me, white boy*. 1900 -155 -125.

*Juice*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Level 2 Project Space, curated by Wayne Tunnicliffe; showing Christopher Dean, David Rosetzky and Jane Trengrove

*Bad Gay Art*, Raw Nerve Gallery, curated by Robert Schubert; showing Andrew McQualter, John Meade and Scott Redford

*Reinscribing Pleasure*, Taylor Square (Pride and Artspace), Andrew Ewing and Eugene Hoh



March 19 to April 26

**LIU XIAO XIAN**

Point of View

April 30 to May 31

**PAUL SUTTON**

Pedestrian

Stills Gallery  
16 Elizabeth Street,  
Paddington 2021  
Wed - Sat  
11.00 - 6.00pm



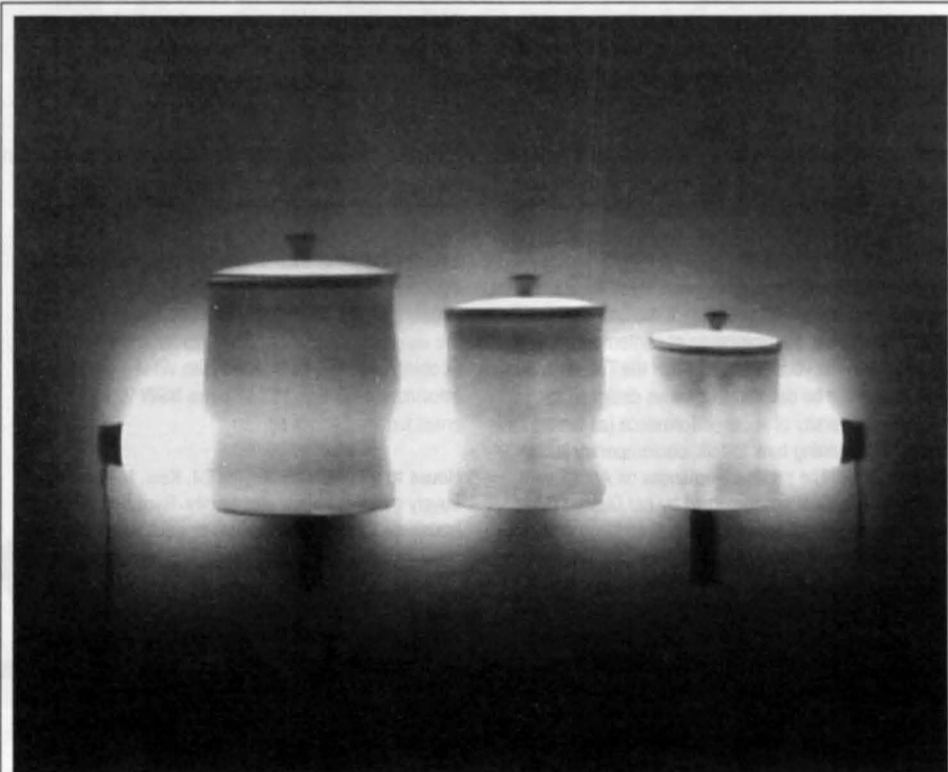
## Italian trauma

In her catalogue text ("Comedy in the Face of Catastrophe") accompanying the work of Italian artists Vedova Mazzei (Simeone Crispino and Maristella Scala) exhibiting at the Centre for Contemporary Photography in Melbourne this month, Jen Budney writes: "The 1900s have been nearly one hundred years of sustained trauma". She cites the Futurists' "energetic embrace of the destructive energy of modern life as a cynical manoeuvre towards the site of power". Whereas the blasé attitude (a psychic phenomenon confined to the metropolis) could be seen as "a type of autistic denial". She cites evidence of the social, political and economic upheavals continuing in "current frenzied debates about cloning, global warming, species depletion, genetic interventions, terrorism, automobile and aeroplane catastrophes, unemployment, electronic communications... And despite the environmental crisis, the Italian government has offered tax breaks to every person who purchases a new Fiat this year. In preparation for the European common currency, the economy must roll relentlessly on, even as Milan boasts the second worst smog levels in Europe.

"Vedova Mazzei plays inside this nightmare of modern life, poking fun at any blasé postures the audience might have assumed. In their first Australian show, their subject matter is lifted from some of the more bizarre issues of the day: 'Sheeps' can be read in part as an ironic homage to Dolly, the first clone of an adult mammal. 'Killer Driller' may be interpreted as a sinister solution to Australia's feline overpopulation. The video, 'Pupa' invokes the distortions and contortions of the human body in an age of vanity".

The work, Budney writes, is forthright and frequently noisy ("Italy doesn't leave much room for those who talk or walk softly"), combining comedy and spectacle. While not wishing to essentialise or pigeonhole, Jen Budney sees the work as "particularly Italian—la dolce vita comes as much from the Italian people's insistence on flattery and laughter as it does from the scenery and the food".

Vedova Mazzei are exhibiting with the assistance of the Italian Cultural Institute. Catalogue essay by Jen Budney. Centre for Contemporary Photography, 205 Johnson Street, Fitzroy April 11-May 10. Information Tel 03 94171549



Bill Culbert, *Three Sisters*, 1995

## Light works

New Zealand born artist Bill Culbert began investigating the phenomenon of electrically generated light in the mid-60s, at the same time looking at the effects of the camera obscura. He produced his first arrangement, *Light Fields*, followed closely by an exhibition of Cubic Projections from the filaments of a single light bulb multiplied by the pin holes on the surface of a sphere. In the 70s his work became more contextual—farm implements with handles of fluorescent light; then he concentrated on the effects of sunlight and shadow through glass. In a recent exhibition entitled *Light Vessels, Jars and Plains* at Viewpoint Photography Gallery in Salford UK, he treated light as though it were liquid, pouring it from one container to the other. At Zone Gallery in Newcastle Upon Tyne, light became a linear force extending endlessly in every direction; passing through walls, floor and ceiling. "I have built the light on the floor and pushed it, like a tide would push flotsam towards a corner. I have thrown it against the wall. It is physically affected by this. I do not try to organise light aesthetically. Inevitably, it seems to look organised. It is ruthless in that way. Things are immediately cleaned up. That is beautiful but slightly disturbing. Light never seems to go wrong. Its place is there" (Bill Culbert, 1994).

Spotlight, new works by Bill Culbert, Gitta Weise Gallery, Room 35, Level 2, 94 Oxford Street Darlinghurst, NSW, April 8-May 3. Tel/Fax 02 9360 2659.

# Shorts

"Where art became life and life became art **Rainer Werner Fassbinder** was always present." In April, Fassbinder will be present on SBS Eat Carpet Monday April 5 when his short film **Chaos** will be screened. On April 14 the **Third Eye Cinema** screens **Veronika Voss** and prior to the screening Lindsay Smith's **Nightshift Theatre Asylum** will present short scenes from two neglected Fassbinder plays (**Bremen Coffee** and **Pre-Paradise, Sorry, Now**). Asylum opens the full season of these plays on April 17, running Thursday to Sunday till April 27 at St Stephen's Hall, 189 Church Street, Newtown at 7.30 and 9pm. Information 02-95571466

Set in a waiting room, the last vestige of still and empty space **Union Theatre's Momentomoment** is a reflection on the imaginative potential of architectural space and the temporality of gesture. A work in which the boundaries are blurred between audience and performer, between actual and performed events. Choreographed by **Felicity MacDonald**, designed by **Simon Barley** with music by **David Borbet**, lighting by **Mikkel Mynster**. April 10-20 at 8.30pm (no Saturday performances) in The Atrium, Architecture and Planning Building, Melbourne University. Union Theatre bookings 03-93447447

Canberra's **Company Skylark** continues to expand inventively and collaboratively on the possibilities of puppetry. Directed by **Peter Wilson**, this year the company has a busy schedule with **Wake Baby** (created with writer **Gillian Rubenstein**) doing Adelaide and Canberra in April, then touring to Toronto, Brussels and Lyon in May. The company's adaptation of Tolkien's **The Hobbit** will open in Canberra then hit the road for Melbourne and Brisbane. Around October, they'll also collaborate with Playbox in Melbourne on **Love Suicides**, a story of cheated love and moral crisis across two cultures (Australia and Japan) by **John Romeril**. **Love Suicides** is also included in the very impressive program of Canberra's revamped **Street Theatre**. Information: Tel 06-2471132 Fax 06-2471160 email: skylark@peg.pegasus.com.au

Is anybody home in Canberra? In November last year seven puppeteers from Hanoi's **Song Ngoc Water Puppetry Troupe** came to Australia to collaborate with **Canberra Youth Theatre** and **Canberra Musicians Inc** on a work based on traditional Vietnamese water puppetry. Following their performances at the Sydney Festival, **Water Stories** toured to regional NSW, then to schools in the ACT region finishing with a sell-out season in March at the Canberra Festival. A tour to Vietnam seems a strong possibility for later this year.

**Sydney Alpha Ensemble** presents **Nyx** a program of Australian premieres of new works by **Mary Finsterer** (**Nyx**), **Stephen Cronin** (**Eros and Agape**) and **Conlon Nancarrow** (**Piece #2** for small orchestra) and new pieces commissioned for Alpha Ensemble from **Roger Dean** (...and the pictures burn) and **Michael Smetanin** (**Nevermore**), May 24 at 8 pm at Eugene Goossens Hall, 700 Harris Street Ultimo. Tickets and further information: Harriet Cunningham Tel/Fax 02-99567950

The major theme of the **Sydney Improvised Music Association** (SIMA) April program at the Strawberry Hills Hotel is **The Voice**, an exploration of contemporary approaches to the vocal arts. Over half the Tuesdays and Wednesdays will be devoted to a series designed to showcase a diversity of vocal performance (all female as it happens) spanning funk to folk, contemporary jazz to the avant garde. The series commences on April 1 with funk singer **Lily Dior** accompanied by her Quartet (Mike Bartolomei on acoustic piano, Adam Armstrong on bass, Andrew Gander on drums). **Mara Kiek** on April 2 features folk-based sounds drawn from diverse musical sources performing with Llew Kiek on bouzouki, baglama, guitars and vocals, Tony Gorman on clarinet, Paul Cutlan on sax and Steve Elphick on bass. On Tuesday 8 April jazz and funk-rock singer **Emma Franz** makes her SIMA debut with her band (James Muller, Scott Hinkler, Adam Armstrong and Nick McBride). Both Wednesdays April 9 and 16 are turned over to one of our Australia's finest jazz singers, **Kristen Cornwell** performing her very personal style with her Quintet (featuring Sandy Evans and Jeremy Sawkins). On Tuesday April 22, the double bill of **Michele Morgan's Chelate Trio** and the **Hazel Smith/Roger Dean Duo**. A note from SIMA that from April they will add one Monday night to the monthly program featuring groups specialising in **Free Improvisation**. Kicking off on Monday April 21 with a CD launch and performance by guitarist **Michael Sheridan** and flautist/saxophonist **Jim Denley**. The two CDs to be launched—Sheridan's **Digital Jamming** (Black Hole Records) and Jim Denley's **Sonic Hieroglyphs from the night-continents** (Split Records). Strawberry Hills Hotel, Cnr. Elizabeth and Devonshire Streets, Surry Hills. Information: Jane March 02-99382180

**Sidetrack Performance Group's One Week Suzuki Stomp Intensive** runs 14-18 April Teacher is **Mémé Thorne**. Suzuki Stomp classes will also run every Monday from 7-9pm, replacing the Tuesday sessions.

All classes at the Sidetrack Studio which now has a brand new wooden floor. Enquiries Tel 02-95601255.

Tasmania's **Salamanca Theatre Company** has appointed **Deborah Pollard** as its new Artistic Director to replace Christine Best who has directed the company over the last four years. Deborah aims to maintain the company's commitment to diversity and quality theatre, incorporating her own specialisations in physical theatre, cross-cultural collaboration and contemporary arts practice.

**Dead Girls' Party** presented by **Nerve Shell** who are **Caitlin Newton-Broad & Gail Priest**, performance and sound installation artists. "The dead woman has always had a hard time getting to poetry readings. She can't find anything to wear, her themes are all domestic, her language is bloody and paranoid. By the time she extricates herself from her death chamber, her confidence has been a little depleted." An investigation into processed, digital text & sound, and the dubious intimacy of machines. Live and pre-recorded worlds merge, sounds and stories float around waiting to claim a body, confusing the evidence which relates to the death of certain famous wives. Free presentations on April 10-12, 8pm and April 13 6.30pm. **The Performance Space** Gallery. Bookings on 9319 5091, spaces limited.

The inaugural **Sculpture by the Sea**, an open air sculpture exhibition along the Bondi-Tamarama walk on May 3 offers prizes (**Sydney Water Sculpture Prize \$5,000** for best sculpture plus a People's Choice and a Young Sculptor's prize). For site and installation information, application forms and other details send a stamped addressed envelope to: Sculpture by the Sea, 21/24-6 Onslow Avenue, Elizabeth Bay NSW 2011. Completed applications due Friday April 18. Information: David Handley. Tel: 02 93571457 Fax: 02 93572335

Selected papers from **The Performer in New Media Conference** presented by the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance in association with the Australian Film Television and Radio School in September 1996 are now available. Papers include **Understanding Art and Technology** (Amanda McDonald-Crowley); **New Media—The Future for Australian Content Policies** (Michael Ward, AFC); **Performers and Innovation in New Media** (filmmaker and interactive multimedia producer, David Cox); **The Multilinear Performance and the Nonlinear Script** (actor Matthew King, writer-performers Keith Gallasch & Virginia Baxter, Peter Harvey-Wright from Harvest Productions); **Motion Capture** (Gordon Lescinsky, Beam Software); **Bread and Butter Opportunities** (Laura Tricker, interactive multimedia producer); **Rights and Representation** (Anne Britton, Jock Given, Walter Saunders); **Performers Protection in New Media** (solicitor Greg Duffy) **Performance for the Future** (Martin Cooper, AME and Rodney Wissler Queensland University of Technology) Information: Lynn Gailey, MEAA.

**Scoping** is a new project for **Film West**, an arts program designed for screening on community television covering specifically arts events and issues in western Sydney. In 1996 Film West developed a pilot program and subsequently received funding support from the NSW Ministry for the Arts. Scoping will address the imbalance in arts programming which concentrates on inner city venues and events and largely ignores the major urban population centres in the west. Scoping will appear shortly and a special Scoping page will be built on Film West's web site. Information PO Box 153 Milperra NSW 2214 email: filmwest@uws.edu.au

House to rent May 25-August 24, Kew, Melbourne. Lovely garden, 10 minutes to city. Rent negotiable or house-swap with Sydney. Tim or Zsuzsanna 03-98537031

House mind wanted, July 10-August 25, Sydney. Honest and reliable. Can supply references. Tim or Zsuzsanna 03-9853703

Feeling complacent, well-adjusted, comfortable and relaxed? Run screaming to **Panic: Morality, Media, Culture at Artspace on Saturday 12 April**. From a press release jumping with scare quotes: "Last year was a year of panics in Australia. The news took us in close to terror and frenzy. Victims and eyewitnesses were coaxed to share their horror. Revelations were made about the sources of the panics, and figures emerged to fear and hate: killers, paedophiles, Asians. So far this year it's business as usual in the news media: another massacre, more revelations of abuse... But in 1996, as Australians let loose their nostalgia for home and 'family values', their yearning for belonging and security, fears were unleashed of strange introverts, clerics, migrants, street people. Our public places are anonymous and nondescript, yet they house these clever and well-disguised devils. And the news media are obvious culprits in creating the 'threats', with their entertainment values, ritual practices and social control agendas. Can the media do panic differently? Other fears are more established, and these, curiously, are often about new media: violent video games, Internet porn, even commercial television. A moral crisis is provoked, tough measures are called for and a

# Sport

## TOOTH AND CLAW

with Jack Rufus

People have been wondering for a long time now: what is going on with professional boxing? The heavyweight division, once the pride of pugilism, has become a laughing-stock. It's a joke. But there's a good reason for that: boxing has been taken over by a new generation of funny men. Not since the golden days of silent cinema has such brilliant comic talent been on display.

Take Mr Golota. Billed as a great white hope, he is in fact a peerless exponent of slapstick. Well ahead on points against former champ Riddock Bowe, he suddenly whacked his hapless opponent beneath the belt, occasioning an all-in brawl in the ring. All we needed was some custard pies to relive that Keystone magic. Then, a few months later, he did it again, showing his mastery of the comic art. If they laugh the first time, don't mess with it. Just keep hitting below the belt.

Not to be outdone, Mr Bowe demonstrated his skill at social satire. Declaring his resolve to toughen up, he joined the Marines, only to quit boot camp eight days later. "It was too hard", he said, deadpan, to riotous applause. Greatest comic achievement, though, goes to perennial clown Don King, who sent a crazed ex-crack addict into the ring. After wandering around in small circles, then bursting into tears in the ring, King's latest sidekick brought the house down. When King later fronted the media as if nothing unusual had happened, we knew we were in the presence of true comic genius.

particularly susceptible target is named: boys, women, Generation X. But whose crisis is this?" Convened by Helen Wilson, speakers include: **Paul Jones** (Dept of Sociology & Social Anthropology, UNSW) **The Role of 'Moral Panic' in the Work of Stuart Hall, Jeannie Martin & Fiona Allon** (Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences, UTS) **Panic in the Streets: home, homelessness & public spaces, George Morgan** (Centre for Aboriginal Cultural Studies, University of Western Sydney) **The Bulletin, Street Crime & the Larrikin Moral Panic in the Late 19th Century, Catharine Lumby** (Media & Communication Studies, Macquarie University), author of **Bad Girls** (Allen & Unwin), **Mindless Violence & Loveless Sex: the Good News, John Potts** (Media & Communication Studies, Macquarie University), **The Irrational in Commercial Television News, Philip Bell** (Media & Communication Studies, UNSW), **Blainey and Hanson: the media "debates", Lea Redfern** (Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences, UTS), **The Pedophile as "folk devil", Stephen Stockwell** (Faculty of Education & the Arts, Griffith University), **Childs play, Racism and Port Arthur, Sally Stockbridge** (Network 10), **Tim Dwyer** (Aust Broadcasting Authority), **Recurring moral panics & new methods of regulation, Clarice Butkus & Mark Evans** (Media & Communication Studies, Macquarie University), **Regulating the Emergent: traditional media's moral panic, Jason Sternberg** (Dept of Journalism, University of Queensland), **Generation X: lifestyle panics & the new generation gap, David Marshall** (Media & Cultural Studies Centre, University of Queensland), **Technophobia: video-games, computer hacks & cybernetics**. Organised by Artspace and the Department of Media and Communication, Macquarie University at The Gunner, 43-51 Cowper Wharf Road, Woolloomooloo Tel 02 93681899 Fax 02 93681705 email: artspace@merlin.com.au

"Human intervention into landscape not only cuts into the hill but alters the human behaviour around it." **Robert Kleinboonschate's** exhibition of large scale paintings, drawings and sculpture focuses on the human figure in a state of synthesis with the landscape. Till April 13 at NT's **Araluen Centre**. Also in April, **Through Other Eyes** offers Aboriginal memories of Miss Olive Pink, an eccentric human rights activist working in the area of Aboriginal welfare. The exhibition shows how the absence of Aboriginal viewpoints leads to distorted understanding of the history of Central Australia. "Altyerrengke akkerete ayeye antwirrekwyeteke" (Hold on to the Dreaming) says Kathleen Wallace, one of three Eastern Arrente artists featured in **rentye (Homeland)** a collection of oil and water colour paintings, works on silk and paper and decorated objects. All three artists (**Therese Ryder, Gabrielle Wallace and Kathleen Wallace**), grew up on the Santa Teresa Mission where they were encouraged by the nuns to develop a European aesthetic, painting

## TEE OFF

with Vivienne Inch

I was thrilled to be present at the inaugural Federation of Farmers Twister Competition which followed the Wood Chop and Shearing at this year's Royal Easter Show. I admit to some misgivings at the outset. Twister is after all a party game invented in the sixties to loosen people up after the egg combo. As skills go, it's a doddle. You need to be able to hold your liquor and your bum in the air without farting. But having witnessed the event, I take my Akubra off to the genius who made the connection between this innocent pastime and the implications of the High Court's Wik decision on land title. It can only have been Singo. Only a Pitt Street Farmer could come up with something so unabashedly Bush. So neat. Crude even. A simple game of reconciliation, of "moomba" (getting together and having fun!). The only murmurings on the stands came from the same killjoys who gave the thumbs down to dwarf throwing a few years ago. What sort of homes do these people come from? This is not a moral issue. It's a contact sport! And one for the thinking spectator. Whose mind does not drift to dreams of racial harmony while watching a burly white cow cocky match reflexes with an Aboriginal on a field of cow cakes? And not only that. Staring us in the face is a sporting solution to the rural unemployment crisis. Aboriginals will audition around the nation. The young Jimmy Sharman might be coaxed from his more urbane pursuits to put just the right spin on the sport and put the family business back on the boards.

landscape as perceived by the eye. In this exhibition, the artists present images of their homelands in both representational and symbolic form. All showing at **The Araluen Centre for Arts and Entertainment** in April/May. Information: Tel: 08-89525022 Fax: 08-89530259

"This scruffy bunch performed anywhere between 10 and 14 shows a week from as far north to the Demilitarized Zone to as far south as the Delta as it was possible to get transport, managing to shine and glitter in our best attire despite the mildew, the perspiration and the pungent odours!... Coming home proved to be much more difficult than I could have possibly imagined" (Go-go girl Lynn Lawson) "We fled in 1977, two years after the fall of Saigon. For four days and three nights my parents and I and six brothers and sisters and 39 other 'boat people' sailed. In Malaysia we were forced to stage a 'shipwreck' in order to dock" (Refugee, Ann Pham). "It's pretty hard... you go down the local Brighton RSL and they put on a welcome back dinner... and the first thing they do is pop the champagne and of course you duck and you're under the table" (Conscript, Bob Meehan). **Việt Nam Voices** is an exhibition examining the war through the art of Australian and Vietnamese war veterans, anti-war protesters, the Viet Cong and soldiers from the Army of North Vietnam. April 12-June 8 10 am to 4 pm Monday-Sunday at **Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre**, 1 Casula Road, Casula. Information Tel 02 98241121 Fax 02 98214273

As I walked through the **Underfoot** exhibition at the **Hyde Park Barracks**, the first sense that surfaced was olfactory—a smell of dust which must have been imaginary. The floorcoverings represented here from 1800-1950 have been lovingly restored by the Conservation Resource Centre established by the Historic Houses Trust to record Australia's domestic design history. Here on display are the patterns of daily life in China matting, woven chenille, hook rugs, cross-stitch, hand-knotted stocking mats, prodded wool, astrakhan, jute, rag rugs, fringed kangaroo tail skins, sheepskin, Bailer twine broom and Brussels weave, woven coir runners. The sensation as I stared at exhibit 117: "Silver Star congooleum square with printed design on mottled brown scattered with abstract motifs in brown, orange and key pattern border" was somatic. A sensation of coolness crept from my feet up and through my body as I tripped over a five-year-old in a hot Riverina town in 1953 lying in the cool hallway trying to catch what there was of a breeze. The "Arctic Sunset feltex with deep pink ground and pattern of interlocking circles alternating with stars and squiggles in red, white and black, 1956" brought back other memories that I thought I had tucked safely away under the carpet. Hyde Park Barracks, Macquarie Street, Sydney Information Tel 02 9223 8922