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June-July 1997



Australian bi-monthly arts on-line

Bad Taste, High Theatre

Karen De Perthuis at Australian Fashion Week

Archer's Adelaide Festival on Target

Prepare for your arts pilgrimage

Not So Common Knowledge

Jane McKemmish talks writing and teaching writing

Wi(c)ked

A personal view of Wik from Barbara Bolt

Marshall Maguire on playing commissions

Pam Kleemann and Sandy Edwards

How innovative is dance?

Illuminating Bill Culbert

New York performance

New Sydney galleries

Environmental arts

Magpie2



OnScreen

Mike Moore's First Movie

Peter Goldsworthy on The Castle

Adrian Martin on Wong Kar Wai

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RealTime is celebrating three years of provocative coverage of the Australian arts. In 1994, the performance company Open City received a small seeding grant from the Australia Council to trial a national arts paper. The publisher's vision for the paper was, as it remains today, to offer new approaches to critical writing on the arts; to provide an alternative focus to the mainstream media; to encourage intelligent and accessible writing giving voice to the diversity of Australia's burgeoning arts scene.

RealTime celebrates this surge of creativity by providing a national forum where writers (including many practising artists) are encouraged to write about artistic creativity and to respond intimately to artworks while placing them in their social, political and cultural contexts.

Among the achievements of *RealTime* is its success over three years in delivering bi-monthly 25,000 copies free of charge to readers in capital cities and regional centres throughout Australia. This achievement is shared by all of the energetic team in Sydney and generous editorial committees across the country. The support of the Australia Council (New Media Arts Fund), the Australian Film Commission (Industry & Cultural Development Branch), the NSW Ministry for the Arts and our advertisers has been vital and sustained.

RealTime is embarking on its first international venture, covering the London International Festival of Theatre June 1–29. *RealTime*'s idiosyncratic and engaging on-site coverage of Barrie Kosky's Adelaide Festival in 1996 attracted the attention of Lucy Neal, Director of the London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT). *RealTime* has been invited by LIFT to co-ordinate a team of six Australian writers—Richard Murphet (VIC), Wesley Enoch (QLD), Linda Marie Walker (SA), Zsuzsanna Soboslay (VIC), Keith Gallasch and Virginia Baxter (NSW)—and three British writers to create four special issues of *RealTime* at this significant and unusual international festival. LIFT will feature three Australian performances—*The Geography of Haunted Places*, *7 Stages of Grieving* and *The North*—works from China, Israel, Palestine and many other countries. In Australia, the festival coverage can be read as it happens on *RealTime*'s new website. *RealTime* at LIFT is made possible through a partnership between LIFT and the Australia Council's involvement in the *newIMAGES* program, part of a major cultural exchange between Britain and Australia in 1997. Open City's expanded vision for *RealTime* over the next three years aims at broader and more frequent coverage of the invigorating contemporary Australian arts scene on-line. As we celebrate our first three years we premiere our new website <http://ltimearts.com/~opencity/>. Our thanks to our many readers, to our subscribers, to the artists and companies who advertise with us, to the funding bodies who support us, for all helping us create and sustain a vision.

3 Arts issues

6–7 International

8 Fashion

9–14 Visual arts

15–25 OnScreen

26–29 Dance

30–31 Literature

32–36 Performance

37–38 Music

39 Sports and Shorts

cover image details

clockwise from top right: Cloudgate Dance Theatre, Adelaide Festival, 1998 • *Kissed*, Sydney Film Festival • Elizabeth Bell, *Venus Observes* • *Conspirators of Pleasure*, Melbourne International Film Festival • Pam Kleemann, from the series *No Place Like Babylon* • One Extra Company, *Suite Slip'd*

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Wi(c)ked

Barbara Bolt sees dark contradictions in land, art and identity ownership issues in the Wik debate

Slope-head. Gin. Cunt-face. Poofsta. Such little words. Yet so expressive. Economical, even. Don't look at me like that. I'm not afraid of what you think. I am brave. I am proud of my dirty, mean, stinking little white mind. I will not be censored. I am an optimist. I am an Australian. Don't blame me. I was taught to look ahead.

Josephine Wilson
The Geography of Haunted Places

It is rumoured that there have been too many shows by Aborigines, gays and ethnic groups in public funded galleries in the 'City of Light', the 'State of Excitement'. The same is not said of the private commercial galleries, although Brigitta Braun's commitment to Aboriginal art, at Artplace, might be perceived this way. And then there are those specialist galleries—Indigenart, Creative Native, Artist in Residence, but no-one really considers they are in contention. It has long been accepted that they cater mainly for tourists and as such are not the subject of critical interest, review or academic scholarship.

It is quite difficult to pinpoint the cause of growing disaffection amongst established artists, but there seem to be a number of themes circulating. The most frequently cited criticism is a qualitative one. The work is crap. Whilst obviously there are exceptional artists, such as Rover Thomas, the common sense view is that much of the work being exhibited under the umbrella of Aboriginal art, ethnic art and gay art just isn't 'good' art. For the more theoretically

inclined, those for whom the category 'good art' seems problematic, it appears that 'difference' has become boring. It is no longer fashionable. Never mind that being 'different' has real effects on real people's lives. It has reached its use-by date and so there is a need to look elsewhere—technology perhaps! Then of course there is the question of incommensurability. One can escape responsibility by claiming that embedded cultural values are in the end non-negotiable. I don't understand it, therefore I can't talk about it or write about it. No-one's admitting it, but perhaps the Hanson factor is operating.

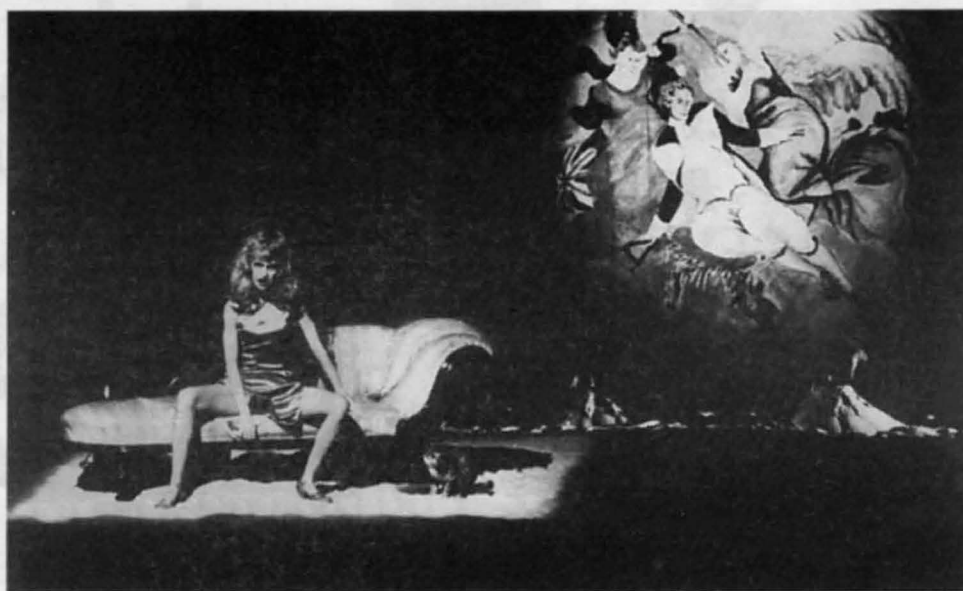
It is three years since Josephine Wilson wrote *The Geography of Haunted Places*, a performance text about colonisation, domination and memory. In 1994, Wilson imagined she was laying ghosts to rest, that in talking out the brutality of the events we could take stock of our past, in preparation for a 'better' future.

The opportunity to talk about it, get it out of your system, talk about the hurt and the harm that has occurred is probably more benefit than anything else that will ever occur.

Federal Aboriginal Affairs Minister John Herron, *The Australian* October 7, 1996

But the hope for a 'talking cure' has receded rapidly and *The Geography of Haunted Places* has become prophetic. Was it fortuitous then, that the national tour of the performance coincided with Hanson's launch into the world of federal politics? Hanson keeps packing them in. In the meantime, apart from the promotional opening night, *Geography* has played to small clusters of the converted. (I wonder if it will be different when it is staged in London?)

And now it's time for the lessons of history. You say I must go back. See what I never saw. Well quite frankly, I am insulted. We are insulted. Of course we treated them



Erin Hefferon in *The Geography of Haunted Places*

Stephen Smith

badly. Very badly. Very very badly. Very fucking badly. But who? Me? I? I don't owe them anything. Let me speak. Please. Get it out of my system. I will not be intimidated into silence. It is a free country. And I do love a sunburnt country.

Josephine Wilson
The Geography of Haunted Places

In Hanson's view:

...we have the chance for Australia to be the best place in the world...(but) we won't achieve it by throwing our money at our land and so-called reconciliation when in fact we have nothing to feel guilty about.

Pauline Hanson quoted,
The West Australian May 5, 1997

Hanson echoes Senator Herron's October 1996 statement on the Stolen Generation. "We shouldn't blame ourselves for the sins of our fathers and mothers. We can say they were terrible things but we can't blame ourselves because it wouldn't occur today. You can no more think of doing that than fly" (*The Australian* October 7, 1996). I'm experiencing a peculiar sense of vertigo. The ghost of the repressed returns.

Elizabeth Durack's confession to Robert Smith (*Art Monthly* March 1997) that Eddie Burrup was not an actual Aboriginal artist, but rather a creation of her own imagination, operates from the same logic as colonialism. Her gesture is as uninvited as the first landing. The coloniser takes what he/she wants and claims it under the guise of land and country. What is alarming is not just the act, but also the rationalisation of the act through discourse. In his article "The Incarnations of Eddie Burrup", Robert Smith claims, that Elizabeth Durack's assumption of Eddie Burrup as her alter ego was in fact a homage to Aboriginal Australia. As apologist for Elizabeth Durack, he suggests that her association with Aboriginal people prevents her work from being sentimental, condescending or idealized, so that it "achieves true freedom from racial discrimination". She is "a concrete exemplar of reconciliation between two communities and two cultures" (*Art Monthly*, March 1997).

If by reconciliation Smith means Aborigines are reconciled to being represented by white Australians and have accepted the loss of their right to Native Title, I guess he has a point. But they haven't, and Elizabeth Durack's assumption of the persona of an Aboriginal male painter is antithetical to the spirit of reconciliation. To suggest otherwise is arrant nonsense.

Moreover, what should be pointed out in this case is the link between the Durack family and the rights of pastoral leaseholders and Native Title. When Elizabeth Durack chose to exhibit Eddie Burrup's work in the 1996 *Native Title Now* exhibition at Tandanya in Adelaide, what was she thinking? How could she reconcile the contradiction between her own position as the daughter of one of the

great pastoral lease holders in the Kimberleys and the aims of the exhibition? It is an irony that the Government should be in the process of extending the rights of pastoral leaseholders which will in effect eliminate Native Title, even as Elizabeth Durack exhibits her work, as Eddie Burrup, in Tandanya. Does she have no shame, or would the irony escape her? Perhaps she sees it as her birthright. After all her sister Mary's history of the Durack family's involvement in the Kimberleys is titled *Kings in Grass Castles*. Robert Smith is keen to tell us that; "Aboriginal workers traversing other properties would let it be known...that they 'belonged' on the Durack's run" (*Art Monthly* March 1997). But who speaks for whom?

It comes down to a particular mechanism of silencing and an effacement of the other. A sense of what Aboriginal people feel about Elizabeth Durack's deceit can only be found in the letters to the editor in such newspapers as *The Western Australian*. This effacement of Aboriginal voices has been almost fully effected in the debate on Native Title, as Prime Minister John Howard slogs it out with the National Party. Wilson Tuckey is speaking for his electorate (have they evicted all Aboriginal people from his electorate of O'Connor?) and the Pastoralists and Graziers Association has pledged to fight for its members (obviously pastoralists and Aborigines are mutually exclusive categories). Howard's duty was to shed light on the matter, to clarify the principles set out in Wik, but in doing so he made his paramount concern very clear:

I want to make it very clear to the farmers of Australia...I won't let you down...I can assure them I'm not going to sell them short. I'm not going to sell them out, I'm not going to let them down.

Prime Minister John Howard quoted,
The Australian March 16, 1997

The prognosis for reconciliation does not appear optimistic. We are haunted by history. Viewing *The Geography of Haunted Places* against the backdrop of current events is unsettling. If I am not answerable for the actions of my father and mother, then am I answerable for my own actions? It seems that the self-reflexivity that can be achieved in art is totally lacking in the reductive rhetoric of politics. In this context, it is apt that Robert Smith has dubbed Elizabeth Durack a "concrete exemplar between two communities and two cultures". What he neglected to make clear was that the communities and cultures he was talking about were the Liberal party and the National Party. No-one else gets a guernsey.

*Thanks to Josephine Wilson for allowing me access to the script of *The Geography of Haunted Places*, and to Estelle Barrett.*

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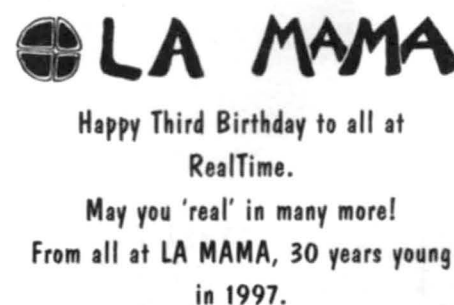
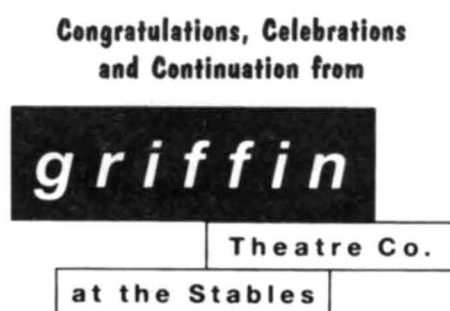
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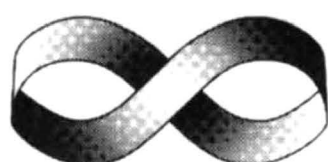


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Last rites and second comings

In Beijing, Moscow and New York, Sally Sussman encounters the performative past in the present

Beijing

The tightly structured performance piece 'The Death of Deng' dominates TV screens for the required 10 days of mourning, with endless replays of the heir apparent, Zhang Zemin, breaking down on national TV. (Echoes of Bob Hawke's performance over the 1989 Massacre, for which dearly departed Deng was responsible.) Every available piece of stock footage of Deng's glorious past deeds is regurgitated to fill prime time television. Instructions are strict: there are to be no uplifting, amusing or happy programs during this period. It is a relief after the endless uplifting, amusing and happy programs during the pre-Deng's-death period, known as Chinese New Year. (I know this because most of the radical writers, directors and performers for theatre I knew are now working for TV, where they can earn big bucks working on soaps and serials.) The citizens of Beijing look on in boredom. The upheaval that traditionally follows the end of an empire does not occur. Deng's death has been anticipated for many months, perhaps even years. The only question discussed is how long Deng was actually dead before it became politically expedient to announce it. Did his family get so sick of the big cover-up that they selected an auspicious day and manufactured his demise? The official photo of his body is taken from such an oblique angle, through such a thick filter: is it actually Deng or a body-double? Real or fake, on February 24th, when it is taken for cremation through the suburbs of Beijing, celebratory fireworks are heard. Luckily, the source is never traced.

Meanwhile, at the new Chang An theatre, with its plush seats and plush prices, *Shajabang*, one of the eight Model Theatre Works from the Cultural Revolution is

having a revival. Named after the area in which the wounded soldiers from the People's Liberation Army were hidden from the KMT (Guomindang) army during the civil war by the local female innkeeper, *Shajabang* is performed by a young troupe from the Beijing Municipal Opera Company. The entire opera, the Artistic Director proudly explains, gesture by gesture, aria by aria, revolutionary look by look, was learnt from the film of the original. Revolutionary fervour is noticeably lacking in this production. The audience tittered during the more blatantly propagandist sections, which 'performed' by this generation of young people born after the last major political movement in Chinese history, seemed just that—a performance, a re-creation of another era, a curiosity, without the ideological heart of the original.

Moscow

A new museum, constructed in homage to Mayakovsky's life and work has been built in the house where he committed suicide at the age of 32. Part walk-in installation, part Futurist theme-park, a Tatlinesque staircase leads the viewer to various chambers where Mayakovsky's posters, poetic world, stage designs and life are displayed in strange 3D clusters. In a bright red chamber, a table, lavishly decorated and adorned with cutlery lies on its side as it is consumed by a machine—a recreation of a Mayakovsky poem on bourgeois consumption. I sidle up to this creation, wanting to photograph, when one of the plump, peroxided middle-aged women who regulate all public spaces in Russia screams at me—I can only photograph the installation if I photograph someone in front of it. I team up with a trio of unemployed young women and we

manufacture scenarios in front of the pieces which are disassembled as soon as we are out of range. The last chambers illustrate alternative death scenarios for Mayakovsky and the final image, suggesting that the exhibition is continually updated, is a photograph of the storming of 'the Whitehouse', the Russian parliament.

New York

From Mayakovsky's museum to Richard Foreman's latest piece, *Pearls for Pigs*, seems a short leap. Enter the blatantly deconstructive, self-reflexive world which seems to characterise much of New York contemporary work, a world of false starts, shifting directions and changing perceptions:

LIGHTS UP (In the audience's eyes)

MUSIC IN (The same two bars repeated as needed)

ACTORS COME IN (Then leave and come in again)

MAESTRO: *I don't like the actors in this play.*

PIERROT: *I don't like this play.*

COLUMBINE enters, sidles up to Maestro and they execute a crude commedia del'arte-style fuck.

MAESTRO: (to audience) *Have you seen enough?*

Four crotch-rubbing Old Dwarfs watch. They wear black conical spiral hats, sport padded bottoms, lacy stockings, aprons, full Edwardian ruffs, sideburns and doc martens. They are a crude dancing chorus, the props-masters, the masturbating buffoons. By the time The Doctor arrives and asks Maestro: "Wait a minute, aren't you an actor?" the hints are blatant: THIS IS AN INTERROGATION OF PERFORMANCE!

The mechanics and metaphors of theatrical artifice are literally subverted: a long bank of footlights is strung from the roof of the thrust stage and focused on the audience. Stage boundaries are marked by string. A baby proscenium stage stands at the back of the space, its velvet curtains open at one point to reveal a blackboard on which is scrawled "The Theatre of Disaster, the Theatre of False Starts, The Theatre of Missed Opportunities". Red velvet curtains on poles, like square-rigger sails are periodically brought on by the Old Dwarfs. Large mirrors, clapper boards and huge picture frames are trained on the audience. Focus is literally pulled: the Old Dwarfs draw strings from pulleys attached to poles marking the perimeter of the stage towards the character or prop to be highlighted, like a Renaissance perspective drawing.

Foreman's staging peccadillos, I'm told, are all here: set pieces and props from past Ontological-Hysteric theatre pieces are recycled. Large white discs on poles are held behind performers heads like halos. Winding handles mounted on microphone stands known as 'spinners' are spun for effect. Everyone is miked. Structured like jazz riffs, the piece veers from the trivial to the profound with equal punch, punctuated by booming bangs, pings and pongs and abrupt lighting changes. The stage is regularly cleared; new props, ideas and artefacts are brought on at chaotic pace; the performers exit and then reappear, continuing where they left off. At one point The Doctor commands, "Make something thrilling happen!" and later, "There is no story in this". Decapitation follows deconstruction as Maestro screams "MIND ATTACK!" and later, "Off with the false face!". A guillotine is wheeled on and Maestro is duly beheaded. Bloody rubber heads appear and dummies fly on. The final anti-climactic image is of a dummy riding a carnival horse made with the legs of two performers, as Maestro looks on blankly.

A vast internal gyroscope seems to drive the piece. As David Patrick Kelly, who plays Maestro and who is a leading performer in many of Foreman's pieces comments: "It's a hard, hard way to work but when its done, it's like being in a wonderful machine body...It's as if Samuel Beckett decided to write a radio play for the Marx Brothers".

Meanwhile, in another Downtown theatre, a Foreman protégé presents his crudely self-reflexive piece which makes in-references to current Downtown theatre concerns, including National Endowment for the Arts funding cuts, conservative critics, the interrogation of the actor-audience relationship etc. For me, the highlight of this dreadful piece of navel-gazing was the appearance of Rupert Murdoch, played with an accent suggesting Cockney, South African and New Zealand roots and wearing a grey suit and grey leather shoes. "Dingo slime!", yells one character.

As other New York artists wait for the demise of the big three white males—Richard Foreman, Robert Wilson and Lee Breuer who have dominated the avant-garde scene since the 70s—the other half recycle their ideas in cool Downtown colours.

Another New York

HAIJ, Lee Breuer's performance poem for one performer, three closed-circuit video cameras and pre-recorded video, premiered at the Public Theatre in 1983. The company, Mabou Mines, has been around since 1970, long enough to have accumulated such gems in repertory. Fourteen years later, the technology which originally had to be "rehearsed in performance" due to costs, now performs like liquid—a delicate dance of live and pre-recorded images slide, fracture and dissolve across the three mirrored surfaces of the extravagant dressing table in front of which Ruth Maleczech performs her virtuosic journey through multiple identities.

"I have nothing to hide", she quips to her image in the mirror and her filmed self underneath this, while applying thick make-up to construct a surface on which to build other identities. At the dab of a fingertip on her palette of make-up pots, Maleczech activates a computer program which directs hammers to hit the ornate glass bottles in front of her, which ring like cash registers or warning bells in counterpoint to her conversation on the checks and balances of relationships. The three cameras contrive to further prism her profiles, and literalise details of monologue: "Cash & Carry. A pound of flesh at \$2.19 a pound". One camera picks up on her trying on a plastic ring, another shows her crinkled profile, while yet another focuses on a tissue in its box, on which is scrawled, "\$2.19".

Adding a scarf, she becomes the Child and interacts with memories of a significant journey with her father through Arizona, projected in three parts on the mirrors. Over the video's soundtrack, Arabic music is superimposed linking us with other mythic journeys: Hajj is the Arabic word for the journey to Mecca which all Muslims must make at least once in their lifetime. Later, as Maleczech inserts her face into a rubber mask of the Father, there is a chilling moment: with the aid of a synthesiser, her voice deepens into the gravelly tones of the father while retaining the wispy upper registers of the Child/Woman.

Texts, images, media and performances interact and resonate in a compelling composition on debt, loss and the layers of experience we inhabit. In HAIJ, we move beyond technology as a decorative, distracting or consistently cool medium in performance. Here it has been honed to play an integral performative role: intimate, warm, humorous and visceral, as versatile as the virtuosic live performer, the extraordinary Ruth Maleczech.

Sydney-based performance creator Sally Sussman is a resident artist with New York's Mabou Mines performance company.

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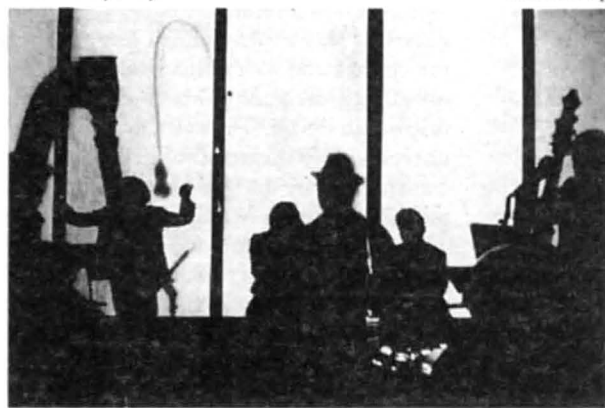
Feasting on the body of art

Keith Gallasch gets his first glimpse of the menu for the 1998 Adelaide Festival

Now's the time to start making those reservations for the 1998 Adelaide Festival. The first announcement of selected dishes from the festival menu suggests bold preparations by chef Robyn Archer, with fresh A-grade produce from arts shopping expeditions around the world.

There are impressive dishes on the menu and, as is often the case with Adelaide, the names are not always well-known here but will be by the time they have been savoured and have left town. For those in the know, the intestinal juices are ready and waiting to digest and make their own Robert Le Page, Les Ballets C. de la B., Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, Heiner Goebbels and Sequentia.

It could also be the last time to feast in the Adelaide Festival manner. This is the gist of what Archer announces to a small group of journalists and arts writers over an intimate lunch in Sydney.



Heiner Goebbels/Ensemble Modern, *Schwarz auf Weiss*
Wong Bergmann

For the year 2000 she's cooking up something very different indeed and you sense that plans are well-advanced—and probably have to be given that there'll be lot cooking in the year of the Olympics. The classic menu served in an inner city setting will be re-stated in 1998, the model that came out of Edinburgh and which Adelaide in particular made its own. But Archer would like to ask audiences, why a festival, why this kind of festival, and her festival of 2000 will provoke responses and answers. She invokes a changing world, the mass concerts of the Three Tenors, the meaninglessness of the concept of 2000 to a greater part of the world's population. What can she possibly have in mind?

In the meantime, she praises the Adelaide Festival as the one she's always admired for its intellectual underpinnings and promises us brain food—festival forums that transcend the 'Meet the Artist' syndrome, that "debate the arts, get the meat into it".

Barrie Kosky brought those intellectual underpinnings to the surface in his frank delineation of his festival's themes in brochures and programs, but the forums left you hungry. To leave you in no doubt that you'll be fed, the Festival Forum series is titled "Dealing with the Body and the Blood of Art".

Enough side dishes and back to the main course as Archer moves about the table, recounting anecdotally her vivid recollections of the shows she's programmed, holding up photos, passing them out to us. She announces the seven hour theatrical epic *The Seven Streams of the River Ota* from Robert Le Page and Ex Machina from Canada. The work will be performed at the capacious Thebarton Theatre (site of Pina Bausch's remarkable *Kontakkt* in 1982 and Le Page's acclaimed *The Dragon's Trilogy* in 1988). Epic works are always attractive prospects at arts festivals—immersion in another world, the triumph of endurance by performers and audience alike in a sustained sharing—and this one is only being served for six performances. 'Book early' is suddenly meaningful. The design frame and significant parts of *The Seven Streams*... bear the influence of classic Japanese theatre, in a work that fuses and juxtaposes various kinds of theatricality as it searches through the lives of those "living in the shadow of the bomb" with a narrative (of sorts) opening in Hiroshima in 1945 and closing there in 1997.

Dance already looks prominent on the main course, with the Cloud Gate Dance Theatre from Taiwan and Belgium's Les Ballets C. de la B. The Taiwanese presence is unexpected while Belgium has become a centre for innovation and influence in dance and performance. For *Song of the Wanderers*, Cloud Gate's choreographer, Lin Hwai Min (a Taiwanese 'National Treasure') draws both on his experience of religious pilgrims in India (whose devotional acts of flagellation, ritual bathing and trance are recreated and elaborated on) and Herman Hesse's novel *Siddhartha*, and employs 3,500 kilograms of continually raked-patterned golden rice to provide the 'substance' of the work—set and context. *Song of the Wanderers* is offered to us finally as deeply contemplative and spiritually enlightening. Real time in this work will transform into time of another kind, another epic experience. Only four

performances are programmed.

Unusual ingredients also feature when Les Ballets C. de la B. collaborate with music group Het muziek Lod to create *La Tristeza Complice* (The Shared Sorrow)—10 accordions and a solo soprano play the music of Henry Purcell. Ten adult performers and two children present "a rapid-fire procession of extreme characters—the swaggering ballet dancer, the acrobat on one roller skate, the transvestite who imagines himself a dog, the north African breakdancer with wigs, the hysterical blonde". The same work boasts beautiful, quiet, poetic moments in its depiction of "the unruly behaviour of survival".

The importance of music in Archer's feast is already evident—Gregorian chanting in the Taiwanese offering and Purcell in a dance of survival. But the most obvious trend in the composing of the musical menu is German. Archer says it wasn't consciously planned at first and with her deep commitment to Eisler and Weill it's not at all surprising that it found its place on the menu by itself.

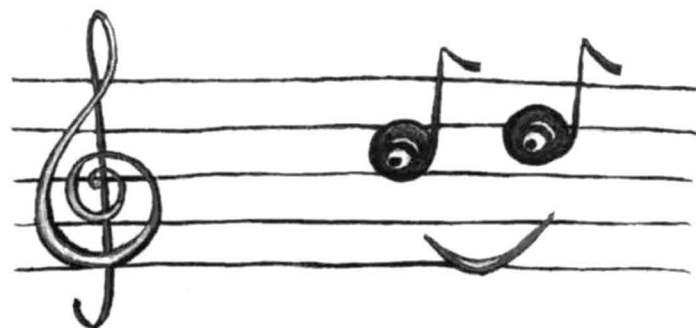
A major coup is German composer Heiner Goebbels supported by the 18-strong Ensemble Modern and designer Jean Kalman (creating a space within the Festival Theatre). Goebbels created a number of works with the late Heiner Müller (including a favorite of mine, *Man in an Elevator*, an ECM label CD), and in *Black On White* features poetry by Müller and Edgar Allen Poe. It's described as a "theatrical shadow show". I particularly like the description of the dynamic of the work: "...the music forms the text of the piece, which is then 'set to music' by the staging: hearing with the eyes, seeing with the ears". Another shift in the sensory expectations and the promise of play with light that made the 1996 Festival's *Orfeo* so powerful. (*Orfeo*, by the way, is set to appear in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra later this year and is not to be missed.)

Hans Peter Kuhn, another coup and famed for his collaborations with Robert Wilson, will create a site specific sound work on the banks of the River Torrens. Sequentia will perform works by Abbess Hildegard von Bingen, celebrating her 900th birthday. And there's the promise of concerts of Eisler, Bach and Schubert plus an 80-minute "cabaret attack" on "the history of German music from Wagner to Weill" by Jordan and Arias—true quality singers, says Archer.

The balance of the festival menu will be handed out in October. In the meantime there's more than enough to whet the appetite and the intellect, and it's a real prompt to make those early bookings.

The XXth Adelaide Festival, February 27–March 15, 1998. For complete booking guide (October 1997) send your details to Adelaide Festival, fax (08) 8226 8100, email: ausfest@adelaide.on.net, website: <http://www.festivals.on.net/adelaide>

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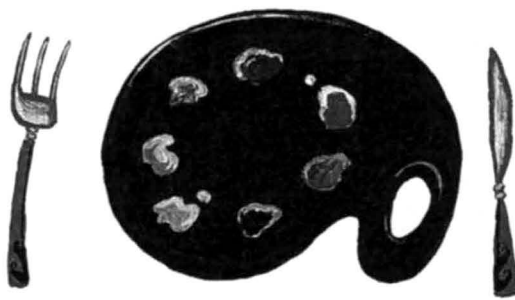
Music. Celtic band Capercaillie on tour across Australia
Punkulture Exhibition at the Australian Museum, Sydney.



Dance. Gregory Nash from London's Dance Umbrella at Greenmill, Melbourne.



Writing. Six young British playwrights at Interplay in Townsville.



Art. Jane and Louise Wilson in residence at the College of Fine Arts, The University of New South Wales, Paddington.

Tony Cragg sculptures at the Queensland Art Gallery.

Eduardo Paolozzi's works on paper at the New England Regional Art Museum.

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Bad taste, high theatre and performing absence

Karen de Perthuis finds it's easier for fabric to be flawless as *Australian Fashion Week* in Sydney becomes a legitimate part of the cultural landscape

Months of planning go into *Australian Fashion Week*. Coming up with a look that makes an original fashion statement involves choosing fabrics, styles, hem-lengths, accessories, footwear, hair, makeup, attitude. Then there's the networking, the thinking up of witty aphorisms for the interviewers. And that's only the audience. God knows what it must be like for the designers.

The hype surrounding *Fashion Week*—now in its second year—is that it was an unqualified success. Attended by influential overseas buyers and media (albeit, lured out here on all-expenses paid trips), given wide coverage by local newspapers and TV, the 'discovery' of a new fashion star, Akira Isogawa, the publicity provided by Linda Evangelista storming off in a huff, and with capacity crowds each day the organisers have reason to be satisfied. While it may be overly optimistic to expect that Sydney will eventually join Paris, London, New York and Milan as a fashion capital, *Fashion Week* itself does look set to become as integral a part of the local fashion scene as Jackie O glasses. This is despite the fact that, in the short term at least, for most of those involved in financing the event a wiser fashion investment might have been a Prada bag.

For all the interest it projects, *Fashion Week* is not really much more than a glamorous trade fair. Held at the former Sydney Showground site under a cluster of white tents vaguely reminiscent of the

Opera House sails, the space is dominated by an exhibition area where stall holders set up displays hoping to attract the attention of the much vaunted overseas buyers or, at the very least, more local ones. Entrance is limited to industry delegates and invited guests. The atmosphere is not unlike a well-dressed night at the Sydney Film Festival—lots of black, lots of would-be film-makers and the same sort of conversations about having slept in and missing the best show. The glaring lights make parading inevitable—critical eyes survey the room checking out what everyone is wearing, the wrong shoes are noted with disdain and points are awarded to anyone who looks good out of black. No-one ever came close to beating Anna Piaggi, the visually arresting creative director of *Vogue Italia*. With the appearance of an exotic bird and



Anna Piaggi, creative director of *Vogue Italia* Cameron Bloom

flanked by the ultimate fashion accessory—two Antonio Banderas look-a-likes—she provided more spectacle than any supermodel in a frock with a broken zip.

The parades themselves are held in adjoining tents and it is here that *Fashion Week* injects the missing element of fantasy into the local industry. There is a world of difference between clothes hanging on a rack and those presented as a collection on the living bodies of models. It is this element which is largely ignored by the mainstream press with their predictable complaints that black lipstick, see-through blouses or bird's nest hairdos are irrelevant for the 'real' woman catching a bus to the office. Equally irrelevant is the assertion that what is shown is ugly. This attitude not only ignores the history of fashion which regularly promotes an aesthetic of bad taste but also, more importantly, ignores the fact that what is being displayed is done so in the context of a theatrical event.

It is not just the clothes that create the experience of attending a performance—there is a symbiotic relationship between what is on stage and the audience. In a way that resembles the experience of seeing live music, the spectators contribute to the atmosphere, but the buzz of expectation in the audience is in turn dependent on the designer's reputation. In a world permeated with marketing, aura is reduced to the level of image and it is this that excites the fashion faithful. Overtly commercial and accessible labels such as Charlie Brown and

Country Road worked hard and failed to produce an atmosphere of eager anticipation whereas others could have shown a collection of paper bags and still have been the hottest ticket in town.

The staging, which consists of a central catwalk with spectators on three sides, means that the audience becomes a visual part of the show. Consequently, who is at a show can be almost as important as what's on the models. In fact, until you get used to their presence, it is hard not to be distracted by the line-up in the front row which, along with the ubiquitous style gurus hiding behind dark glasses, consists of a collection of pop-stars, celebrities, very eligible bachelors and a generally glittering crowd which changes depending on whether, as a designer, you take your lamé gold or black.

Judged by the mercury on the hip barometer, the coolest show was given by Peter Morrissey and Leona Edmiston, the design team with more image than a mirror ball. Although only a relatively small label, they are probably the most recognisable designers in Australia due to their skill at self-promotion and ability to attract high profile clients. Each collection they produce is part of an ongoing narrative inspired by icons of popular culture and marketed via a series of postcards. On these cards the models are photographed in an established composition, always adopting the bold and sexually charged attitude which has become the Morrissey Edmiston signature. This attitude and composition was echoed in the show which, although following the standard format of models walking down the catwalk, turning and walking back again, nonetheless managed to excite the audience and live up to its over-hyped reputation.

The homogeneity of the shows was a problem addressed by few designers. With all the open-invitation participants showing in the same halls, many using the same models and often the same music, if the clothes or atmosphere were not extraordinary, it was difficult to create an individual identity and a memorable show. In an attempt to counter-act this, the Marc's label had 'real' people as models who chatted amongst themselves and to the audience. Lisa Ho altered the decor by carpeting the catwalk in grass and sending out bare-footed models and a successfully moody show was achieved by the under-rated New Zealand label Zambesi with the use of down beat music. The most interesting effect was achieved by the Melbourne label Saba which constructed a wall of video screens that flashed between the models on the catwalk and backstage. Although the idea of a peek behind-the-scenes has been used before, most notably by Isaac Mizrahi, it is an effective technique that successfully makes a statement about the intrinsically voyeuristic nature of a fashion show.

The one show that stepped completely out of the formulaic was that of Collette Dinnigan who made headlines last year when she was invited to show in the Paris collections. In line with the recent northern hemisphere trend away from the fashion spectacular, she chose to show



Annaliese Seubert in a Collette Dinnigan

Cameron Bloom

only fifteen *couture* garments in an intimate salon-style show held at The Dome before a limited number of invited guests. It was a move aimed less at selling the clothes and more at consolidating her image as a designer of evening wear that drips with desire. The event was unrepentantly theatrical with the space transformed by designer James Gordon into a sumptuous Moulin Rouge bordello. The soprano Emma Lysons opened the show while choreographed models moved around the room in a leisurely mode. The performance continued with a dramatic rumba and the cabaret singer Bernie Lynch serenading the French model Chrystelle, while a delighted audience sat back at cafe tables and spun comets of light with sparklers.

Dinnigan's show enabled the models to parade in a less exacting environment than that offered by the catwalk of the main halls where many of the girls seemed more intent on not smiling or tripping than showing off the clothes—some retaining their expression of muted terror throughout the week. Although catwalk modelling can easily be classed as performance, it is unusual in that it requires subsumption to an overall look so that what is being performed is a type of absence. If fashion on the catwalk aspires to be art, then the model is the blank canvas—even the supermodel Linda Evangelista becomes unrecognisable in the quest for uniformity. It is surprising then to see the transformation once the model is seen through the mediating lens of a camera. Even those that appear barely there in the flesh regain their substance and goddess-like status when represented as images on TV or in the press. This phenomenon was highlighted in the Saba show where the models' image on the screen became more compellingly watchable than in reality.

This would suggest that the fashion show is a medium that favours the inanimate clothes over the animate models—and after all, it is easier for fabric to be flawless. This is not to say that everything shown at *Fashion Week* would fit that description but what it did show was that there are Australian designers who have the capacity to present a coherent vision capable of operating outside the influence of overseas trends. While it may be too early to expect *Fashion Week* to parallel the successes of the Australian film industry in forging a national profile, it undoubtedly will become—with its atmosphere which combines theatre, dance party and the art gallery opening—a legitimate part of the cultural landscape.

Australian Fashion Week, Sydney Showground, May 5-10



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New guard avant-garde

Jacqueline Millner scans recent developments in Sydney's alternative gallery scene

The alternative gallery scene in Sydney has been heaving and changing again of late. First Draft may have celebrated its tenth anniversary last year, but the average alternative space is not distinguished by such longevity. The last couple of years have seen the loss of important and unique spaces like Selenium (a beautiful, high-domed room ideal for installations), as well as Airspace, Toast, and the short-lived Particle. However, in recent months a new confidence has emerged, marked by the opening of five new spaces committed to the promotion of fledgling practitioners, including two galleries catering to specific groups of artists. Raw Nerve Gallery and 151 Regent Street have been operating for around a year on the western edge of the city, joined by the new incarnation of Side-On Inc in Annandale, the establishment of Gallery 4A in the Haymarket and Room 35 in Darlinghurst. Together with Pendulum and CBD contemporary art spaces are now in force in the city.

Gallery 4A is ensconced in a commercial building in the heart of Chinatown, a small, bright room with grey linoleum floors and two windows overlooking Sussex Street. Its location reflects its founding rationale, for this gallery grew out of the Asian Australian Artists Association set up last year to promote cultural links between arts professionals in Asia and Australia. The association has the patronage of some influential local business people, as well as the support of established Asian-Australian

thousands of fine pinpricks. The resultant surface has surprising depth and complexity, the effect a mesmerising and lyrical composition. The gallery's forthcoming exhibitions also look promising, with Vietnamese-Australian photographer Daachi Dang worth special mention given his memorable ghostly images on metal, shown at First Draft last year.

Not far from 4A on the outskirts of the CBD, on a windy, car-swept corner, sits 151 Regent Street. Unrecognisable from the street—it is plastered with its own publicity fliers which resemble gig posters and fail to immediately connote 'art gallery'—151 Regent Street occupies a dilapidated Victorian building in the sights of Redfern's TNT towers. The space is divided into two small galleries. The walls are rendered gesso and sit inside the original architectural shell whose vestiges are evident in the ceiling—a mangle of old electric cords and decrepit, soot-smothered plaster cornices. The gallery is run by Rohan Stanley, a recent graduate from the visual arts school in the University of Western Sydney (Nepean), who has some interesting ambitions for the space. To distinguish his gallery from other alternative spaces, Stanley hopes to turn Regent Street into a commercial enterprise, through the establishment of something like a quick-turnaround Artbank. Stanley promotes this 'Art Exchange' as "an art rental scheme unlike any other", which would provide a new exhibition of six works by a single artist, installed in a

workplace (presumably corporate offices such as law and insurance firms) every month for 12 months. The scheme is yet to kick off, but it may provide an extended network for the exhibition, promotion and financial support of new art if it succeeds, although of course only certain practices would be suitable. It is unlikely, for

instance, that the recent kinetic installation by Cassandra Bossell, set against the backdrop of charcoal rubbings of the gallery's architectural details by Kristen Sabiel, would be corporate foyer material. The work—a network of rubber hose, buckets and domestic utensils dripping water throughout the gallery—was particularly effective on a stormy day, when it appeared to be wired directly to the outside environment. However, it is work easily consumed, lacking the complexity to make for a lasting experience.

Ephemeral work is still very much the business of alternative spaces, and the recent exhibition at Side-On Inc is a good example—a couple of polaroid shots, an empty stool to mark the performance on opening night by Chris Peak and Rohan Thomas. Until the new directors took over at the beginning of this year, Side-On Inc had maintained a pretty low profile since its inception in 1995. Affiliated with Side-On film production company, which occupies the upstairs offices, the space comprises a relatively small room with frontage onto traffic-glutted Parramatta Road, Stanmore. The directors are all currently enrolled at Sydney College of the Arts, but their programming extends far beyond their student coterie. Indeed, one of the notable characteristics of the gallery is the number of established artists in its line-up, including Anne Ooms, Adam Cullen, Joyce Hinterding and Maureen Burns. Director Melanie O'Callaghan speculates that it is

the intimate size of the space and its newcomer status which attracts such artists, as much as the opportunity to do something against the grain in a venue outside the restrictions of commercial galleries. Like First Draft, on which it is partly modelled, Side-On Inc is committed to exhibiting a wide range of contemporary art, eclectic and unpredictable, rather than streamlining the artists shown into a house style. That wide range takes in regular film nights, where shorts which may also do the festival circuit are given the art gallery treatment.

Eclectic aesthetics also characterise Raw Nerve gallery, set up under the auspices of the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, and housed in a corner of Mardi Gras headquarters in Erskineville. Raw Nerve is committed to nurturing emerging gay and lesbian artists and offers free gallery space, promotional material and even opening night drinks on a proposal basis.

The gallery has an unusual layout, a long, thin space divided into three small rooms, making it amenable to group shows but less so for large installation work. In May, the gallery hosted Northern Territory artist Ken Burrridge, whose scenes of outback erotica—Donald Friend-like voyeuristic drawings of nubile young stockmen together with assemblages of bush memorabilia and dildos—occupied every room. Perhaps some curatorial intervention might have improved the outcome here, although the excess of material was consonant with the artist's enthusiasm and palpable delight at exhibiting his work in Sydney.

Given its broad commitment to the promotion of gay and lesbian art, Raw Nerve will always be likely to experience a tension between art which sits comfortably in avant-garde conceptual circles, on the one hand, and community practices, on the other. Indeed, this is evident in their program, which along with Burrridge has featured an important show curated by Robert Schubert, Bad Gay Art, and artists such as Christopher Dean—exhibiting here in June—whose minimalist paintings have also appeared in Sherman Goodhope, CBD and Pendulum. This tension can arguably be very productive, adding to the works' interpretive layers, and of course expanding the audience for contemporary art.

Raw Nerve quite categorically states its non-commercial status, as do most of these alternative spaces. However, one of the most appealing new opportunities for emerging artists to exhibit—for a fee—is a

project space within a commercial gallery. The Gitte Weise Gallery (formerly Kunst) relocated to downtown Oxford Street at the beginning of this year. Along with the main gallery, an irregular room overlooked by a charming arched window with views to the city skyline, Weise also operates the adjacent Room 35—a small, thin room with loads of natural light—as an independent exhibition space available for lease on a proposal basis. In May, Room 35 showcased a group of in-house artists in *Exquisite*. Tightly curated for maximum aesthetic effect—a remarkably harmonious mix of texture, colour and scale—it included a fluoro wall piece by Neil Roberts, ocular lens works by Helga Groves, and three delicately layered



Work by David Haines and Kevin Sheehan, *Evil Art*, Side-On Inc

paintings by Christopher Snee. *Exquisite* is indeed a good advertisement for the curatorial assistance interested artists would receive if exhibiting in Room 35.

While Room 35 might be unusual given its commercial gallery auspices, the trend in alternative spaces has long been towards professionalisation. Artist-gallery dealings are strictly arm's-length, fee-for-service, the gallery administrators often responsible for the management of public funds, if working on a voluntary basis. Professionalisation is no doubt generally a positive attribute; at times, however, it can usher in standardisation, in a field where diversity, spontaneity and working outside established parameters are key. Only if these new venues can successfully play host to these attributes will they be likely to thrive.

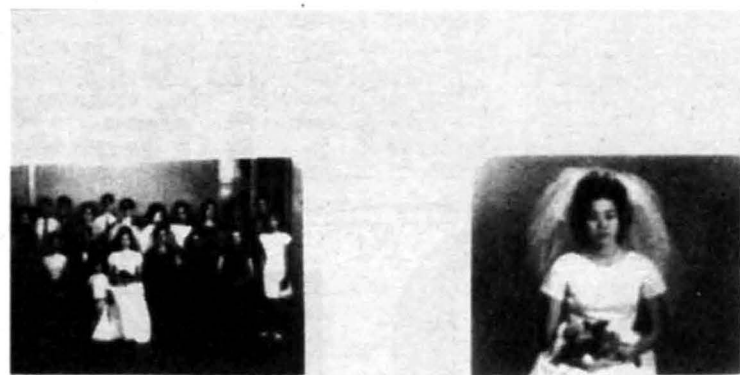
Gallery 4A, room 3, floor 3, 405-411
Sussex St, Sydney, tel/fax (02) 9211 2245

151 Regent Street Gallery, 151 Regent St,
Chippendale, tel (02) 9698 5469

Side-On Inc, 176 Parramatta Rd, Stanmore,
tel (02) 9568 5048, fax (02) 9564 5703,
<http://www.personal.usyd.edu.au/~gayrel/sideon/html>

Raw Nerve Gallery, Cnr Erskineville Rd and
Gourie St, Erskineville, tel (02) 9557 4332

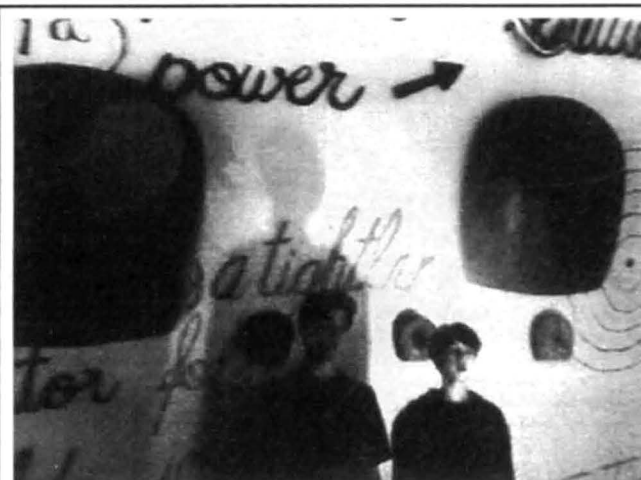
Room 35, Gitte Weise Gallery, level 2,
94 Oxford St, Darlinghurst,
tel/fax (02) 9360 2659



Emil Goh, *The Wedding (The Last Nanya)* and *The Bride (The Last Nanya)*, Gallery 4A

artists such as John Young, who sits on the gallery's management committee along with emerging artists including Felicia Kan and Emil Goh. The committee, in consultation with curator Melissa Chui, is responsible for programming the space. To date, this has been by invitation only, but the curator is now accepting proposals. This is not a commercial gallery; its goals are more altruistic, with much of the work hung here already in various collections, or exhibited courtesy of commercial galleries representing the artists. Yet, while the association has definite aims to nurture Asian-Australian artists, the gallery sees its scope in wider terms. It has featured Asian-Australian practitioners in the main, but it also positions itself within the alternative gallery scene as a whole, as its current, and third, exhibition indicates.

Liminis is a group exhibition of rather jejune minimalist conceptual work curated by artist Janet Shanks, as Chui points out, according not to a thematic but to personal taste. It features amongst other pieces a mute Reinhardtesque painting by Clint Doyle from 1993 and some scratched mirror works by Anne Louise Rowe. 4A's earlier offerings—including work by Hou Leong, Lindy Lee and Emil Goh—were undoubtedly more interesting, especially the delicate paintings of Laos-born Savanhdy Vongpoothorn. This is without doubt an artist to watch. Working with acrylic on paper, the artist then forms a network of intricate textures by piercing the paper with



Video still of *Which machine must be plugged into this machine to work*

stated thematic: the written body. However, the vestiges of the performance—rather dreary wall paintings and a straight video recording—made for a less than arresting installation. Here, Henderson's carved sculpture/paintings stole the show, evocative and beautiful figurings of the internal recesses of the body.

Jacqueline Millner

Glen Henderson, *Which machine must be plugged into this machine to work*,
The Performance Space Gallery, April 1997

Brisbane artist Glen Henderson's multi-media collaborative work involves sound, performance, video, action painting and sculpture. The project is undoubtedly ambitious. On opening night, Henderson worked together with both Matthew Fargher's choir—which sang a vocal reaction to her installed pieces—as well as with a group of art students who gestured their visual responses to her work directly onto the gallery walls. The work was as much a comment on the nature of collaboration and the relationship between different practices as about Henderson's

The GongHouse effect

Zsuzsanna Soboslay talks music, ritual and cultural survival with Neil McLachlan



Neil McLachlan lectures in acoustics theory at RMIT Melbourne, and was one of the founding members of GongHouse which was active in Melbourne between 1989 and 1993. GongHouse ran workshops in gamelan instrument-building and performance with schools, community groups, disabled children and indigenous peoples of Victoria and the Philippines. Some of this work included international collaborations with the Filipino theatre company Kaliwat in the Philippines in 1993 on *Ground-Up*, and in Victoria in 1996 on *Dis-Place*. GongHouse members worked with Indigenous Australians in Gippsland and the Western districts of Victoria between 1991 and 1996, culminating with Kaliwat members visiting Lake Tyers mission in Gippsland in 1996.

This work was concerned with conceptions of time and space, and reconceptualising performance strategies with a strong socio-political focus on aspects of social and individual survival, the marking of territory and the utilisation of resources in social and artistic terms.

ZS You described to me a striking performance image from *Ground-Up*: a woman winnowing bullets in a basket usually used to winnow grain. How was *Ground-Up* devised?

NM We visited tribal villagers whose survival depended on their ability to grow food, resist armed attack and maintain their cultural integrity in order to make land rights claims for their ancestral domain. This

involved skills in farming, singing, dancing, and making houses, musical instruments and guns in politically hostile environments. Their lands were stripped of the forests which were their primary physical and cultural resource, making the continuance of their cultural traditions very difficult.

We made a collaborative performance in four sections. In the first, an imagined culture was performed within well-defined social/performance parameters. In the second, we performed the loss of this culture under the conditions of armed conflict, with each performer ritualising dysfunctional/independent behaviours. The transition between these sections was defined by a religious procession of clearly Spanish Christian origin. Each individual performance in section two was informed by our experiences with the villagers and their descriptions of their plight—"our people are like branches cut from a tree".

ZS A huge experience of loss...

NM Except that in this project, the final sections involved a cathartic reordering—place reinstating itself—and the creation of a rituals integrating new economies and social forms, and utilising imported materials and methods to replace those lost.

ZS So this work emphasised a re-creative aspect. That's not how I remember some of GongHouse's earlier work, which also invoked invasion, and fracturing. I'm thinking of *Kaspar's Wake*, performed outdoors at the Melbourne International

Arts Festival in 1991. Perhaps this is because GongHouse, whilst politically concerned with invasion, was not yet working with the re-creative urgencies of a specified indigenous group.

NM *Kaspar's Wake* was a physical, music-theatre work first produced by GongHouse for outdoor performances in collaboration with the writer/director Andrew Lindsay and designer/sculptor Sally Marsden. In this performance the remnants of a military band from an invaded culture attempt to bury a fallen comrade somewhere on the uniform, asphalt grid of a foreign city. In the *terra-nullius* of this grid their rituals fail and the horrors of war are re-lived as group hallucinations, fracturing the spatio-temporal order of their ancient gamelan music. The performers eventually mime their own death, and seamlessly rejoin the initial ritual, evoking an impression that these movements have been repeated endlessly, ritualised in the absence of resolution. The music ends, the performers repack the funeral pyre and leave in a funeral march as they arrived—ghosts drifting across a featureless plain, hopelessly repeating themselves, testing locations to find a repository for their bones, a place worthy of memory.

ZS Is ritual a testing of, or being tested by a place?

NM Perhaps "place" is a vessel created for us and by us in dialogue with generations before. This vessel is a background or a subconscious layer within which other layers of self are folded. Changes in these layerings occur as we age. Rituals often define social boundaries, creating territories of time. The importance of testing a place is to be able to discern some expectation of what may occur in the next repetition of some action or event...

ZS ...making adjustments in time within continuities of time. Certain [Levi-Straussian] anthropological views of ritual name it as essentially a conservative force, a means of continuity with past practices and maintenance of survival and social strategies. Invasion and territorial decimation seem to exhaust the very resources with which to enact ritual. This often happens for people faced with so-called interactive [computer] environments—a kind of blindsight blighting the possibilities for performance...Your Port Phillip Bay proposal, however, links technology with the experiential "soft" arts of sound in environment.

NM Port Phillip may be identified as a bay by its system of water flows, or by its coastline, both of which are so large that they can only be recognised as a bay when charted or viewed from aircraft. But this fixed, distant and totalising view destroys the temporal experience of place; the rituals of testing, identification and remembering.

ZS So the proposal sets out to be a cultural and sensory bio-feedback system?

NM And one, perhaps, creating, streaming and contextualising information essential for survival.

ZS And this links back to your earlier work via...

NM ...a concern with the corporeality of sound, performance, and the experience of time...the devising of instruments to match this aspect, a convergence of art, information, and communal processes.

The Port Phillip Project: Geelong foreshore installations

transducer: A device for converting variations in one physical quantity, as pressure, brightness, etc., quantitatively into variations in another, as voltage, position, etc.; esp. a device for converting a non-electrical to an electrical signal.

The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary

In *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty describes perception as the act which simultaneously creates clusters of data and the meaning which unifies them. Therefore, the transducers we use to record and expand our perceptions of our environment, are themselves measures of what we expect, or hope, to find there.

Sculptural installations inspired by the instruments of science, music and the visual arts, will transcribe varying environmental forces into mathematical and poetic metaphors. To mention just a few ideas: sound installations such as floating bells moored across the expanse of the bay and wave organs along the board walks or piers will record wave action, while drawing machines and aeolian harps and flutes will record the wind. Ancient and modern forms of rain gauges, thermometers, barometers, chronometers etc. will be reflected in large and small works placed on sites relevant to their use eg. at launching ramps, marinas, the baths or in gardens.

The constantly changing numeric, visual, spatial and aural information these installations create will be recorded by judiciously placed sensors, microphones and cameras eg. underwater or offshore. Data will be collected by a central computer where it will be digitally stored as an ever expanding cultural and scientific catalogue.

A CD-ROM catalogue will contextualise this data which may be downloaded to floppy disks on site (a cafe pavilion) or globally through the internet. Chemical, biological and meteorological data will also be constantly available through a range of sensors and satellite images. Income from the purchase of catalogues and data may be used to maintain and expand these installations.

The work will be self-documenting and exhibitions sampling any of its aspects may be created anywhere in the world with articles describing the work in journals and magazines. Corio Bay may become an essential port of call for any-one fascinated with understanding relationships between culture and nature.

Neil McLachlan



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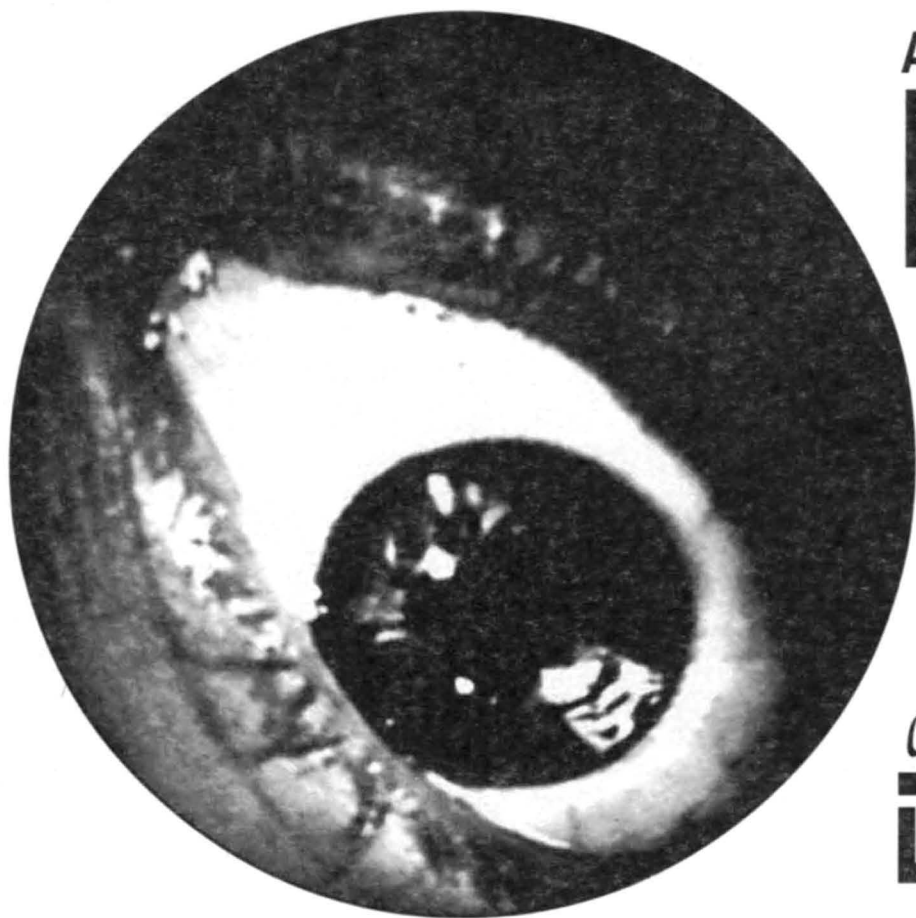
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Meeting Bill Culbert

Virginia Baxter speaks with the light man at Gitte Weise Gallery

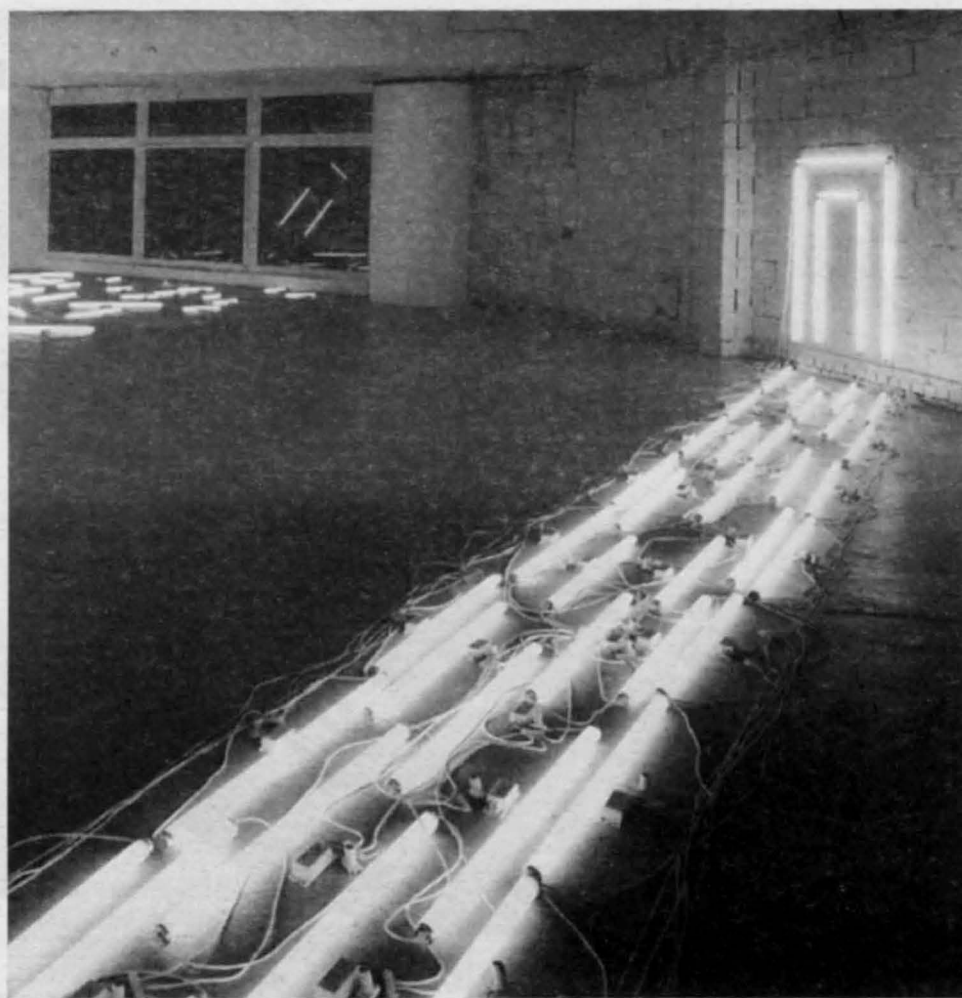
Years ago I found a small black book with an embossed light globe on the cover and the name of the New Zealand born artist Bill Culbert. Ten years later I meet him in Sydney at Gitte Weise's Gallery in Oxford Street, Sydney. He's making a little something for tonight's exhibition opening. In Thailand, on the way here, he collected six plastic water bottles with blue writing. He's cutting out a box to hold the bottles and the fluorescent tube to illuminate them.

He tells me about the two exhibitions he's prepared for the Avignon Festival in July. One will be in Gallery Apollinaire, a derelict chateau converted to flats. Here he will exhibit 'An Incident in Marlowe's Office'. He'll remove one of the derelict chandeliers in the chateau and replace it

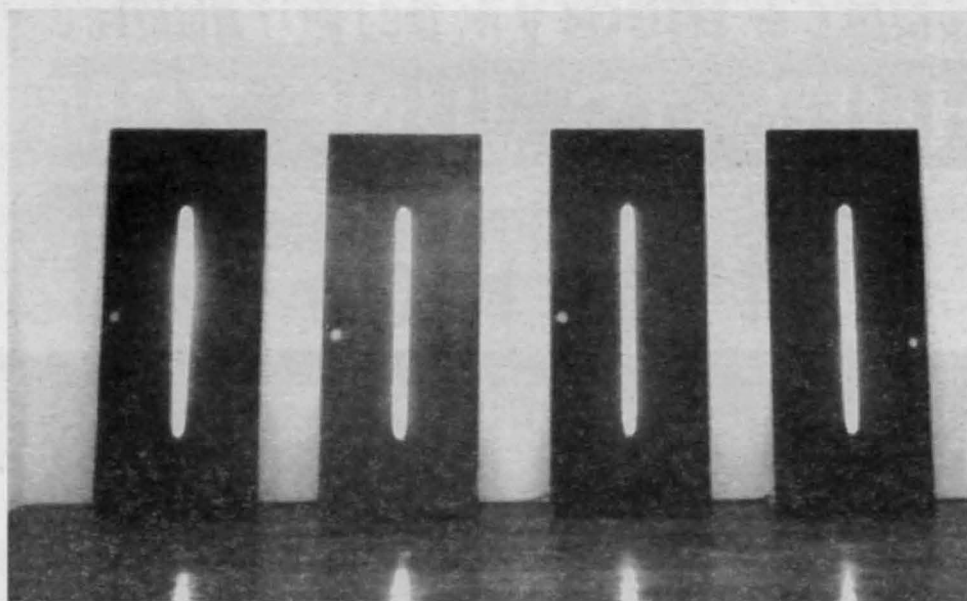
with another made from the components of an office chair. The piece is inspired by a line from Raymond Chandler's *Farewell My Lovely*:

A wedge of sunlight slipped over the edge of the desk and fell noiselessly to the carpet

We talk about changing light and he shows me slides of his recent exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery in London: a neon cloud, two large tiptrucks discharging loads of blue light. In another installation, he's worked with an electronic engineer to make light imperceptibly shift between two large sailcloth containers. Light empties from one vessel as the other fills



Bill Culbert, *Zum* (detail), 1991



Bill Culbert, *Stoplight*, 1997

up. We look at earlier works from 1976: one lit globe, one dull, a black space—showing the empty space. Another work, from 1975: here the dead bulb has a shadow, the lit one a reflection. Twenty years later the idea still takes him.

We walk through *Stoplight*, his new exhibition. He talks about Duchamp's door for three rooms, three spaces controlled by one door, about his own earlier work in which an open door, its shadow and the light beyond form three rooms. Here, light is embedded in six plywood doors leaning off the walls. We always think of light coming through things. Here, light is inside the door. The effect is elusive. These doors are not quite objects. This is not quite an installation. They're not sculptures. This is not furniture. These illuminated constructions are not lights. They're self-lighting installations.

In Bill Culbert's work, things grow larger as you move away, contradicting Renaissance ideas of perspective. Light travels through windows and floors—sometimes literally in shafts of neon tubes. Multiple tubes lie across highly reflective concrete floors that look like water. Which reminds him of another piece. We flip through my little black book. A displaced window leans on the ground. When he sees this work, he's excited again, "The

adrenalin flows when you get an idea like this". The pleasure of ordinary objects. "Where do you find things?" I ask. He tells me a story about his pursuit of a particular wine glass that got him thrown out of various shops—possibly because he carried with him a suitcase, a bottle of wine and a light on a chord.

My sense of the dramatic possibilities in his work compels me to ask Culbert about the effects of light? Blinding light? Tortuous light? But he's not interested in the emotiveness of light. The mystery of light is not in his own psyche. It can happen but it's not intense. "In the 20th century everything has been blown up. Everything freed. Now you can look at something like light." Spiritual ideas to do with light he finds depressing. He is interested in the physics, the logic of light. He started out as a painter. So, either he's taken with an idea of light and finds a way to demonstrate this quality or he's taken with an object that emits or transforms light and re-presents that object. Like meeting the man himself, encountering Bill Culbert's work is pure pleasure. In this room full of doors, I'm reminded of other possibilities. Light goes and comes back. No end is in sight. In the corner, the line of blue and white water bottles from Thailand emit their silent light.

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Picturing vinyl and Babylon

Vikki Riley talks to New York bound Melbourne-based photographer and installation artist Pam Kleemann

VR You are currently working on two forthcoming exhibitions, *No Place Like Babylon* for the CCP in Melbourne in July and then in September a show at 17 Creations Gallery in New York City. *No Place Like Babylon* looks at cities and notions of architecture as social space but your New York show is a return to your experiments with vinyl records as a surface. How did the New York show come about?

PK Quite inadvertently, I came across the 17 Creations Gallery opposite the biggest and busiest photo supplies outlet in New York City. It was showing an exhibition of Delta Blues photographs. I ventured down a short laneway, entered the gallery, looked at the work, met the photographer, we talked, he introduced me to the director, I made an appointment. An intimate space, showing photographs of musicians seemed a likely prospect. Several days later I returned with my Slim Whitman Story box full of my own photographic picture discs. Marianne Giosa, the director, immediately loved the work and offered me an exhibition. It's an extension of the show I had in Melbourne last year, *Who Said Vinyl is Dead?*, with more recent images added to it, many of which were shot in New York in '94 and '96.

VR Your work with vinyl records is the culmination of a long involvement with musicians and performers who are outside of the 'white' music mainstream—African stars like Manu Dibango and Majek Fashek. The unique photographic process you used gives each record its own individualised surface and 'other era' look. Was this a process you came upon by accident?

PK For years I'd been unconsciously trying to come up with a way of exhibiting this work. I always resisted showing these images as straight documentary photographs. I figured there had to be some other way that was interesting and contextualised them. I had long been interested in working with liquid light as a way of applying photographs to other more three dimensional surfaces. So I began experimenting with the vinyl and came up with some exciting images that have a rawness, a grittier texture than a traditional photograph that somehow embodies more honestly the essence of photographing live performance.

VR You seem to utilise reproduction as a formal device.

PK Working as a photographer is

frustrating because I'm not actually that interested using the traditional photographic process to present my own work. I always feel that I want to exhibit my photographs in a context that embodies a wider concept.

VR What then inspired your city photographs which make up the *No Place Like Babylon* show? It seems like a huge leap from the intimate and subjective to documenting a metropolis where the space is architectural and constrictive.

PK For me being in New York is like coming home. I've never felt that so strongly in another place. It threw into question my whole concept of what 'home' means, what it means to be from a

particular geographic location. New York is tall, full of itself, its presence strong, seductive, vibrant. As a subject it had 'facial features', personality. In 1994, I worked on a project called *SWEAT* with Sydney artist Anne Graham. We took to the New York streets with a sewing machine and a camera. I wanted to continue this exploration in my own way, not just from street level but from the vantage point of a bird, from above, below and anywhere in between, searching for an intimacy in the immensity of so many people living in such a confined, controlled space—people as prisoners and tenants. The balance is so delicate.

VR So how are you presenting these images—they are like jigsaw puzzle

pieces of a wider panorama you never get to see.

PK *No Place Like Babylon* will be a simulation of a darkroom with prints washing in trays side by side in a sink and strips of photos pegged to the walls. I'm really drawing a parallel here with the island of Manhattan—being surrounded by waterways and also its subterranean aspect. Water is an integral part of many cities and the photographic process. In this way the installation reflects my initial awe in how such a small land mass could support such density of architecture and population—like a city drowning under the weight of itself—angles and cantilevers, crevices and concrete awash in a kind of photolab. I want to impart a sense of revisiting a city where new buildings seem to magically materialise just like an image coming to life in a darkroom. Where empty space takes on texture and density and is transformed. Looking around the darkroom, strip-prints form a panorama that could not possibly be taken in at one time from one viewpoint.

VR You get a sense from the pictures of being enveloped by both beauty and ugliness, mutated, repetitious. Some of the buildings are seen as harsh, others are pristine and elegiac. Why call the exhibition *No Place Like Babylon*?

PK What seems to have happened in post-industrial New York and indeed in many cities around the world, is that manufacturing is being displaced, without being replaced, so the city has become a centre of administration and commerce rather than production. This idea is discussed fully in Robert Fitch's book *The Assassination Of New York*. It is not dissimilar to how ancient cities worked.

Fitch says that ancient cities were primarily places where elites lived, practised sacred rites, consumed and gave orders. In New York there would be no production within the city limits. The new urban establishment would live purely off surplus produced elsewhere. Babylon was like this. Commodity production took place in the countryside. It's also about the city as a centre for bankers and merchants, where social ranking is determined by income.

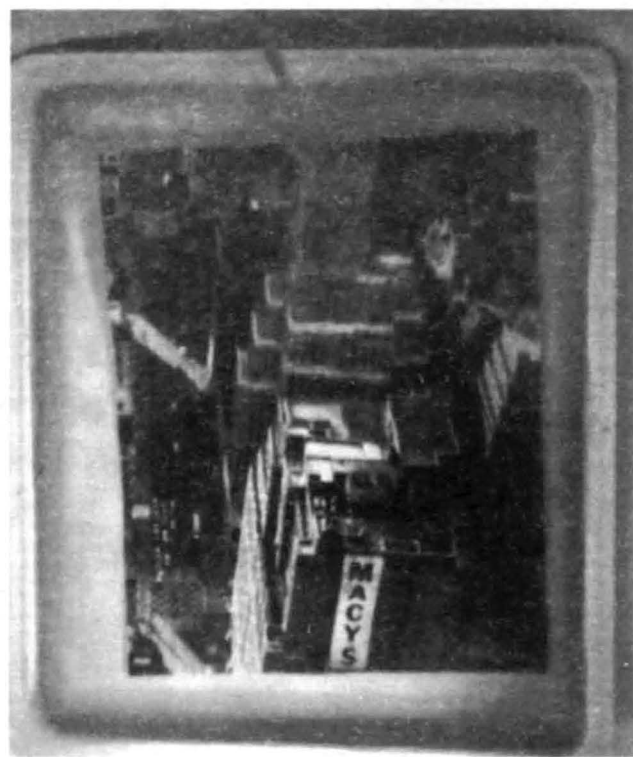
VR The city as a monument of social inequality?

PK Babylon was the greatest city in the second millennium, and has long since taken on the symbol of human arrogance, of towering above the rest of the world, symbolising greatness, wealth, excess, technological advancement. It's not hard to think of modern cities like this.

Pamela Kleemann, *No Place Like Babylon*, Helen Schutt Access Gallery, Centre for Contemporary Photography, July 25–August 23, 1997



Pamela Kleemann, *Legoland*, 1996/97



Pamela Kleemann, *Untitled*, 1996/97, laminated photographs in water

Ear to the ground

Virginia Baxter absorbed in *Incognito*

Here in the Performance Space Gallery on a rainy Friday afternoon, the room is appropriately gloomy for reflection. The screens scattered through the space are like small hearths. Alone in the gallery, I move into Caroline Farmer's four-screen installation, *A girl jumps differently*. On one monitor, a woman's head and

objects on the sand in front of her. An aluminium teapot is magically altered.

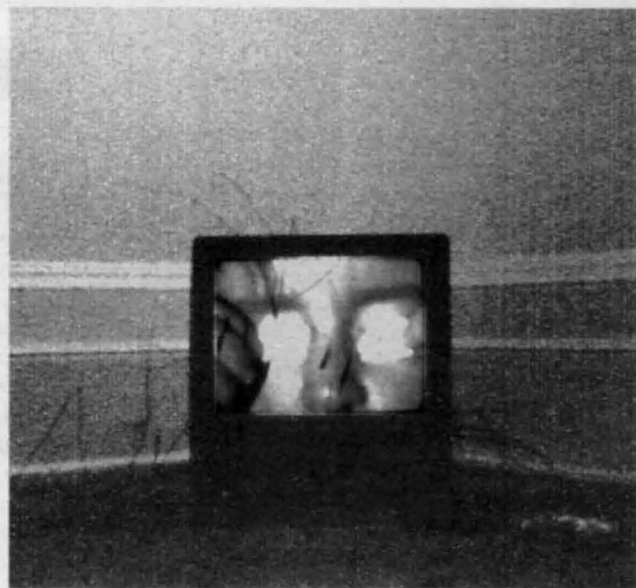
One of the reasons I can't hear what she's saying is the insistent voice at the other end of the room coming from *Scrying*, another Joy Hardman work. There, on another floor monitor, another personification of the artist earnestly belts out Christian hymns with accompanying gestures. Above, reflected in that same shiny teapot, she appears again performing a variety of indolent actions (counting money, dealing cards). Overlaying this screen is a circular frame projecting a ghostly film loop of arms gesturing out into the air. The puzzle of these images holds me until the voice drives me away. I poke my nose back into Room 2. "Go" "with the flow". I have already forgotten what I saw there a minute ago, which may have been what Claire Fletcher had in mind. Back to the corner. What is she saying down there in the dust? I get

down on me knees and move my ear to the screen, one hand in the sand. Suddenly intimate, I catch:

*I spy with my little eye something beginning with W...
whitefellas an blackfellas bein careful
about what they say about money
an blackfella politics...
Riddle me ree. Riddle me ree. Tell me
somethin you can see
blackfellas watchin Jangajang videos and
eatin McDonalds in the McDonald Ranges.
I spy with my little eye something
beginning with W...
whitefellas thinkin they been specially
chosen to learn blackfellas' secrets.*

Suddenly someone else enters the room. Caught screen hogging, I scramble up from the floor. Is that the time? Easily an hour has passed. I scuttle backwards through the exhibition, nodding to the coloured messages, still pulsing a pink "Don't". Darting a parting glance at the still jumping girl with the fans, hair flying, I fall into the street.

*Incognito, The Performance Space Gallery
May 7-24*

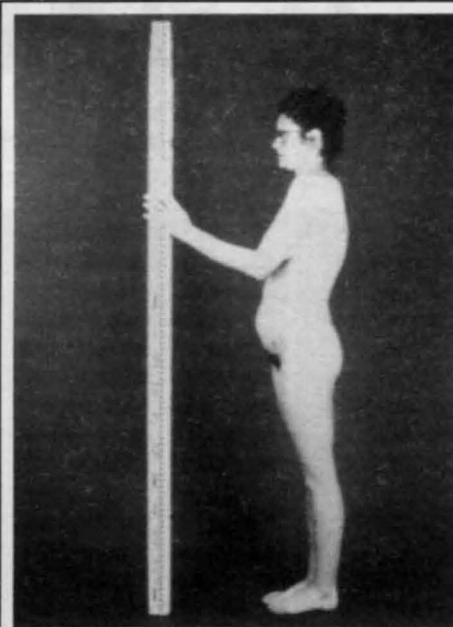


Joy Hardman, *I Spy*, video still, 1997

shoulders, her hair full of air. Above her, billowing parachute silk. On three screens opposite, identical electric fans blowing. It's a video stunt but suddenly, I feel the cold. Airhead! I should be thinking about the bifurcated nature of the female, the topography of the grotesque body. These ideas jump around as I wait to see what happens to the girl.

Meanwhile, my feet are moving to the next room where six floor monitors screen day-glo messages—"Don't" and "Stop", "The Flow". In her Queensland studio, Claire Fletcher was thinking pink, thinking purple, thinking Brisbane, city of theme parks, thinking conspicuous consumption and all that is beautiful in the everyday. Here in Sydney my downcast eyes register bland minimalism, and maybe too quickly, urge me on, glancing backwards at the jumping girl.

In Room 3. I step into the installation by Joy Hardman (Alice Springs) and decide to stay a while. *I Spy* is installed in a corner by a door. Here the artist sits crosslegged inside a small monitor on the floor in a pile of red sand, surrounded by twigs and cans. She whispers and obscures her eyes with leaves, flecks of mica, feathers and beer cans, then performs a sort of ritual blessing over a collection of ordinary



Linda Sproul, *Ellen—Standing*, side-on

In *Difficult to Light* Linda Sproul presents herself in various guises side by side with the original images: as famous pin-up (Madonna, Marilyn Monroe, Christine Keeler, Betty Grable) and as nineteenth century anthropological study (modelled from anthropometric studies of Ellen, a young Aboriginal woman, documented in 1870). Freda Freiberg writes in her catalogue essay: "The juxtaposition of the sensual with the scientific underlines the way in which the Western value system regards white as the symbol of enlightenment and dark as its opposite. This exhibition forms part of Linda Sproul's ongoing *White Woman* project—an investigation of the symbolic and actual condition of the white woman sited in Australia working with images from photography, film and art. Through referencing the gestures of found images, donning their surface signs, rather than miming their poses, or trying to produce a perfect simulacrum, Sproul undertakes an examination of what it is to be a white woman in this culture". *Difficult to Light, The White Woman Variation #2*. Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, April 19–May 25



Linda Sproul, *Christine*



Linda Sproul, *Betty*



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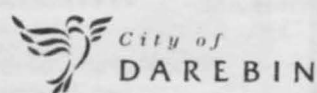
The prize aims to promote creativity, innovation and excellence in contemporary art practice in Victoria.

Application forms are available from

Ph: 03 9468 2828 Fax: 03 9468 2818

Applications close on 7 July 1997

Co-ordinator: Samantha Comte



A rare performative element in the first and immediately popular *Sculpture by the Sea* event was *Venus Observes*. It is the third piece in an on-going work, *Fragments from the Discourse of the Nude*, that explores desire and subjectivity from the position of the object, here the form of the female nude and artist's model. In this time-based sculpture, 'The Birth of Venus' is reinterpreted with the intention of investing power with the objects of desire. Not only do these Venuses construct and present their own image, they also create and then market it—viewers are invited to purchase portraits the Venuses have made of each other.

RT

Venus Observes, by Elizabeth Bell. Performers: Elizabeth Bell, Ricarda Reeck and Soledad Cordeaux. Costume design by Elizabeth Bell, Patricia Black and Annetta Luce. Performed in a rockpool for *Sculpture by the Sea*, Bondi, Sydney, May 3

OnScreen

film, media & techno-arts

Feature

Love Action

Adrian Martin's rapturous descent into the grace-noir of Wong Kar-Wai's *Fallen Angels*

We all know that the cinema is obsessed with love, with romance, and most especially with the couple. The theorist Raymond Bellour captured the imagination of a generation of film students when he said something like: "Narrative cinema is a machine for creating the couple". And he meant that pretty literally: no matter what intriguing twists and turns there are in a movie plot, we end up, a million times over, with the final clinch, the final kiss or embrace, and the whole world of the film shrinks to that moment, that gesture, before the final fade-out.

It may have something to do with me as much as something to do with cinema, but I too have become obsessed with what it takes to get to that kind of final moment in a film. The idea of a 'love connection' in movies, that final, crowning, sublime kiss or whatever, is not a mystical or abstract or purely sentimental idea. It's a very tangible, palpable, physical business. It's a matter of getting two bodies into the same space; a matter of getting two pairs of eyes to lock together at exactly the right moment. Of course we're in some particularly rarefied realm of romantic movie fantasy here, where everything leads to this singular second of love connection, a connection that does not have to go under the scrutiny of any further reality test. But every fantasy, if it's a good fantasy, has its charge, and also its truth.

So, as I was saying, romantic movies are about getting two bodies together. Two bodies that are on separate courses, travelling on two separate paths. It's a dance of sorts, lovely and sometimes agonising. The agony comes when those paths cross over, but still the lovers-to-be somehow do not recognise each other; their time has not yet come. I remember the plot of that strange Alan Rudolph film *Made in Heaven*, where two people who fall in love in the after-life are reincarnated back on earth, and then spend the rest of the movie wandering around before their great sparking moment of destiny. I also think of the more down to earth romantic agony that you get in comedies. Here, the lovers might know each other already, they might even be married already, but things keep intervening that get in the way of their moment of physical union. Youngsters on their parents' porch can't get in their first kiss; newly marrieds can't consummate their first night.

The first teacher of film studies I ever had, long ago, once said to the class: look at how many times kisses are interrupted in old Hollywood films. And he was dead right: ever since then, I have been chilled and niggled and frustrated by literally hundreds of glancing, incomplete, furtive pashes in cinema. Sometimes, it's all I take away from certain films: that damn kiss that didn't happen until the final shot. Now, you can call that 'sexual tension' if you like, and that's part of it, but it's not the whole story: it's romantic tension in a full-blown way.

One of the things that most characterises the modern era in movies, as opposed to the Golden Days of Hollywood era, is the problem of how much harder it is these days to get to that final moment of kiss or union. I don't only mean that the problems facing modern lovers seem infinitely more complex and neurotic. I mean that the films themselves, or their filmmakers, seem very tentative, wary, troubled by the prospect of ending a movie this way. They don't want to seem too corny, and are leery of that impossible, hyped-up, love fantasy trip. And this question mark that hovers over the final romantic kiss creates a few different kinds of responses or solutions in modern cinema. There's the response of flip irony, a certain sarcasm, or at the very least an extreme understatement, a droll detachment. I'm thinking for instance of the last shot of Aki Kaurismäki's splendid comedy *I Hired a Contract Killer*. In this movie, you have a sad-eyed hero, played by the great Jean-Pierre L aud. In the last shot of the film, this guy finally evades once and for all the death that he has commissioned for himself (by hiring a contract killer to bump him off). A car stops in front of L aud, just short of running him down; the woman who he has shared some vague love experience with declares her love for him, and they embrace. But there is no cut to close-up for this, no rapturous swell of music. It is a downbeat embrace, the little bright rose in the vast, grey gutter.

And then there's another kind of movie response to the difficulty of modern love. And that's to stress the redemptive, magical, even miraculous aspect of a final kiss. It's as if, after a film has shown so much contemporary-style confusion and despair and violence and emotional murkiness, suddenly there comes along this singular moment of grace which is the kiss. The famous ending of Woody Allen's *Manhattan* mixes the ironic and the miraculous—using, as so many modern romantic comedies do, that desperate run or dash to catch up with a departing lover. A more extreme example is Edward Yang's recent Taiwanese film *Mahjong*, where a lacerating scene of murder and death is abruptly followed by one of the the sweetest snogs between young things in the street that I've ever seen.

And now we cut to a new movie, one of the truly great movies of the year: Hong Kong director Wong Kar-Wai's *Fallen Angels*. Wong is a wildly acclaimed filmmaker whose

work I didn't take to straight away, when I first saw his film *Chungking Express*. The droll, lazy, meandering feel of that film, the dwelling on the rather groovy surface of everything in sight, whether hairdos or tableware or CD players, this all alienated me rather than drew me in. But with *Fallen Angels*, I just fell headlong into the fragile and sensual world of Wong Kar-Wai. It is truly a sad, sexy, hypnotic film. And the condition of modern love, the disputed passage towards unlikely or impossible moments of romantic union, that is the central, perhaps sole topic of this quietly obsessive masterpiece.

We know this from the first dazzling moments of *Fallen Angels*. In a striking black and white composition, a man and woman are sitting, silent, languid, smoking. Nobody films the body-language of tiredness and languor like Wong Kar-Wai. Everyone in his films is at all times slumped and stretched out, the weight of the world is sending their emotional gravity straight down to the bottom of whatever space they are occupying, trainseat or bedsheet or barstool. This man and woman in the opening shot of the film are also shot somewhat kookily with an exaggerated wide angle lens. This lens distorts and distends space, making these people look a mile away from each other when they are in fact quite close. Virtually the whole of the film is shot in this way, which gives the film an almost psychedelic feel. Anyhow, we have this man and woman, and finally some desultory words that encapsulate their cool, modern relationship: "Are we still partners?"

In truth, it is an odd partnership between these two, known as Agent (that's her) and Killer (that's him). It's a professional partnership, of sorts: they share a living cum office space, a seedy little cul-de-sac, but inhabit it at separate times, different hours. She cruises local locations for him, which he then shows up at, in order to kill people. The narrative whys and wherefores of this bizarre assassination game remain completely abstract and obscure. There's death—sudden, senseless, a beautifully choreographed slow-motion mayhem—and then there's love, unspoken, unrequited, filling every lonely, sad crevice of this eternal Hong Kong night. That's the universe of Wong Kar-Wai, a universe of complete and utter disconnection, of ephemeral moments, of time forever wasting, and of a certain, voluptuous oblivion. All the characters here are fallen angels when we meet them, and they keep falling still further, unless a gesture of love can redeem them for a precious second.

But, for all the moroseness, there is an unusual lightness to Wong's vision: he shows you disconnection without the usual dose of maudlin alienation, he gives you grunge without the usual component of revved-up angst. Instead, it's just a great, floating world, with the characters floating through the most exquisitely realised and rendered spaces and places. Everything is corridors and stairways, squiggly, labyrinthine tunnels of passage in *Fallen Angels*, all cramped little corners and concentrated spaces. There's a great gag, where a woman plonks herself next to a guy in a McDonalds, making as if the place is so crowded she has nowhere else to sit; the camera then swings around to show that it is cavernously empty. In another superb moment, the start of a one night stand is dramatised in a woman's frenetic attempts to get her chosen man up the front steps of her apartment block; she cajoles him, she keeps running up and down the steps, she tries to physically drag him up.

Almost everybody gets very lost and confused watching Wong's films, even his most feverish fans. And I've finally realised why: he plots the paths of a lot of different characters, but he films them all in very similar settings, often the same settings, in a kind of rondo or progressive circulation. The different characters in *Fallen Angels*, like in *Chungking Express* tend to bleed into each other; they all have a ghostly, two-dimensional, shifting quality. There is in fact a sublime part in the film where one guy says in voice-over on the soundtrack: "some women are like water—some men, too". That dreamy statement is accompanied by a shot that goes on forever of this man and woman, a liquid image that seems streaked or even deformed by rain, and the man's head keeps approaching the woman's shoulder and withdrawing from it...And so these various watery characters might represent different aspects of one very disconnected human being, one very divided soul. Every character embodies a different kind of extreme: whereas Agent, for instance, is withdrawn, solitary and solipsistic, another character named Ho is a mute, but he gets by through an excess of contact, forcing himself on everybody until they give him what he wants. The scenes involving Ho have an improvised, playful slapstick quality that is just hilarious.

Everyone in *Fallen Angels* is either too close, or too far apart. Lovers never meet, but strangers suddenly grasp each other in bars to rave, or wail and cry on a shoulder. They all search for a middle distance, a comfortable, shared ground, that they can never find. The pathos of Wong Kar-Wai's films is very terse and new and particular. On the one hand his films are elegies to loneliness—"Loneliness is ultimately the film's centrifugal

• continued page 16

Features

Love Action

• from page 15

force", as Tony Rayns has said of *Fallen Angels*. With reference to the extraordinarily compelling scenes of masturbation in this film, Larry Gross puts it even better: "Nothing is more typical of the world of Wong Kar-Wai than a sex scene where one of the participants isn't present". All his characters spend all their wasted, waking moments trying to mark the time, to mark their territory, as all lived meaning slips right through their fingers. And yet there is still some sort of longing for origins, for family, for the memory of some fragile community in this shattered world. Like Wim Wenders in the 1970s, Wong returns to the difficult theme of family ties, of lost young things finding and resolving some bond with their parents. Like romantic love, it's not a very easy business, and its conclusions are never especially solid. But the depiction of Ho's odd, tangential, but finally rather touching relationship with his father, a relationship mediated mainly through a video camera, that's one of the surprisingly moving aspects of this film.

Above all, *Fallen Angels* communicates its intense feelings of yearning and pathos through its extraordinary style. This is hardly a narrative film; it is like one great, sustained tone poem. Every one of its feelings depends on the sustained intensity of colours and faces and gestures, of spaces and places that blur and streak into one another through the rapid succession of images. It is like one long montage sequence, the rock video or MTV aesthetic raised to the highest form of cinema art. This is a film in which the rush of a train, the blur of shoes on pavement, the rain on a window or the stain on a tablecloth carry as much tender emotion as the sad eyes of a forlorn lover or the moon above the skyscrapers in the Hong Kong sky. Don't miss your fleeting, precious connection with this remarkable film.

This review was broadcast in edited form on The Week In Film, ABC Radio National, April 19, 1997

Mike Moore's first movie

Peter Goldsworthy muses on the *Frontline* team's foray into film with *The Castle*

It's the only television I watch each week without fail, but how do they keep it up? With *Frontline* scripts now also set at Year 12 level on the Victorian VCE English syllabus, its penetration as a media critique gives it a reach far beyond that of *Media Watch*, whose obsessive snobbery on matters of spelling (albeit often hilarious) is too infrequently balanced by exposés of the calibre of the 'Barcelona-Tonight' fraud, or Son-of-Colston harassment. (No doubt budgetary constraints keep *Media Watch* a little stunted.) A recent report in *The Advertiser* told of an Adelaide current affairs reporter, researching a story in Broken Hill on lead pollution, having an interview stopped by a Hillite with the line: "I've seen *Frontline*—I'm not having a bar of that!"

The cynicism of the commercial current affairs programs is satirised to great comic effect on *Frontline*—but are programs like *A Current Affair* becoming too soft a target? Putting it another way, parody must find it increasingly difficult to compete with the self-parodying reality. Of course, *Frontline* has taught many to see *A Current Affair* and such-like as self-parodies. It may be that *Frontline* will eventually need to move in the direction of satirising the genuinely pious and sanctimonious rather than the merely cynically pious and sanctimonious—that is, to satirise ABC current affairs rather than the commercial variety. This is not to say *Frontline* has shirked the hard yards. The Pauline Hanson program was one such yard.

The program has the neatness and patness of commercial sitcom—the interleaving themes of any given program always tie up deftly, and usually hilariously, in twenty nine minutes flat. Leaving aside the Awesome Foursome of scriptwriters, the balance of the ensemble cast, as with a sitcom such as *Seinfeld*, is a great part of the success—recognisable cartoon types, but

still human enough for us to identify with and feel for to some extent. There is also the sense of continuity. My own fear is that the wonderful Emma will end up in bed with the sleaze-bag Prowsey—if only because Nice Girls are always jumping onto the backs of Harleys with Bastards, and riding off into violent sunsets. To appear on *Frontline* as yourself—or at least as a slightly larger-than-life yourself—is becoming the true measure of celebrity in this country. Fifteen seconds of fame on *Frontline* is far more important than the regulation fifteen minutes on a mere *Midday Show* or *IMT*—or even (best of all) *Club Buggery*. Minders and publicists must be falling over each other to try to influence the show's producers—with, I'd guess, about as much chance as a snowball's in hell.

Someone told me recently that she thought the recent programs had fallen off a bit, and wondered if this was because the team had been working too hard on their movie. I can't see it myself. But what of the reverse? Have they had the time to make a decent movie? And how could that dumb bunny, Rob Sitch, possibly direct a movie? Such is the irritant power of Sitch's *Frontline* frontman persona that this stupid question actually crossed my mind, and lingered there for a microsecond longer than it should.

I can say that Mike Moore definitely didn't direct this movie. It's very funny, and very Feel Good, and the little guys win out over big business, although it doesn't start out looking that way. It starts out looking like a rather condescending satire of the lower middle-cum-working class: wink-wink, nudge-nudge, isn't the taste of the Westies terrible. Tow-truck operators, greyhound owners, and especially hairdressers must squirm every time they go the movies these days—at least since *Muriel's Wedding*, and *Strictly Ballroom*. This style of satire is not that far from Humphrey's *Moonee Ponds*, or P. White's *Sarsaparilla*. But where that great bitch Patrick White's comic vision of suburban Australia was fuelled mostly by great hate, and the dysfunctional families of *Muriel's Wedding* and *Strictly Ballroom* have little to redeem them, the Kerrigans of *The Castle* are saved by the love they feel for each other. (Or their creators are saved from a charge of misanthropy by the love they give them.) Since they all love each other, we can't help loving them too, cartoon dimensions notwithstanding. One review of my favourite movie of last year, *Fargo*, attacked the Coen brothers for their sending up of the Minnesotan accent in such a patronising way. Perhaps, but surely it was a loving send-up. We know whose side we are on. *Fargo*, despite its violence, is also redeemed (unlike the shitty and shallow *Pulp Fiction*) by its immense heart and moral core. In *The Castle*, Sal's broad Australian speech strikes me as way over the top—Dame Edna at her worst—but we finally don't care. The Kerrigans, like *A Current Affair*, might also be too soft a target—but they are not, in the end, the target of this film, they are its heroes.

This takes a bit of arriving at, and there are some questionable moments en route. The laughter of the audience when we learn that Darryl met Sal at the dog track struck me as a bit snobbish—but then I speak as a former (unsuccessful) greyhound owner. The shrieks when Darryl lumbers out in his Uggs—"look at those Uggsies!" one patron actually shouted aloud in my Adelaide cinema—also seems to reflect some insecurity, or unexamined snobbery. I haven't got a pair, but wouldn't mind. Most of the patients in my general practice wear them to consultations—and they look mighty comfortable.

There's a running *Frontline* gag about Adelaide being some kind of Eastern Front, or Siberia, to which people are transferred as punishment. It popped up again in the movie: some poor sod ends up digging post-holes in Adelaide. No laughs in Adelaide, but a friend who saw the film in Melbourne told me it went down well there. Some member of the Awesome Foursome clearly had a bad time in Adelaide, and can't forgive. Flunked out of Med school? Didn't get the job they wanted as an *A Current Affair* stringer? Or did they paradoxically have such a wonderful time in Adelaide they can't forgive the place?

Of course, the fact that the line got no laughs in Adelaide touches exactly on what I've been talking about, a little nervously—which is the very nature of humour itself, no less. Should there be sacred cows, beyond satire? Hell, no. But is the taste of tow-truck operators and hairdressers too easy a target? Interestingly, the Kerrigans would be among the chief target audience, after *The Price is Right*, of *Frontline* itself—the fictional *Frontline*, that is, the play within the play. Maybe the next film by Working Dog (great title) should be aimed at the inner-urbanites, who wear a lot of black and go to arthouse cinema. But then I sit with the Kerrigans every Saturday in the terraces at Port Power games, and they would be the first to laugh at themselves in *The Castle*. It is very funny, and leaves you Feeling Good. It's a bit grainy, made deliberately on the cheap on 16mm blown up to 35mm, but of course it's not a film which relies too much on the visual beauty of its images—like, say, the ultra-pretentious *English Patient*. Its images are visual gags, and you get them in a second, slightly blurred or not. You don't want to linger over them; you want to jump to the next gag. The only *Frontline* regular who appears is Tirié Mora, as a no-talent and world-weary solicitor, a role not that far from his portrayal of Marty in *Frontline*. Marty the cynic seems to be developing a bit of ambition, or narcissism, in recent *Frontlines*—it will be interesting to see where this leads. I'd much prefer Marty to get it off (or is it on?) with Emma than Prowsey, but such a match may not be so true, in an archetypal sense. Nice Guy Jeff the weatherman can continue coming last, at any rate.

Peter Goldsworthy's most recent novel, *Keep It Simple, Stupid (Flamingo)* is set in a small Italian soccer club in the western suburbs

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Review

Primal scenes

Against the grain of acclaim, Rolando Caputo presents a dissenting view of SBS' *Auteur TV*

This is not at all to deny the role of the auteur, but to restore to it the preposition without which the noun is only a lame concept. "Auteur", without doubt, but of what?
André Bazin

The 13-week series *Auteur TV* currently screening on SBS is somewhat of a curatorial conceit. Auteurism, once a *politique* within film criticism centred on the vexing issue of assigning authorship in a collective art form, is here reduced to little more than empty logo. In the late 1950s, that is, in the hey day of the French *politique des auteurs*, André Bazin, with real foresight, cautioned that shed of its *politique*, or a strong theoretical framework, auteurism would, in time, become little more than a label, a means of naming a product rather than a genuine critical enterprise.

The medium of television has rarely allowed audio-visual objects to float freely, that is, unanchored by a supplementary televisual frame that delimits the object's plurality. In this regard, *Auteur TV* continues what seems a growing trend at SBS to codify films in ever discrete units and definable packages. The station has been a great outlet for films, and one does not dispute the valuable access it's given to local film culture to mainly non-English language cinema. Yet, it also plays a heavy hand as intermediary between viewer and film through its clear demarcations in movie programs. Hosts are one means to preserving divisions, think of David Stratton's *Cinema Classics* slot, Margaret Pomeranz's Monday night presentation, and Des Mangan's *Cult Movie* on Saturday nights. The individual worth of the respective hosts is not an issue, but willingly or not they impose an attitude, a tone, prescribe a mode of experience for the viewer. Mangan is most blatant in playing the role of arbitrator of taste for the new pop culture elites. And then there is *Eat Carpet*, SBS's ghetto for experimental, quirky or generally less classifiable short films.

The principal goal of *Auteur TV* seems to be to unearth, wherever possible, first short films by now established 'name' directors. For the most part it succeeds in its aims, throwing up a real pot-pourri of short films—early works by directors who went on to reinvent themselves as darlings of the art house circuit: Peter Greenaway (*Intervals*, 1968), Mike Leigh (*The Goalie of the 2001 FA Cup*, 1975). Early films by directors whose styles remain as aesthetically threadbare and intellectually superficial as ever: Atom Egoyan (*Peep Show*, 1981), Sally Potter (*The London Story*), Clara Law (*A Woman Like Me*, 1989). Late works made for television by long established and esteemed directors: Ingmar Bergman (*Karin's Face*, 1983), Youssef Chahine (*Cairo*, 1991). Early, amateurish film school works by directors who went on to auteurist superstardom: Roman Polanski (*We'll Wreck the Party*, 1957), Martin Scorsese (*It's Not Just You, Murray!*, 1964; *What's a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This?*, 1963). Genuinely surprising early work by filmmakers who continued to surprise throughout: Agnes Varda (*Opera Mouffe*), R.W. Fassbinder (*Das Kleine Chaos/A Little Chaos*, 1967). Overall, one is often at a loss as to what to make of this motley collection.

Yet over weeks of viewing, the occasional gem does surface. P.A Pennebaker's *Daybreak Express* (1953) is in the 'city symphony' genre as found in the avant-garde and documentary traditions of the 1920s. It shares with them a constructivist and abstract impulse to visualise the city as a geometry of shapes and planes, at times creating grid- and box-like patterns that evoke the hard-edged, stream-lined modernist style of a Mondrian canvas. Though equally so, a change in camera angle or focal lens will make of the urban landscape a curvilinear or spiral like shape. Unlike the symphonic grace of its predecessors its editing rhythm is driven by a pulsating jazz score by Duke Ellington. Pennebaker's style makes for an interesting contrast with another, though more recent, city film. Chahine's documentary cum essay-film *Cairo* presents a city captured in arabesque flourishes. Orientalism is precisely the issue here. Commissioned by French television, Chahine himself poses this question to a class of film students: "French TV sent me a fax to make a film on Cairo, what do you think they expect?". Using their replies, and much more, Chahine fashions a fascinating mosaic that blends Western clichés about the Orient and a reflection on the very nature of how to tell the story of a city from all its myriad angles. ●

Not surprisingly, many first short films now seem like blue-prints for debut features—most evidently as in Mathieu Kassovitz's comi-tragic film on racism *Cauchemar Blanc* (White Nightmare, 1991), so close in theme and style to his subsequent feature *La Haine*. Or, Jaco Van Dormael's magic-realist *E Pericoloso Sporgersi* (Don't Lean Out the Window, 1984) a 14-minute fractured narrative on memory and childhood imaginings laced through with an insistently dense soundscape which will return in kind in his much more lyrical and soft-edged feature *Toto the Hero*. Funnily enough, the further some filmmakers move from their early efforts the closer they get to them. In Egoyan's case, *Peep Show* would be the ideal accompanying short for his recent feature *Exotica*. It offers a rudimentary check list of Egoyan's obsessions and the look of his alienated 'photo-booth' worlds. Conversely, some films come as late rejoinders to something one always sensed about a filmmaker's oeuvre but had remained ever absent. Bergman's *Karin's Face* isn't a revelation, it's just confirmation that all those inquiring close-ups of his actresses were part of an endless game of *mise-en-abyme* in search of the one countenance that ever really mattered to him: his mother's face. A film of photo-montage, it's hard to think that Bergman was not aware of Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, so close in melancholic sensibility are the two works.

The early works of Scorsese and Fassbinder could be the definitive movie brat school films. They revel in a post *nouvelle vague* wiz-bang eclecticism. Fassbinder's first love seems Hollywood crime films, his *A Little Chaos* plays at genre much like Jean-Luc Godard's *Bande à Part* (1964), to which Fassbinder's film is partly a homage. As for Scorsese, he has retained his eclecticism but acquired better judgment about the uses to which stylistic influences could be put. His innovative and hyperactive editing and sound/image juxtapositions remain ever constant. Filmmakers grow at different speeds. More or less contemporaries, Fassbinder seemed to have the surer command of his *mise-en-scene*. He was learning and transforming the lessons of film history at a faster rate, but then, Fassbinder was exercising his craft and imagination at a pace that Scorsese could only dream of. By the time Scorsese made his signature film *Mean Streets* (1973), Fassbinder had made an astonishing 18 features.

With few exceptions, most of the films shown in the series to date have been less than inspiring. The curators would do better in seeking works that actually make sense of the conjuncture between *Auteur* and TV, as in case of Jean-Luc Godard's *Six Fois Deux*, for example. A work by a genuine auteur working for and with TV in an attempt to investigate what it does to our understanding of sounds and images.

Rolando Caputo is a lecturer in the Department of Cinema Studies, La Trobe University. He contributes to Metro, Cinema Papers and CTQE: Annotations on Film.

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Essay

Breaking the girl

George Kouvaros on Emily Watson, masochism and martyrdom in Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves*

In an interview published in the October 1996 issue of *Sight and Sound*, Lars von Trier describes his desire to make a film about 'goodness'. What also emerges in this interview, and even more strongly from a viewing of *Breaking the Waves*, is that for von Trier goodness is also equated with the figure of female martyrdom. Despite being lauded for its originality and boldness of vision, the central premise in *Breaking the Waves* relies upon a number of very familiar cinematic stereotypes which centre around the equation of female desire and martyrdom. On the surface, the issues the film seems to struggle with certainly seem ambitious in scope—the power of faith and religion, self destruction and love. Yet, looked at more closely, this ambition serves as something of an alibi for a film which has at its heart a view of female desire that treads over very problematic ground. The contradictory nature of the film reveals itself most clearly when we focus on Emily Watson's performance of Bess.

Writing in the *Chicago Reader*, Jonathan Rosenbaum recounts how, as preparation for her role, Watson was directed by von Trier to study the performances of Renee Falconetti in Carl Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* and Giulietta Masina in Fellini's *La Strada*. Of these two predecessors, it is Falconetti's performance that seems to have left the most significant trace on Watson and von Trier. This influence is visible in the attention paid by the camera to the surface of child-like Watson's face. Her face reflects an innocence of spirit which is never contextualised or explained but remains immanent to both the story and the character. For the majority of the film, a heavy woollen cap and scarf cover Watson's head and neck. These garments serve as framing devices which draw attention to the space between her eyes and her chin. And in this over invested region it is Watson's lips and mouth which carry the greatest responsibility for conveying emotion. As she struggles to come to terms with Jan's request that she find other lovers, Watson turns her lips into incredibly expressive instruments of confusion. In her dialogues with God the camera focuses intently upon Watson's mouth as she speaks her own part in her normal high voice and God's in a patriarchal low tone.

Traces of Falconetti's presence are also evident towards the end of the film when Bess's devotion to the task of saving her ailing husband has left her completely isolated from her strict religious community. When Bess returns to the frigate containing the sadistic sailors, she is filmed from front-on and below standing at the helm of the small boat taking her to her inevitable death. Watson's intense but detached gaze at these moments reminds one of Falconetti's Joan and also highlights the self-enclosed nature of her performance. Instead of investing the world with a particular emotion or desire, Watson's stare into the distance is largely directed inward.

This self-regard points to a broader problem. Although the film places enormous significance on Bess's love for Jan, very little time is spent exploring the relationship or establishing a sense of intimacy between the performers. The camera, which continually isolates the performers' expressions in close up, does not allow them the space or the time to establish a physical or emotional connection.

Both the performances of Watson and Falconetti require from the audience a certain leap of faith, a willingness to not only accept the extreme behaviour of these heroines as guided by a faith that is destined to remain at least partially inaccessible but to also accept in their movements and expressions, a traffic between the material world and what escapes it, between what we can see and what remains out of bounds or beyond our vision. However, the more one considers the two performances and the differing nature of the emotional obsession they each enact, the less possible it becomes to sustain a meaningful comparison. In the case of Falconetti, the struggle which she manifests is based around her commitment to her faith. In a film which invests so much in the power of religious faith, Falconetti's performance is marked by its intense physicality. Her performance creates a strong sense of her struggle with doubt and hesitation.

In the case of Watson's performance, the situation is quite different. For a start, *Breaking the Waves* is asking us to respond to not just a connection with the divine but also the physical and emotional hold of obsessive love. And while the performance of Falconetti and others can provide for both performer and spectator a type of template or



Emily Watson as Bess in *Breaking The Waves*

repository of gestures for the experience of the divine, the challenge of rendering a convincing representation of the hold on Bess by her love for Jan places far greater pressure on both the performer and the film as a whole. It is at this point that the film is brought back to earth and reveals its connections to one of classical Hollywood's most resilient genres, the woman's film. This genre, which seemed to reach its peak during the 1930s and 1940s, has been taken up by feminist film theorists because of the way it marks out a privileged site for the analysis of female spectatorship and subjectivity. As Mary Ann Doane notes, in certain Hollywood films of the 1940s we find a female subject associated with masochism, narcissism and hysteria. These attributes, which are found in abundance in the woman's film, stand in for an entire pathology of the feminine that circulates across a number of different genres. In films like *Letter From An Unknown Woman* and *Stella Dallas*, for instance, self-sacrifice and martyrdom are central to the desire attributed to the female character, a desire "so excessive that the only satisfactory closure consists of her death". Doane also makes the case that the "image repertoire of poses" found in the woman's film of the 1930s and 1940s still have a very familiar ring in contemporary cinema (Mary Ann Doane *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s*, Indiana University Press, 1987).

In *Breaking the Waves*, Emily Watson's performance is also characterised by its recourse to masochistic action. In narrative terms this masochism stems from Bess's intense love for Jan and her belief that by carrying out his instructions to have sex with other men she will be able to make him well. This scenario, which begins in a half-comic manner at the back of the local bus, quickly and predictably spirals into violence. The last view that we have of Bess is on a hospital trolley, her body covered in cuts and bruises. Despite the perilous nature of her condition, Bess's only concern is whether Jan has been made well by her suffering. *Breaking the Waves* seems to reaffirm the very dubious proposition that once broached the only successful outcome for female desire is through self-sacrifice or death.

In an attempt to understand the appeal of the woman's film beyond the pleasures of masochistic identification, writers such as Doane have endeavoured to mark out those moments when the films and performances play around and reenact the performance of femininity, this time making its gestures and poses appear strange. It is debatable whether *Breaking the Waves* achieves something similar. Von Trier's direction does not allow Watson the space or time to explore the nature of her obsession. Instead he papers over the dubious aspects of the film with a documentary veneer involving a hyperactive hand-held camera. The only time that one senses a possible opening out of the stereotypes concerning Bess's emotional attachment is when Watson gazes directly at the camera. These isolated moments suggest that what we are witnessing is the acting out of a scenario that remains at a certain distance from the actor. This sense of a scenario in rehearsal is also suggested by the tendency of the camera to momentarily lose focus. At such times, it seems as if von Trier is trying to put a distance between the film and the story it tells.

Perhaps the most perplexing thing about the film is that the type of love it promotes is, in the end, as joyless and repressive as the harsh fundamentalist community which ostracises Bess. During a brief interlude early in the film we see Jan and Bess at the movies. Bess is gazing up at the screen in open mouthed, rapturous amazement. Jan, however, is not looking at the screen but at Bess, revelling in her innocence. It is at this point that Bess's role as heroic martyr merges with a more commonplace figure found throughout the history of the cinema, that of the over involved female spectator, the spectator for whom the screen serves as an irresistible lure. Bess's wonderment at the image serves as the mark of her passivity and inability to negotiate a place for herself within the social world. Reflected through Jan's admiring gaze, Bess's wide-eyed stare at the screen not only highlights her naivety but also her willingness to give herself over to someone else's desire.

George Kouvaros lectures in film at the School of Theatre and Film, University of New South Wales.

Film Culture Proposals

Note New Closing Date – 31 July

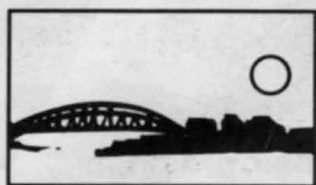
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Essay

Chaucer in Miami

Noel King on Bob Rafelson, Jack Nicholson and *Blood and Wine*.

I really like working with him. The guy is very caring, committed, driven, and ultimately very very smart. He's a singular moviemaker, and to me that's the best thing anybody can be. I like being part of that. We seem to make interesting stuff together. Among other things, we both care a lot about whimsy. I don't like his having had rather a rougher road than I have. There is no reason for it.

Jack Nicholson on Bob Rafelson (*Film Comment* May/July, 1981)

Bob Rafelson tells how he first met Jack Nicholson in the mid 1960s at Los Angeles Writers Guild film screenings: "I was always very vocal. I was often yelling at the screen. There was always this one other voice screaming" (Stephen Farber, 'Rafelson's Return', *New West*, March 1981). Eventually, after a showing of W.C. Fields's *Never Give a Sucker an Even Break* (1941) the two public screamers met and soon were collaborating on the screenplay for Rafelson's first feature, *Head* (1968). That mix of The Monkees, drugs and Marshal McLuhan's media theories debunked the manufacturedness of the Beatles-clone group created so successfully for TV by Rafelson. Broadcast on NBC from 1966 to 1968 *The Monkees* won an Emmy and made Rafelson rich. Repeats ran on CBS from 1969 to 1972 followed by open syndication. As a friend of Rafelson's put it, "*The Monkees* gave Bob fuck-you-money. He doesn't have to take a job because he needs the money. He can always walk away" ('Rafelson's Return').

Rafelson's most celebrated act of "walking away" occurred during the shooting of *Brubaker* (1980). After ten days of filming, a 20th Century Fox vice-president showed up unannounced, a punch-up occurred and Rafelson was sacked. After this incident Nicholson helped out his friend by involving him in the David Mamet-scripted re-make of James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1981). It seems clear that, for some time, Nicholson's clout as a superstar who can green-light a project has helped Rafelson continue to make bigish-budget Hollywood movies.

★★★

Blood and Wine (1997) is Rafelson's ninth film in almost 30 years of filmmaking, so he's working at a Bresson-like pace. Between *Head* and this latest film he made four other films with Nicholson: *Five Easy Pieces* (1970), *The King of Marvin Gardens* (1972), *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1981), and *Man Trouble* (1992). He also directed *Stay Hungry* (1975), *Black Widow* (1987) and *Mountains of the Moon* (1990). In 1983 he made his first music video, for Lionel Richie's *All Night Long*, and in 1994 contributed a 30-minute offering (*Wet*) to a European anthology film, *Erotic Tales*.

Rafelson and Nicholson's most recent collaboration opened in Sydney to mixed reviews just as the first book-length study of Rafelson's work—Jay Boyer's *Bob Rafelson: Hollywood Maverick* (Twayne Publishers, 1996)—became available. Robert Drewe pronounced the film a "jarring, clashing effort", claimed that the preview audience was laughing at rather than with the film, and advised his readers to rent *Five Easy Pieces* to remember how the Rafelson-Nicholson magic once worked (*Sydney Morning Herald*, April 24, 1997). David Stratton was kinder, likening the film's "tough, mordant, comic edge" and its "combination of violence and abrasive humour" to the Miami-based novels of Elmore Leonard and Carl Hiaassen (*The Weekend Australian* April 26-27, 1997). He might have added the wonderful Hoke Mosley series of Miami novels that Charles Willeford wrote towards the end of his life (*Miami Blues*, *Sideswipe*, *The Way We Die Now*, *New Hope for the Dead*), for they too mix violence and mordant humour in a way similar to that found in *Blood and Wine*, found also, we should remember, in such Coen brothers movies as *Blood Simple* (1983) and *Fargo* (1996). The reference to Leonard's writing is apt, if we recall Martin Amis's description of Leonard's novels as being so many retellings of Chaucer's *The Pardoner's Tale*. Reviewing *Riding the Rap*, Amis said: "Leonard is a literary genius who writes re-readable thrillers...All his thrillers are *Pardoner's Tales* in which Death roams the land—usually Miami and Detroit—disguised as money". Chaucer's tale has had quite an impact on the American hard-boiled tradition of fiction, and through that, on American film noir and neo-noir.

James Ross wrote his bleak one-off novel, *They Don't Dance Much* (1940) as a deliberate retelling of *The Pardoner's Tale* and John Huston's 1948 adaptation of B. Traven's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1934) revisited the tale. The durability/malleability of the story was reasserted in Scott Smith's best-selling *A Simple Plan* (1993) which took the tale to a wintry northern US landscape. *Blood and Wine* puts these Chaucerian elements—a bag of money (here, some jewels), wine (Jack's job), treachery and death—in a Miami setting.

★★★

Appearing in a series which has books on film noir, Henri Langlois, Bertolucci and Fellini, Alan Rudolph and Peter Weir, Boyer's book is further evidence of a revived auteurism that has been chugging along throughout the 1990s. Often this is a 1950s auteurism armed with more information about the production circumstances in which the favoured directorial subject laboured: witness Bernard Eisenschitz's biography of Nicholas Ray (Faber, 1993) and Jon Lewis's study of Francis Coppola and the moment of Zoetrope Studios (*Whom God Wishes to Destroy*, Duke UP, 1995).

Boyer's study highlights Rafelson's ability to work well with actors. Nicholson moved toward stardom via *Five Easy Pieces*, Mark LeFanu (in his entry on Rafelson in *American Film Directors Vol 2*, McGraw Hill, 1983) referred to the "astounding fluency" of Bruce Dern's performance in *The King of Marvin Gardens*, *Stay Hungry* allowed Sally Field to redirect her career towards substantial dramatic heroines, Jessica Lange became a major actress after *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, the already accomplished Debra Winger and Theresa Russell give compelling performances as hunter and hunted in *Black Widow*, and Nicholson, Davis, Caine and Dorff are all excellent in *Blood and Wine*. Boyer's book also reveals how carefully Rafelson collaborates with his cinematographers, and he certainly has worked with the best. Laszlo Kovacs (*Easy Rider*) shot *Five Easy Pieces* and the difficulties posed for him by the Atlantic City hotel location in *The King of Marvin Gardens* are absorbingly described (pp. 55-59); for *Stay Hungry* Rafelson used Victor Kemper (*Dog Day Afternoon*); for *The Postman* it was Sven Nykvist (whose task was to be "Gregg Toland in colour"); Conrad Hall shot *Black Widow* and on *Blood and Wine* it was Newton Sigel of *The Usual Suspects* (1995). Rafelson's interest in the technical developments of contemporary filmmaking are indicated in his use of the then-

new technology of videotape for shot-planning on *The Postman*. Nicholson alerted him to the virtues of this technology, having used it himself when directing *Goin' South* (1978) and having watched Kubrick use it on *The Shining* (1980).

Boyer's subtitle indicates the perspective he will take towards his subject. As one who has worked on the margins of the New Hollywood, Rafelson "has remained in the background of the business, or perhaps simply off to the side" (p. 9) while producing work that is interested in "marginal figures" (p. 15). This recalls the 1950s *Cahiers du Cinéma* lionising of Orson Welles and Nicholas Ray as maverick-geniuses hampered by the studio system. Although one expects a (slightly) romantic auteurism of the kind on offer in Boyer's book to find virtue and consistency across the director's oeuvre, it's always interesting to see how that operation is performed. *Mountains of the Moon* initially seems an odd film to have come from a director whose reputation was forged on "small, off-beat films about Americana, all shot on small scale on identifiably American soil" (p. 110), but Boyer's account of the Burton/Speke film as "handsome, intelligent, curious" is persuasive. And I was charmed to read his heroic attempt to recruit *Man Trouble* to the ranks of distinction: "No one seemed to see that *Man Trouble* was in many ways in keeping with much of Rafelson's earlier work...Things that do not make much sense in the film often fall right into line when you consider the film is Rafelson's". Before using the Mandy Rice Davies reply ("Well they would, wouldn't they") or recalling that André Bazin warned the *Cahiers* young turks that cinematic genius occasionally could fall victim to an "accidental sterility" ('On the Politique des Auteurs', in Jim Hillier ed., *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s: Neo Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, Cambridge, Mass./Harvard UP, 1985), you have to admire the extent to which Boyer's book seeks to practise a form of auteurism appropriate to Rafelson's work. For Boyer, Rafelson does not exhibit the "single, overwhelming presence" of a Godard, but the films "nevertheless reveal a consistency of directorial concerns and methods" (p. 124).

★★★

Does it matter that film critics continue to invoke the moment of Rafelson's collaboration with Nicholson on *Five Easy Pieces*, thereby implying that subsequent work across a period of 25 years has not managed to repeat that success? Orson Welles cheerfully admitted in many an interview that after making *Citizen Kane* (1941) it was downhill all the way. In saying that, Welles was accepting the tedious inevitability of an aesthetic-cultural judgment with which he did not agree (he regarded *Chimes at Midnight* (1966) as the film that would get him into Heaven).

Rafelson is now 64 and Nicholson is 60. We are seeing the last acts of great filmmakers. In Richard Schickel's phrase (applied to Clint Eastwood), these guys are now on "the back nine" (and Jack is a big golf fan). So, in the case of Rafelson, we should be thankful he managed to get off a "tramp steamer bound for Panama" (Boyer, p. 1) all those years ago. As is well known, a "tramp steamer" is a ship on which everyone is dressed as Charlie Chaplin. Contemporary filmviewers are lucky Rafelson jumped ship and started making movies, his most recent, *Blood and Wine*, certainly as interesting and accomplished as *Five Easy Pieces*.

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Reports

See no evil

Jane Mills considers the implications of the Senate Select Committee on Community Standards' Report on the Portrayal of Violence in the Electronic Media

The screen has long been accused of being a medium of dangerous, subversive influence. And ever since 1903 when *The Great Train Robbery* depicted its potent image of a gun turned towards the camera and fired straight at the audience, screen violence has been accused of inciting audiences to actual violence.

Until recently screen censorship in Australia has, on the whole, focused on the end product, the completed film. Notwithstanding the effects of market forces, writers mostly got to write what they wanted to write; all those in the production process mostly got to make the film or program they wanted to make. But the Senate Select Committee on Community Standards' Report on the Portrayal of Violence in the Electronic Media (February, 1997) signals a significant shift in censorship—from the end product to the creative process of production. The cause and effect debate which has gone on since the very first days of filmmaking is increasingly considered of little relevance. Last year Australia's Minister for the Arts spoke about the failure of the experts to provide him with a convenient scapegoat for societal violence, noting that "there is no conclusive evidence" for a causal link between screen and actual violence, and that the effects of on-screen violence are "not quantifiable" (*Sydney Morning Herald* August 1996).

But the Senate Select Committee is less convinced. Their Report takes a significant step towards claiming there is a causal connection; indeed, the notion that screen or fantasy violence is causally related to societal violence is implicit in all their recommendations: "rather than concentrating on a largely inconclusive cause and effect debate, the Senate Committee's view is that action should be taken on the basis of consensus among researchers that there are possible adverse effects from watching violence..." [my emphasis]. The Report cites, but ignores, the findings of the far more comprehensive National Committee on Violence whose chair, Professor Duncan Campbell, came to radically different conclusions: "The causes of violence are extremely complex and we're not going to find any simple answers, even though many people would wish to...The obsession with violent films, videos and games is a result of desperately searching around for something to pin the blame on". This 1991 Committee found it impossible to isolate one cause from another and listed many possible factors including poverty, domestic violence and abuse, urban decay and cultural disintegration. It put screen violence second to bottom of all other contributory factors.

The recent Senate Select Committee's recommendations should cause alarm bells to ring in the minds and hearts of all those concerned in the creative process as well as in those of the community—for the audience's role in the creative process, that of making meaning from what is depicted on the screen, is no less important.

The Committee's first recommendation proposes that seminars are to be held by organisations such as Young Media Australia, the ABA, and the Australian Film, Television and Radio School for script writers and producers "aimed at highlighting the need for a more balanced and realistic portrayal of the long term effects of violence". How do we make commonsense of this? Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch*, Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* and Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*, prime candidates for banning or reclassification, depicted realistic portrayals of violence—those represented as shot died, and torture resulted in dismemberment. Any shooting that results in a bloody and painful screen death certainly contains more realism than, say, the screen world of *The Lone Ranger* where men were killed and maimed not only without drawing blood but equally miraculously without damaging clothes.

Are writers to be sent to these re-education camps in order to come up with scripts in which only the baddies get killed? Or perhaps only 50% of the baddies get killed? Or might it mean writers are to be stopped from penning parts for all those deadly dolls and murdering molls who have stalked our screens in recent years because, in real life, few women kill? Do we really want a screen culture in which writers have to curb their imaginations and base their stories only on actual criminal statistics? What sense is there in permitting *Heavenly Creatures*, a deeply disturbing story of matricide based on a real event, but banning an obvious fantasy like *Basic Instinct*? And what does this mean for education? Should it be a teacher's job to impose their or anyone else's views on their students? Surely it's the role of education to encourage those involved in the creative process to use their imaginations—not to indoctrinate them to adopt a formulaic state-imposed view of what the world ought to be like. And to encourage public debate.

Recommendation 10 proposes an increase in the "level of fees imposed by the Office of Film and Literature Classification for classification if the material to be classified is found to contain high level violence". This can only lead to the commissioning of fewer films that deal with one of the major concerns of society. The controls at the end of the process will get pushed back to the beginning—to the writer. The smaller production and distribution companies will find it too financially risky to make films which would attract the attention of this recommendation, let alone submit their films for classification. It will lead to less diversity on our screens—with the major American studios and distributors gaining even greater domination of our screen culture than they already have. Then there's the proposal in Recommendation 11 that "the funds raised by the increased fees be used to finance public

education campaigns aimed at highlighting the possible adverse effects of watching large amounts of violent material".

We would all gain by increased education and a higher level of cineliteracy within the community. And one entirely sensible recommendation proposes increasing the public scrutiny of broadcasting and the introduction into state school curricula of a "compulsory course on the critical evaluation of the media". But have our politicians considered the possible adverse effects of a society whose citizens are not to be protected from actual harm, but one in which all citizens are "protected" from all images and stories of harm?

Three recent examples of screen censorship reveal the harm caused by a screen culture in which the creative process is constrained by political imperatives. Firstly, in 1995 the internationally acclaimed Spanish film *Tras el Cristal* was banned from Queer Screen, the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras' film festival. At a seminar organised to discuss the banning, all that was discussed was the issue of censorship. No-one spoke of the important issues the film raised—that of child sexual abuse and the rise of neo-fascism. How could they? They hadn't seen it. Secondly, in New Zealand *Once Were Warriors* was given a general certificate enabling a very large number to see it. This led to a healthy nationwide debate about domestic violence and its relationship to inequality, racism and social deprivation. In Australia, because of its depiction of violence, the film was given a restrictive classification limiting its potential audience. There was little or no debate about the underlying issues of domestic violence and racism—both issues that are crying out to be better understood in Australia today. Finally, the recent furore about the initially banned few seconds of Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man*—in which a woman, with a gun to her head, fellates a man in the wild west—included little or no discussion of the way in which this scene perfectly reveals the lies so often told about the white settler colonisation of the USA: all those valiant white heroes combating lawlessness, and their women portrayed as either safely ensconced in the homestead cooking apple pies, or in the saloon showing some naughty knicker and liable to break into song at any moment. Jarmusch chose to portray the reality of the violent exploitation and demeaning of women in early American society. Were the censors afraid Australian audiences might contemplate what were undoubtedly similar realities for the colonising white settlers in their own history?

Recommendation 13 proposes that "when reporting news items which are identified by the television stations themselves as being accompanied by 'disturbing footage', that footage should only be shown in [a] later evening news bulletin and not during the early evening news bulletin when large numbers of children are watching television". Indicating a belief that only a government has the right to censor, this recommendation reveals the Committee's lack of trust in the community: the task of introducing children to the unpleasant reality of violence, of helping them develop the skills required to make moral judgements, is no longer to be left to parents and carers. Have none of the Committee considered the consequences of raising children in ignorance of the fact that violence is much more than simply "disturbing"? The eighteenth and final recommendation, to "encourage a reduction in violent programming by linking it to the commercial television license renewing process" takes the responsibility for determining community standards even more firmly out of the hands of the community and puts it unequivocally into those of a government interested only in listening to the experts it agrees with.

Like its screen representation, violence is a complex issue, as is humankind's long history of ambivalent repugnance and attraction to it. The depiction of violence on the screen is one way a society has of making sense of human desire in all its complexity. In a world fearful of ideas, the biggest threat to an open society is not the portrayal of violence, but the suppression of fantasies and desires, often frightening and perverse, that we need to make sense of. How will society make sense of this complexity if our writers and film and program makers are to be denied the possibility of representing this on our screens—or allowed to represent it only as something that is simple to understand?

The Attorneys-General who recently met in Canberra to consider a wide range of proposals to increase screen censorship and the politicians who will consider the Senate Select Committee's Report on the Portrayal of Violence in the Electronic Media should bear in mind Aristotle's warning about what it would be like to live in a society in which desire is outlawed:

Imagine a city where there is no desire. Supposing for a moment that the inhabitants of the city continue to eat, drink, procreate in some mechanical way; still, their life is flat. They do not theorise or spin tops or speak figuratively. Few think to shun pain; none give gifts. They bury their dead and forget where...Now and again a man and a woman may marry and live happily enough, but only as travellers do who meet by chance at an inn; at night falling asleep they dream the same dream...but it is unlikely they remember the dream in the morning. The art of storytelling is widely neglected. A city without desire is, in sum, a city of no imagination.

Quoted in Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, Princeton UP, 1986

In a city of no imagination, there is no place for the storyteller of our times, the screenwriter. And every member of society needs its storytellers to help them develop the imagination required to give meaning to what might appear senseless. All those involved in the creative process—a process which can do so much to make sense of the violence and corruption that exists in society—must resist the current censorship creep which aims to destroy our already beleaguered screen culture. For the suppression of screen violence may be infinitely more dangerous for our culture than its depiction.

Jane Mills is Head of Screen Studies at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School.

Screen culture: gone-ski yesterday, here tomorrow...

OnScreen reported last issue on the recommendations of the Review of Commonwealth Assistance to the Film Industry conducted by David Gonski, chair of Hoyts (see Jock Given, 'Gonski and the allure of a mature industry'; and 'Screen Culture: Gone-ski?'). The Gonski Report was commissioned by the Senator Richard Alston, Minister for Communication and the Arts, and tabled in February this year.

Broadly, the report endorsed the continuation of commonwealth government funding to the industry, acknowledging the vital role of government support in the maintenance and growth of a viable domestic industry. But it did make a number of key recommendations, including changes to tax incentive arrangements to encourage the flow of private sector investment into film, and a significant reduction in the activities of Film Australia.

Of particular concern to the screen culture sector was the recommendation that 66 per cent of the \$3 million funding to the Australian Film Commission's (AFC)

Industry and Cultural Development branch earmarked for screen culture, be redirected to funding film production. Effectively, this would have meant an across the board cut of \$2 million, leaving just \$1 million of commonwealth funding per annum to support the broad range of screen culture activities across the states.

The prospect of the adoption of this recommendation caused alarm in the screen culture community: such a cut would have had the potential to seriously curtail the activities of many of the key screen culture organisations and publications. In response to this recommendation the various organisations collectively organised a national campaign to lobby for the maintenance of funding to the sector.

The outcome was revealed, at least for the short term, in the May federal Budget: no cuts specific to the screen culture sector were announced. The Minister has determined that the Gonski Report recommendations will be given further consideration with input from the industry,

and a formal response made at the end of the year. The Minister's Office has also informed the screen culture sector that funding for 1997/98 will not be adversely affected at that time. The screen culture sector has acknowledged the Minister's support and his recognition of the significant contribution it makes to the industry; and the screen culture sector will continue its input into the commonwealth government's deliberations on film industry funding policy.

The AFC, meanwhile, took a cut of \$0.98 million in the Budget (down to \$15.53 million per annum), but has commended the Federal government on maintaining, overall, a strong commitment to the industry. It is understood that this reduction to the AFC's funding will not effect the agency's level of financial assistance to the screen culture organisations which it supports.

Thanks to Lazar Krum of Open Channel for the background for this article.

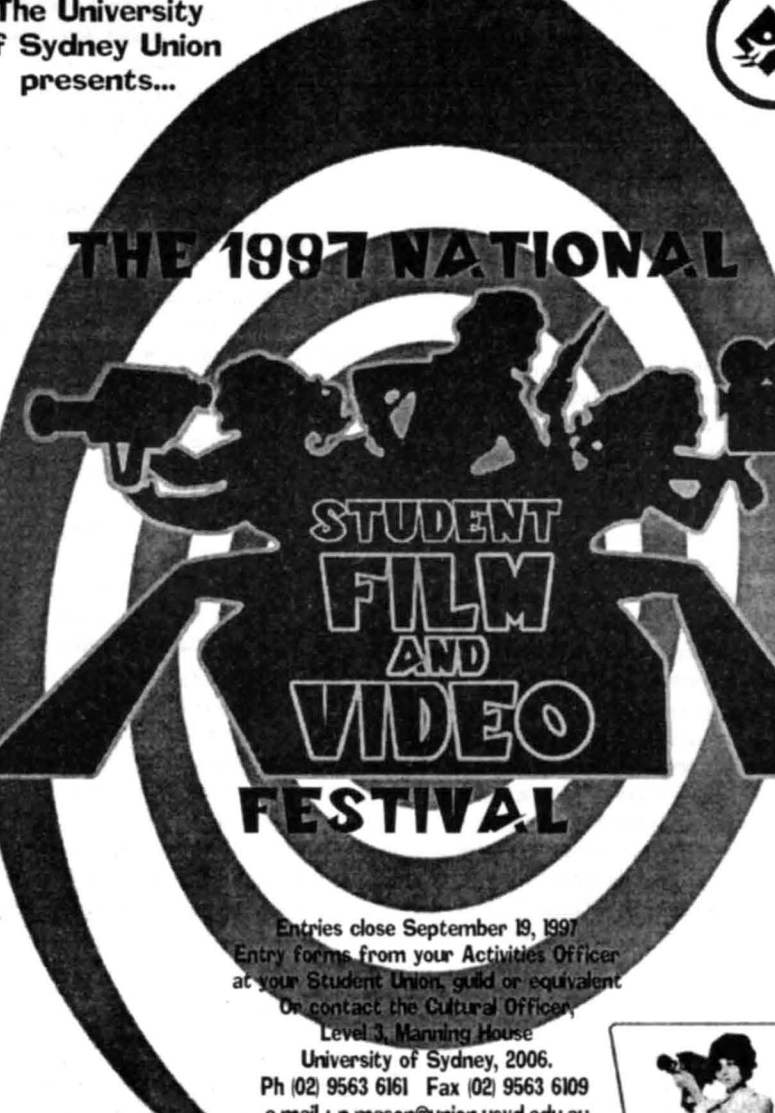

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Report

Stop frame

Robyn Evans reports on the progress towards a Queensland Film Commission

The consultation process between the Queensland film industry and the state government on the formation of the new Queensland Film Commission came under threat following a disruptive incident last month. State Under Treasurer, Doug McTaggart, warned all facets of industry in Queensland that the Minister was considering calling off the merger altogether.

The hard-won consultation process was due to begin in late April. The industry elected five representatives to sit on a working party with the implementation leader, a senior arts adviser, and representatives of both the Pacific Film and Television Commission (PFTC) and Film Queensland (FQ), and reached consensus on five key recommendations to put to government:

1. That the Commission represent a new entity committed to the further development of the Queensland film industry, and that the merger will not diminish existing opportunities.

2. That all schemes, projects and programs of service to the film and television industry be contained in and administered by the new Commission.
3. That the Commission's board of management truly represent the interests of the total film and television industry.
4. That the CEO position be advertised nationally and/or internationally, and that at least two independent industry representatives sit on the selection panel.
5. That the policies of the new Commission recognise national industry codes and practice, and be linked to the national industry.

These recommendations, which have been endorsed at national level by Australian Writers Guild, Screen Producers Association of Australia and Australian Screen Directors Association responded to concerns about the Minister's original plans for the merger, which proposed that investment functions of both

existing organisations be taken on by the new Commission, with development functions to be handled within the Arts Office. Early discussions of the recommendations with the leader of the implementation team, Teena Roberts, lent support to the general feeling of industry optimism about the entire process.

On April 22, just days before the first meeting of the working party, some of the industry representatives on the working party attended a meeting with Sir Llew Edwards, the Chair of the PFTC, and Robin James, the PFTC's CEO, on the understanding that Sir Llew wished to endorse the five recommendations put to the Minister. During the meeting Sir Llew indicated that he had been to the Minister, and that she had accepted that the PFTC would incorporate the activities and staff of FQ into its current structure, that the current PFTC board would be retained, and that Robin James would be given the position of CEO of the merged entity.

It was suggested that there was never going to be a consultation process. Understandably this caused a great deal of concern in the industry; not only would such a plan run contrary to the express wishes of the industry but, if what Sir Llew Edwards and Robin James claimed was true, the government would have been guilty of a gross deception. The elected industry representatives contacted Teena Roberts for confirmation of their claims and were

invited to a meeting with Doug McTaggart to discuss the government's position. Sir Llew Edwards and Robin James were also invited to this meeting but failed to attend.

According to a general letter to the industry published by the industry representatives, Mr McTaggart expressed his alarm about the incident involving the PFTC, and his disappointment that they had not attended the meeting. He instructed the industry not to take any further sidebar meetings, to "forget everything we've been told to date" and to "start again from scratch with him". He then outlined a plan to re-start the consultation process, emphasising that the Minister is approaching the merger with an open mind. On May 13 his office released an issues paper for response by industry within one week. When the responses have been collated, he will meet with the working party to discuss the restructure.

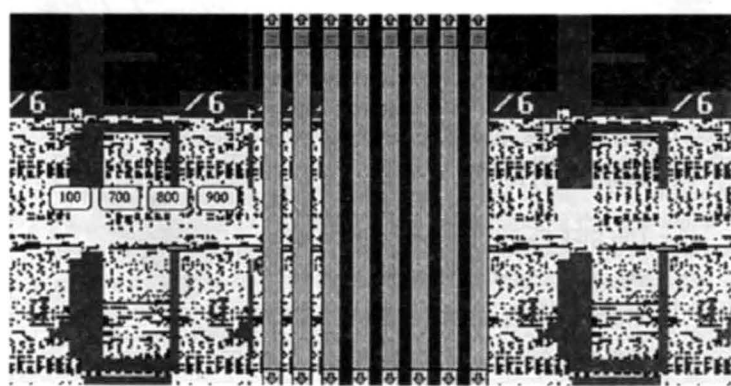
The issues paper outlines four points, primarily the structure and composition of the Commission board, and the process of appointment of the new CEO. Clearly there will be at least one dissenting voice on this issue. The industry representatives will continue to endorse the five key recommendations, which have very strong support across the industry. The outcome of the consultation process will be a major session at the annual QScreen conference in June.

Comment

Web crud

Ian Haig digs the dirt on the www

There is a lot to be said for grunge in the digital realm: the seamless perfection of much digital imagery and the regimented order of the corporate web site are very familiar and very...banal. These days when everything is so over-designed and carries with it a tasteful Photoshop blur filter, it's refreshing to stumble across some real grunge for a change, which reconfirms that the real world is full of crap and grime just like you always thought it was. It's often when the dirt gets in the system that things get really interesting after all.



www.jodi.org is perfect web grunge, if there ever can be such a thing. There is something about this site which makes you want to go back again and again, something engagingly low tech, simple and funky about their catalogue of web works—100cc, Goodtimes and their latest %20 (<http://www.adaweb.com/context/jodi/index.html>). There is no sign of the generic hand of Photoshop here, or names like 'virtual gallery' or 'cyberart', just a dizzying array of in-your-face, free-formed, computer game bitmaps and data corruption that takes control of your computer. *www.jodi.org* manages to capture something inherent about the web medium to the extent that the works are wonderfully self-referential: computer viruses, scrambled error messages, corrupted data and chunks of computer code make up the overriding aesthetic here. However, it's the way in which the works have the capacity to take control of your browser the first time you visit it and infect your monitor with what you swear is a computer crash, or some serious memory fragmentation, which is the crucial element in the work. Unlike so much web art,

www.jodi.org understands the notion of 'noise' on the web, putting back what is normally left out or relegated to the trashcan.

www.jodi.org also manages to take things way beyond the notion of 'browsing', a metaphor with problematic connotations at the best of times. You don't so much browse these works; you are infiltrated by them, taken over by them and consumed. Here, there are some similarities with the acclaimed work of *etoy* (*www.etoy.com*—Sigue Sigue Sputnik meets *Mondo 2000*) but, ultimately, *www.jodi.org* is more inventive and demystifying of the medium, and manages to explode so many of the clichés associated with producing work for the web, in particular the notion of reinvesting the control to the interactive 'user'. Sure, you're free to explore *www.jodi.org* through its maze of imagemap

viruses and data refuse, which is an experience in itself, but essentially you get the feeling that there is some other force at work, directing your every move and monitoring your movements. The user here is just one in a long line of guinea pigs under some weird

surveillance. This is territory which many interactives rarely venture into—territory where the user is not 'in control', but 'out of control' of the work.

The scrambled error messages moving across your monitor recall much of what the web is really about: those spaces in between web sites, the files not loading correctly, the error messages, files not found and 'error 404s' which constitute so much of the experience of using this medium. Here, Netscape frames the work as a self-reflexive cultural interface, and, apart from the occasional hypertext link and imagemap, the notion of interface design is done away with, as something which simply gets in the way of the work. Interface is superficial window dressing, surface detail obscuring what lies below. In a very real way, *www.jodi.org* is the underside of the glossy veneer of the web, the underground trash and grunge, discarded and left to fester and to hopefully mutate into something even more compelling.

When Tim Berners Lee, in the early days of the medium, was thinking of what the web could possibly become *www.jodi.org* was probably the furthest thing from his mind; and

in many ways *www.jodi.org* is about as far away as you can get from the bevelled-edged buttons of corporate web hell, or yet another banal 'virtual gallery'. For that alone it should demand your attention as one of the most interesting web art works to ever come down the pipe.

One of the more interesting aspects of the web is the phenomenon of the useless web page. Sites like the *Rotting Food Home Page*, or *The Virtual Tour of the Gas Station Toilet* compel the question: Why? Why on earth did someone even produce such a web page? For me these are some of the highlights of the web, the points where the web crosses over into a kind of reality television and touches the lives of real people. The web is the perfect medium for wacked out, deluded weirdos to actually say something to the world, no matter how inane or stupid they might appear to the rest of us. While it's easy to dismiss such pages as just ugly examples of HTML grunge, the better ones are complex, fucked-up messes of desires and opinions—perfect web crud.

If you buy into the hype which invokes this medium as the great democratising, utopian delivery system, the useless web page is probably a far more accurate realisation of such hyperbole than, say, *www.sony.com*. And as the experience of browsing the web increasingly becomes about as compelling as flipping through the yellow pages, these useless web pages (<http://www.go2net.com/internet/useless>) and sites like *The World Wide Web Hall of Shame* (comprising web 'abominations') manage to break down the medium, demystify it, in ways which even more experimental, creative web projects fail to. It's these pages that remind one that this is a web constructed by people, not corporate search engines, or infobots—give me the losers, freaks and weirdos any day. The rest of web culture is busy applying pre-existing technical models and paradigms from the world of graphic design, desktop publishing, 3D and CD-ROM based multimedia to the web, hoping that they will reveal the 'truth' of the medium and take it to the promised land. I, for one, think that in some ways at least the useless web page has already found the true web, encapsulated in those raw, weird glimpses of the world at the other end of the modem.

Ian Haig is a Melbourne-based practising computer animation artist.

Newsreel

Swimming Outside the Flags

An initiative from the Australian Film Commission and SBS Independent will put the work of Australian animators onto television screens. *Swimming Outside the Flags* will produce a collection of short animation films, totalling 50 minutes, to be broadcast on SBS-TV in 1998.

"The initiative aims to bring the most innovative, original, challenging and creative material to adult Australian and international audiences. We hope to discover new talent as well as to enhance the profile of more experienced Australian animators", says AFC project co-ordinator Andrew Traucki. Each animated work will be no longer than five minutes, but there is no minimum length. The initiative will encourage a diversity of animation styles.

"*Swimming Outside the Flags* is about engaging in ideas and telling stories in ways not often seen on our television screens", says Barbara Masel of SBS Independent. "The initiative will encourage animation projects which are driven by the playful expression of ideas rather than technology."

For application forms contact the Australian Film Commission on 61-2 9321 6444 or 61-3 9279 3400 or access the AFC Web site at <http://www.afc.gov.au/www/anim/> Applications close August 20, 1997.

National Student Film Festival

Entries are now open for this year's National Student Film and Video Festival. The 1997 Festival is open to anyone who has completed a film or video since July 1996, is enrolled at a tertiary institution (other than the AFTRS) and is a member of their relevant student union, guild or equivalent.

Thanks to a high level of support from around the country, last year's Festival was the largest yet. Entries were double that of previous years, and the finalists screenings and awards night at Sydney's Chauvel Cinema played to a full house. Entries came from all states and finalists represented campuses from Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Wollongong.

The winning entries from the 1996 Festival were toured nationally through campuses around Australia in Semester 1, 1997. Apart from giving exposure to student screen works, it has also resulted in the establishment of a national student screen network.

Works can be entered in a number of categories, and the judging panel is made up of critics, academics and practitioners from the film industry.

Entries close September 1, 1997. Entry forms and further information are currently available from your student union, Association, Guild or equivalent, or by contacting the University of Sydney, Tel: (02) 9563 6161 ; Fax (02) 9563 6109, email : p.mason@union.usyd.edu.au

WIFT's Women in Motion

Women in Film and Television (WIFT) is to continue its Women in Motion Festival in 1997, beginning on August 4 and will consist of a series of forums, filmmaking demonstrations and film screenings with an increased emphasis on multimedia works.

The aim for this year's festival is to keep the issues of 'women's representation' both on and off the screen in the public eye and to inspire women's interest in films.

For further information please call Barbara Clifford at WIFT Victoria on 03 9525 4922 or email: barb@fox.net.au

Column

Cinesonics

Lost Highway: Booms, drones and other dark waves

Philip Brophy

There is a story—one of many—about how they built Disneyland. Apparently, if you can make your way through any of the secret entrances to the operations divisions concealed underground, you then must navigate some long, reverberant corridors. Word is that the corridors were designed to be highly reverberant because children would be more frightened by the booming sound of their own voice than the dark alone. I can't remember where I heard this story, but if it is true, it's another indication of how Disneyland is a designed environment of sublime invention and perceptual precision.

David Lynch embodies the Disneyland effect of combining and manipulating a carnival obviousness with perceptual hucksterism. In a demure archetype of postmodern pulp, he folds the fake into the real in the name of pleasure and terror. Postmodernism unfortunately has been commandeered by artists who do no more than slum it for the intelligentsia. Yet most po-mo artsy figures like Lynch are desperately modernist and pathologically Eurocentric. However, Lynch knows sound. And since he has been doing his own sound design (after sound designer Allan Splet's death in the early 90s) he has realized a series of cinesonic moments which open up the complexity of his cinema far more effectively than his visual symbolism alone has allowed.

Lost Highway (1997) has such a moment—possibly the best Lynch has ever directed—when Fred Madison (Bill Pullman) walks into darkness. He stands in front of a perceptually undefined space: it could be a corridor trailing into centre-screen, or it could be a flat wall lit only at the extreme edges of the frame. Foreground, background, depth, curvature are rendered indistinct by the screen's disorienting flatness. As Madison walks forward (away from us, with his back to us) he walks into darkness itself. (We will return to this scene later.)

This intensely quiet moment happens, from memory, about twenty minutes into the film. The twenty minutes before this moment are probably even more important; twenty minutes worth of sound that creates the sono-narratological world—a designed environment like the mythical underground corridors of Disneyland—across which *Lost Highway* loops.

When we first enter Madison's apartment, a strange aura occupies the cinema: it is the sound of nothing, the texture of silence. That

humming tone that says nothing is occurring; that ringing rumble of space itself. Location sound recordists refer to it as room atmosphere. Like room temperature, it is a palpable nothingness. It's the texture that has to be recorded separately as filler for dialogue editors, so they may seamlessly segue between passages of recorded speech. Without this sound of nothingness, location dialogue would be revealed in truth as bits wrought from a real space—a live acoustic space too great and expansive for the audio track's constructed fictitiousness to contain. Listening to 'badly edited' dialogue demonstrates this effect: you hear the dialogue hissing with room atmosphere cutting in and out, framed by non-hissing 'taped silence'. Dialogue editing, traditionally, must disguise the fact that a real room exists—paradoxically by ensuring that you can't relate its sonic texture of virtual silence to actual silence.

But the strangeness of the nothingness which sounds in Madison's apartment is thick, pregnant, alive. Perversely, Lynch has layered an excess of nothingness, to build a dense and moist bed of rumbling tone which lugubriously bleeds into the air conditioned atmosphere of the cinema. Standard practice in mixdown situations is to audition your final mix against a simulated distant traffic rumble to replicate the urban theatre environment so one can check the soundtrack's clarity. Lynch's sound design privileges the very substance which the soundtrack figures as noise. All the oppressively empty spaces, rooms, chambers and corridors in *Lost Highway* breathe and heave this nothingness through a network of zones vibrating with noisy silence: the tensile ringing of fluoro tubes, the baritone chorus of central heating, the organic tone clusters of electrical circuitry, the dissonant harmonics of air vents. The on screen world is effectively turned inside out to inhabit the auditorium—a device that perfectly fits a film whose project is to loop back on itself in an unending nightmare of psychosis.

Contrary to Lynch's fawning filtering of art history's radically chic icons, his sound design is sharp and logical. Having visually emptied Madison's apartment in tres-hip neo-Antonioni style, he makes one aware of the absence of objects and the sparseness of a space only an architect could inhabit (or a thirty-something musician still living in the designer-80s). Put simply, that low rumbling tone is the aural equivalent of the grimy brown, gun metal and dark olive which suck all colour into their depths. The lighting design and camera work extend this logic, giving us that sublime moment when all space and depth becomes a granular shadow of invisibility as Madison walks into the black hole of centre-frame. In this scene, Lynch employs the perceptual precision typical of Disneyland's design logic in order to convey

an existential void—yet he doesn't do it in a literary mode by referencing Sartre or Camus. He creates his void as a truly cinesonic moment, born of the audio-visual meld.

I'm being overly precise about this, because everyone and their dog knows those reverberant, booming rumbles that echo from *Eraserhead* (1977) to *Blue Velvet* (1986) and into every 'strange' short film made by every film student in the last 15 years. Like, big boom equals fucked-up mind. In the 40s it was the vibraphone; the 50s, the theremin; the 60s, echo machines; the 70s, the synthesizer; the 80s, big, metallic clangs put through too much reverb—and they all equal fucked-up minds. *Eraserhead* churns the same old romantic cheese by dwelling on weirdo head states and employing dissonance to 'subtly' convey a character's 'otherness', yet the film is nonetheless a landmark in exploring base emotional states through aural abstraction. Still, the question remains—and I'll flag it here rather than completely answer it—what does a big, bad boom have to do with a fucked-up mind?

Essentially, it's a matter of scale. The weight, mass and volume of those big booms convey a monstrous size that intimidate us: we associate those sounds with catastrophe. The big boom replicates sonic occurrences like thunder cracks and rolls, nearby earthquakes and tremors, distant gunshots and detonations, collapsing buildings and crashing cars. Bass frequencies at high volumes physically wrack the body, placing one within a traumatizing field of shock waves. Anyone who has lived through such events can testify to the precision with which a low frequency sound can psycho-acoustically instil fear. But that's not all.

The 'feel' of those sounds—ie their subjective presence within our psycho-acoustic subconscious (our own moist darkness where most sound seems to operate)—uncannily links to deeper neurological states: headaches, migraines, hang-overs, stress, etc. *The Nutty Professor* (1963) stages a gag we know too well: Jerry Lewis with a hang-over endures the subsonic detonations caused by his students tapping pencils on a desk and chewing gum. The infamous Chinese Water Torture induces a similar state by fusing surface tactility with aural comprehension to make one feel that each drop of water falling on the forehead is like a dynamite blast inside the head. All in all, when the cinema employs the big, bad boom, it is resorting to cheap carnivale manipulation—which always works. As an inheritor of Disneyland's postmodern apparatus of apparitions, David Lynch's sound design knows this well.

Interestingly, *Lost Highway* is complex and subtle with its transformation of the standard series of single booms into dense, low frequency drones. Apart from formal

differences, acute narrative differences are built upon these drones. Booms are percussive—they are discrete events which dramatically punctuate a point within the narrative; drones take the vertical energy of those moments and flatten them into a horizontal spread of de-dramatized continuity. Monotonic drones always create tension because time passes while the 'music' seems to be standing still. It's like the gears are locked and something is stuck.

Lynch dissolves the archly dramatic boom into a tactile, sonar tempura which coats the darkened chambers of *Lost Highway*. As such, he inverts the terminal lethargy of 'deep and meaningful' chamber room dramas—where people walk in and out of rooms and just say stuff—into latent paroxysm. For some people, Lynch's sense of dramaturgy is thin, mono dimensional and lacklustre. Despite his overt postmodern playfulness, this is true—yet combine that very dramaturgy with a sound design that is thick, multi dimensional and gleaning, and you have something far more psychologically involving. Lynch sonically renders dramatic hollowness as a seething container of otherness, heightening our anxiety while we watch what on the surface appears to be undramatic events.

Quite possibly, you could get a talky 'quality' film (pick your own title), remove all the string quartet music, layer and remix all the humming background atmospheres, and a clichéd mid-life-crisis drama may devolve into an aural whirlpool of psychosis. How? The on-screen dramatic points would not disclose any clear psychological motivation behind the dialogue exchanges, and the absence of music cues employed to enhance those dramatic points would disorient and confuse one's ability to 'read' the characters. This is exactly what happens through most of *Lost Highway*: you simply don't know whether anyone is telling lies or truth, or why they would be saying what they're saying anyway. I point this out because Lynch's sound design is working in concert with a specifically generated dramatic scenario that in the end gives us no clear insight to any character's psychosis. Most 'Lynchian' copies try and render their scenarios meaningful and explicative—which goes counter to the big booms and rumbles they employ purely for stylistic effect. Their 'otherness' is gratuitous, ill-defined, unconvincing. Ironically, Lynch's postmodern effect is clarified when copies pale next to his own authorially suspect work. Comparatively, those copies are safely illuminated walkways running along council-developed suburban creeks to David Lynch's aurally chiaroscuro *Lost Highway*.

Lost Highway, David Lynch, director and sound designer.

Review

Condition: Shock of the Ear

You are in an intimate theatre of displacement, a contemplative, stylishly fashioned space yielding to alarms, clocks that lie and multiply, a phone call, an ice-flooded mouse-pad, a chorus of voices recollecting losses of memory and tongue, an elderly voice reliving the shock of endangered hearing in 1944. You are the performer, Kafka mode, silently acting out a scenario of someone else's inventing. But there are no visible human agents. You are being programmed...to be interrupted. The sound cuts out, mid-story, the light turns itself off, a sound erupts from the other side of the room, the phone rings. You answer it; is it listening, or indifferent? What time is it telling? But you have picked it up. You're curious. You're looking to pick up, weave, complete little stories, half-pleasures, beautiful voices. As you linger and the more you linger, the less automaton you are and discover that you can play the voices and slices of music, repeating and overlapping them with your magic mouse. Darkness. A crash beckons. Someone beats you there. A theatre of impatience, envy and competition rudely intrudes. Are you missing something significant? You would 'mouse' better than *that*. And then they're bored and gone and you're trying to pick up where you were, wanting back into the reverie, back into the little jolts that

force connections, "red as blood/yellow as fat", your mouse-pad a painting with its own moves, glass breaking beautifully over you, and too real...but it's only sound. The light draws you to sit at an elegant wedge of a desk, between designer lamps and speakers. You contemplate a tale of torture, irritated by pathos overscored by a set of strings, but you sit like and you are lit like someone being interrogated. A voice crackles and it's 1944 again, a landstorm south of Darwin, lightning, eardrums. You could keep subjecting yourself to this dark pleasure, never sure if you've heard the whole story, played every delicious, anxious word, because you know very well with the many permutations offered by interactivity, someone will say, did you see, hear, generate *that* bit? It's nice to experience an interactive work with sound at it's shifting centre, with inventive mousing, with physical requirements for the performer-user *beyond the mouse*, and a fine sense of theatre and of collaboration: Richard Vella (music), Maria Miranda (painting and screen design), Greg White (programming), David Bartolo (interface design), Neil Simpson (the room), the eerily present voices of Evdokia Katahanis, Gosia Dombrowska and others, and the guiding hand and ear of artistic director Norrie Neumark. Artspace, April 17–May 3.

Keith Gallasch

Preview

LOUDness

LOUD, Australia's first national media festival of youth culture and the arts, was launched in April by Senator Alston, federal Minister for Communications and the Arts, and Michael Lynch, General Manager of the Australia Council. Scheduled throughout January 1998, the festival will encourage youth (12–25 years) creativity in print and electronic media (television, radio and online) to produce documentaries, short film, soundscapes, vox pops, photography and written articles.

In the television arena, young people will have the opportunity to produce, write, direct and film a range of subjects, ranging from short pieces which focus on themes of identity and place, to involvement in documentaries which voice the perspectives of youth. Networks which have confirmed their participation include ABC, SBS, Network 10, the Comedy Channel, V and Optus Vision's Ovation and Local Vision. The programming includes *LOUD* *dox*, a showcase for young documentary filmmakers. Our Place is a national video project involving filmmakers from all over the country producing short documentary self-portraits that reflect both their own viewpoints and youth diversity. The works will be produced for TV broadcast with

seeding funding and resources which filmmakers will be able to access locally.

LOUD *bits*, a national competition revolving around the interpretation of *LOUD*, invites submissions of funky, funny and in-your-face experimental or animated pieces of between three seconds to three minutes duration. Airtime will be secured for the *LOUD* short film festival.

LOUD online will bring together established and aspiring net heads to create a collaborative web site with the support of a range of new media companies and ABC multimedia. Chat rooms will enable young people from around Australia to 'meet' and share interests.

A multimedia magazine featuring moving images, music, sounds, stories, animation and design will evolve continuously and an online exhibition will showcase the best emerging digital artists, while the national home page competition will thrust young backyard web designers and artists into the public eye.

RT

LOUD, Media Festival of Youth Culture and the Arts, January 1998.

For more details about submitting project proposals, etc, visit the *LOUD* website at <http://www.LOUD.org.au> or call the *LOUD* information line on 1900 122 221.

Previews

That immersive glow

Annemarie Jonson highlights the Sydney Film Festival

After the critically acclaimed but commercially problematic 1996 Sydney Film Festival, Paul Byrnes returns to direct Sydney's 44th. And it's looking like a good one.

The main program, now known as Panorama and still screened in the marvellous State Theatre, has confirmed over 150 films from 25 countries; and the Pitt Centre program, renamed The Edge, has been extended by a day to allow more time for repeats. Panorama, while not as strongly focused on Asian content as in past years, includes the, by all accounts, outstanding feature *The River*, directed by Taiwanese Tsai Ming-liang (*Vive L'Amour*) and described as "an original and mysterious film about families and sexuality" in which a "man experiences acute neck pain after swimming in a polluted river". Tsai's film, lauded in March 1997 *Sight and Sound* as "extraordinary", won the Silver Bear Special Jury Prize in Berlin. Also featured is Maggie Cheung, the Hong Kong action movie screen goddess starring as herself in Olivier Assayas' *Imma Vep*, a film about the remake of Feuillade's vampire series *Les Vampires* (the same issue of *S&S* features a great interview with Cheung on this experience). I'll also be looking out for features like Aki Kaurismäki's

"return to form" with *Drifting Clouds*; Canadian Lynne Stopkewich's *Kissed*, a tale of necrophilia which apparently wowed Toronto; Australian Bill Bennett's psychological thriller *Kiss or Kill* (featuring local acting wunderkinds and *Love and Other Catastrophes* alumni Frances O'Connor and Matt Day); Bertrand Tavernier's *Capitaine Conan* (billed by *Variety* as the French director's best film in several years); and a bunch of what look like potentially engaging features from Eastern Europe.

It is sometimes the case that, amongst the gems, second rate features or only marginally engaging divertissements get an airing they otherwise wouldn't. The punter can always rely, however, on the special nights (where a preponderance of the truly good features are screened) and compelling documentaries which would likely get no screen time in this country outside the festival. This year festival goers can look forward, for example, to a raft of local documentaries including George Miller's *40,000 years of Dreaming: a Century of Australian Cinema*. Miller's interesting, possibly tendentious, premise is that Australian film can be understood as an extension of Aboriginal storytelling. Another Australian documentary, *Exile in Sarajevo*, is a

video diary by a Bosnian-Australian actor who returns to his mother's hometown in 1995 during the civil war. Trevor Graham's *Mabo—The Life of an Island Man* is a timely offering in these desperate days for race relations.

From overseas: the indefatigable Ross McElwee's (*Sherman's March*, *Time Indefinite*) *The Six O'Clock News*, on the experiences of Americans whose personal traumas and tragedies have featured on TV news; David Lawson's *The Last Angel of History*, intriguingly billed as a Chris Marker-esque "creative science fiction documentary about Africa, cyberculture and history"; Thom Anderson and Noel Burch's *Red Hollywood*, which examines the messages communist filmmakers, before and after McCarthyism, were able to get into their films; Arthur Dong's *Licensed to Kill*, a rumination on the motivations of homophobes who kill; *Some Nudity Required*, a documentary on screen violence and sex by Odette Springer, Roger Corman's music supervisor on over fifty erotic/slasher movies; Frederick Wiseman's *La Comedie Francaise*; and *Girls Like Us*, a Philadelphia version of the Apted/Armstrong genre of coming-of-age verité (it won the Grand Jury Prize for Best Documentary at Sundance this year); as well many others I can't mention here.

The special screenings and retrospectives look particularly promising. They include sessions of Irish cinema (the Stephen Frears' directed screen version of Roddy Doyle's *The Van* and Gilles MacKinnon's (*Small Faces*) new feature *Trojan Eddie*); a special night of Spanish Cinema; a session titled 'Movie

Makers—Grand Obsessions', featuring a documentary on the making of Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch*, and Terry Gilliam's own account of his struggle to make *12 Monkeys* in the Hollywood system; and a special night aptly tilted *Blood Brothers and Rats* which includes Abel Ferrara's latest offering *The Funeral* (starring Christopher Walken and Chris Penn), and John Irvin's *City of Industry* with Harvey Keitel playing—you guessed it—a low-life professional crim on a mission. A major feature of this year's Festival is the retrospective *Howard Hawks: American Artist*, during which new prints of 11 of the auteur's films including *Scarface*, *Bringing Up Baby*, *Only Angels Have Wings*, *His Girl Friday*, *Rio Bravo* and *The Big Sky* will be screened. Special guests include Bob Gitt, Preservation Officer at the UCLA Film and Television Archive who will present, amongst other treats, *The Big Sleep We Never Saw*, the original cut of Hawks' film with 18 minutes of previously unscreened footage. A Shohei Imamura retrospective is another bonus this year.

In place of last year's day tripper tickets, nonsubscribers are offered the new flexi-ticket which gives access to any three films on weekday daytimes. Responding to feedback from last year's patrons, subscribers are offered longer meal breaks, better co-ordinated starting times, and subscriber discounts on special nights. Along with the promising content, it looks like a structurally improved Festival this year.

44th Sydney Film Festival, June 6–20

Japanese Gen X, jazz, spaghetti westerns, and...

Anna Dzenis anticipates the Melbourne International Film Festival

This year's Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF) is the inaugural festival for recently appointed director Sandra Sdraulig, as she takes over the helm from a very successful run by Tait Brady. The festival remains centred in the city at its two main venues, The Capitol and the State Film Theatre. MIFF promises to bring to its audiences compelling and provocative works from the international festival circuit—from London, Sundance, Berlin and Cannes.

Amongst the titles are a range of features by first-time directors who have primarily worked in other mediums such as video and photography. *Mugshot* is New York photographer-turned director Matt Mahurir's debut feature—a story about a man's forgotten life after he is found in a deserted building without identification or memory. *Lilies* is a highly mannered film by Canadian video artist John Greyson, described as a visually ethereal and powerful socio-political tale of someone wrongly accused of the murder of his lover. *Courting Courtney*, directed by Paul Tarantino, is a romantic story that mixes film and documentary. Protagonist Nick documents his former sweetheart Courtney's parade of unsuitable suitors and unsuccessful liaisons in an analytical and enamoured mode. Other delights to anticipate include *Conspirators of Pleasure* by Czech animator Jan Svankmajer, who turns his hand to the art of fetishes in this Marquis de Sade-styled tale of six townspeople readying themselves for Sunday. The wildly titled *Killer Condom*, directed by Martin Walz, is described as a disrespectful metaphor for AIDS, and is based on the

comic book by infamous New York comic-strip artist, Ralph Konig. Japanese Generation X features include *Suzaku* (*Moe No Suzaku*), Japanese writer/director Naomi Kawase's debut feature and winner of the International critic's prize at Rotterdam; *Kid's Return*, which follows two young boys on their various adventures into kickboxing and the Yakuza, directed by Takeshi Kitano; as well as a journey through Tokyo's underworld in *Tokyo Skin* directed by Yukinari Hanawa.

Another exciting aspect to this festival is its *Four Major Focuses on Film*, curated by Melbourne identities, film scholars and buffs. These are *All That Jazz: Saxophones in Cinema From Fats Waller On ...*; *Studio Ghibli: Contemporary Japanese Animation*; *Made in Spain*, a showcase of recent Spanish cinema; and a Sergio Leone retrospective.

All That Jazz is curated by Rick Thompson, long-time jazz aficionado and lecturer in cinema studies at La Trobe University, who sees that there is a symbiotic relationship between jazz and film as "the two art forms which define the twentieth century...Both are kinetic and real-time bound, reflecting social attitudes to events and the mood of the people living in that time. At the centre of each is a complex interplay between individual and ensemble performance, between traditional forms and one-off inventions". Already confirmed are Tavernier's *Round Midnight*, Eastwood's *Bird* and the Stones' *Stormy Weather*. Other titles that are being pursued are Shirley Clarke's *The Connection*, Rolf De Heer's *Dingo* and a documentary on Dexter Gordon.

Following the success of last year's Japanimation features and 1995's Tezuka retrospective, Anime scholar Philip Brophy has curated a collection of contemporary works from Studio Ghibli. Formed in 1983 by Hayao Miyazaki, one of Japan's pre-eminent Manga artists, Studio Ghibli has the reputation of consistently matching box office figures with live-action releases. Miyazaki's fantasy narratives are generally focused on teenage girls and the ecological plight of the earth. In his book on Japanese and American animation *Kaboom* (Museum of Contemporary Art, 1994), Brophy profiles Miyazaki and describes him thus: "Miyazaki reworks Tezuka by adapting the sensibilities of his subjects and characters, effectively draining them of Disney-esque inflections, without surrendering a peculiarly Japanese post-nuclear mode of imagining other worlds. If Tezuka is nostalgic, Miyazaki is elegiac".

Already confirmed for the *Made in Spain* series is Javier Barden's *Mouth to Mouth*, a film that comes with the tag-line "your fantasies are only a phone call away". Also eagerly anticipated is Augustin Diaz Yanes' *Nobody Will Speak of Us When We Are Dead*, winner of eight Spanish Goya Awards, including Best Film and Best Actress. As the story begins Gloria's (Victoria Abril) bullfighting husband is in a coma, her get-rich trip to Mexico has turned sour, and she is now one of the survivors of a Mexican mafia shoot-out...

The Sergio Leone program is a world first. Although Leone's Italian gaze at the mythological American West has acquired international cult status, remarkably there has

been no major retrospective of his work. Film buff and critical commentator Paul Harris curates this selection of Leone's films which gives MIFF filmgoers the opportunity to not only enjoy these remarkable works in all their cine-brilliance, but also to contextualise and appreciate Leone as a filmmaker. Age film critic Adrian Martin, who has recently completed a British Film Institute book on *Once Upon a Time in America*, will be presenting a keynote lecture on Leone in conjunction with this program.

The other director who will be showcased in the program this year is Theo Angelopoulos. A selection of four of Angelopoulos's earlier films will be shown and MIFF will premiere his most recent work *Ulysses Gaze*, which stars Harvey Keitel as a filmmaker working in the United States who returns to his hometown in Greece after an absence of 35 years. Described as a story travelling through time and place, it is also regarded as a celebration of a century of cinema and an insight into the Bosnian conflict.

Other regular MIFF events will include *The Australian Showcase*, the best of recent Australian feature films, an enormous range of shorts in competition for The City of Melbourne Awards, and the latest in the digital realm with hands-on public access to multimedia products, works on CD-ROM and MIFF's own web site. And of course, as with all festivals, there are more treasures just awaiting final confirmation.

46th Melbourne International Film Festival
July 24–August 10

Advance notice

The 6th Brisbane International Film Festival, July 31–August 10

Last year's BIFF made its mark, suggesting a strong future for the event and showing that a bigger audience is really possible. The full program won't be announced until after this edition of *RealTime* has gone to print, but a few significant highlights are on tantalising offer.

Herbert Brenon is one of the forgotten heroes of the silent cinema. Two of his most famous works, *Peter Pan* (1924) and *A Kiss for Cinderella* (1926) will be screened. Although described as "fairy story films for adults", it's also claimed that they will simultaneously "recapture

the spirit of childhood".

Less likely to engender dreams of innocence is a celebration of the acting and directing achievements of Dennis Hopper (though he does a neat kind of wicked witch in that other popular rites of passage number *Blue Velvet*). The announcement of "Spotlight on Hopper" doesn't say if the actor, filmmaker and photographer will be attending BIFF. It is to be hoped. He's good interview material with his considerable experience of the ins and outs of mainstream Hollywood and the independents.

Also the stuff of fantasy and violence, a selection of the films of Hong Kong director Tsui Hark (*Chinese Ghost Story Trilogy*) are featured, with their blend of the art of Kung Fu, ghost stories and myths.

BIFF says that its sixth incarnation is all about inspiration and imagination. Last year Stanley Kubrick was its centre piece, this year an idiosyncratic combination of Herbert Brenon, Dennis Hopper and Tsui Hark promises a festival with vision.

RT

Reviews

The tyranny of duration

Clare Stewart on the short and short of it at the 14th St Kilda Film Festival

The positioning of short films in collective cinema memory is precarious and contingent, that is to say it is not based on canonical 'necessity' but subject to the accident of personal taste and accessibility. If I say that Jackie Farkas' *The Illustrated Auschwitz* or the Cantrills' *Waterfall* are my favourite Australian films, it is not only the paradigm of an identifiable National cinema which subjects these choices to debate, but the prevalent understanding that the form itself does not sustain, is fleeting and does not belong in the same value system as the feature film. This refusal to treat the short film as a truly independent form is often reflected in the films themselves, the culture of reception infiltrating and conspiring against the potential of the form. The local short film arena is defined by the politics of this 'play', often privileging irreverent modes (Melbourne's other key short film events Cafe Provincial and White Gloves share a comedic emphasis) or operating as a 'playground' for would-be feature filmmakers. While the funding agencies and film schools continue to contribute to the breadth of short filmmaking, they too measure success by the number of recognisable feature directors they have nurtured or jump started, and retrospectives of the 'early works' form the rubric for historical analysis of the short film in Australia.

The St Kilda Film Festival is subject to this crisis (if you'll permit me a level of melodrama) in that it wants (quite rightly) to take itself and the short film form seriously but shrouds this intention in the language of

frivolity (hence Peter Kaufmann's repeated emphasis on the word 'enjoyment' in the Director's Welcome and the wise-cracking program titles). The pluralistic identity of St Kilda itself (cheesily underscored by Jackie Shultz's festival trailer, a long track across variously filled jocks and knickers) where difference is not only accommodated but insisted upon, is in part what quite comfortably permits the Festival's annual reshaping. While not always positive (it's difficult to justify a substantial reduction in the length of the festival when it simultaneously involves the introduction of an international component) this flexibility does allow for the development of new programming strategies.

The retrospective 'Confessions of a Filmmaker', curated by Lawrence Johnston, provided a context for reflecting on the preoccupations emerging in some of the new local works and defined an alternative approach to historicising the short film. Comprised of films with strong formal elements and evocative themes, this private canon included Werner Herzog and Paul Berriff's *Lessons of Darkness*, a magisterial film blurring sci-fi and documentary form to produce a rich and despairing world in the burning aftermath of the Gulf War. Even more haunting now that the situation in Kuwait has 'retired' from the headlines, it stands as a film which demands return and reassessment. Equally compelling was Laurence Green's traumatic revisitation to the territory of family in *Reconstruction*, a film whose use of stock and technique

represents the grain of things remembered and forgotten.

What the films in 'Confessions of a Filmmaker' share is "a fit between the form and the concept, between idea and substance", an aesthetic economy which acknowledges the short film as "a very condensed and crystalline form". Adrian Martin's introduction to 'The Future of Short Film Production' forum stressed the importance of developing a critical and aesthetic awareness of those modalities specific to the short work. Indeed, those films which resonated in this year's festival took deceptively simple formal premises and pushed them to the brink—not ostentatiously but with assurance and verve: Sue Ford's *Faces 1976–1996* (Best Film) juxtaposed moving portraits taken twenty years ago with contemporary images of the same faces, matching stock and grain to negate the passage of time; Lucy Lehmann's seamless Super 8 'capturing' of bush terrain and the suburban home oscillating between a bristling and lilting evocation of lost places in *Five Hundred Acres* (Film Victoria Craft Award); the claustrophobic play on window as screen in Nicky Roller's AFRS production *A Permanent End* (Highly Commended Award for Cinematography); Janet Merewether's matching of video aesthetic to mass image culture in *Making Out in Japan* (Best Achievement in Video Production); and Anastasia Zarnick's VCA production *The Snag in Drag* (Palm Door Award) doing justice to the seemingly continuous take technique immortalised in Jean Rouch's *Gare du nord*.

While pushing already proven techniques consolidates these films, as well as the frequently screened and much applauded Nick Park influenced animations *Uncle* (New Directors Award) and *Penguins Off the Page*, a persistent and niggling poaching from feature films which render the act of

poaching itself redundant (*Pulp Fiction*, *The Usual Suspects*) continues to invade such 'streetwise' numbers as *America* (Highly Commended Award for Direction), *Stitched* (Audience Award), *Stuck* and *Trash*. Hankering after an Australian equivalent to the American kitsch'n'violent trend, these films are all flash and rather than working as self-contained fiction, they tend to bleed into a generic Hollywood imaginary.

Stronger narrative impulses were sustained in the documentaries—*Kitty and the Cartwheelers*' *Shopping Jeep Bonanza* by Michaela French, *The Pursuit of Happiness* by Tim Mummery, and *The Search for the Shell Encrusted Toilet Seat* (Best Editing) by Leonie Dickinson—where the representation of kitsch and the everyday was more appropriately dependent on what is uneasy about the familiar.

The unending search for the best way to exhibit short films becomes more pressing as those films with longer running times increasingly fall through the cracks in the programming of larger festivals. St Kilda Film Festival has a history of providing a screening context unfettered by commercial pressures. However, most punters and filmmakers would agree that the programming rhythms of shorts festivals generally don't (and can't) permit the films to 'breathe'. It is an imperative not only to ensure a continued access to short films, but to provide a culture of reception which generates an understanding of the short as an aesthetic form with its own sets of limits and possibilities.

14th St Kilda Film Festival, St Kilda, April 24–27

Clare Stewart is co-curator of the National Cinematheque, and lectures in Cinema Studies at RMIT.

Positively video

Kathy Cleland reports on *Video Positive 97*

Video Positive 97: Escaping Gravity (VP97), billed as the UK's biggest ever festival of video and electronic art, spanned two cities (Liverpool and Manchester) and 12 venues. With approximately two hundred artists included in the various exhibitions, installations, film and video programs, festival audiences needed serious doses of caffeine as well as dedication to experience all that was on offer. The festival also included three conferences: *LEAF 97* (exploring art, society and technology from an east-European perspective) *Cosmopolis: Excavating Invisible Cities* (investigating the transition from the post-industrial to the digital city) and *Escaping Gravity: The Student Conference*.

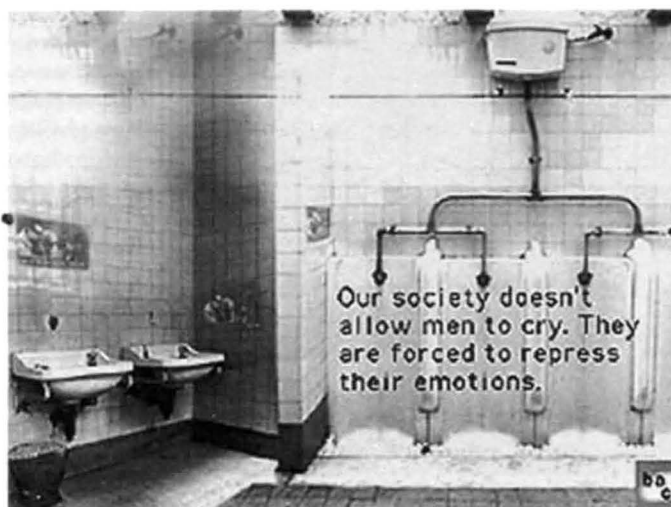
As well as presenting work at standard festival venues such as galleries and theatres, VP97 also placed work in less traditional venues including Cream at Nation, a popular nightclub venue in Liverpool, cafes, and the Museum of Science and Technology in Manchester. The Liverpool cathedral's oratory was the site for Bill Viola's video installation *The Messenger*, a mesmerising work showing a submerged, almost lifeless, human figure slowing rising to the surface and gasping air before again descending to repeat the sequence over and over again. Viola's work was an eerie experience for viewers who became aware, as their eyes got used to the dark interior, that they were standing amongst lifeless stone statues. The VideoWall at Wade Smith, a sports store in Liverpool, was another imaginative but somewhat problematic foray out of the art institutions into the 'real' world. Audiences trying to view George Barber's *Video High Volume 2* were just as likely to be greeted with a half hour Nike ad which was alternated with Barber's work.

There was a strong Australian presence at VP97 in the form of the *aliens.au* program curated by Linda Wallace and financially supported by the Australian Film Commission. Jon McCormack's startling and poetic 'artificial life' progeny were exhibited in his *Turbulence* installation in the Museum of Science and Technology in Manchester.

In Lyndal Jones' *From the Darwin Translations: Spitfire 1.2.3.* audience

members moved through a room full of monitors displaying images of poppy fields with an accompanying soundtrack of birdsong into a darkened room dominated by a large screen showing footage of a pilot's eye view from the cockpit of a Spitfire fighter plane. An intimate atmosphere was created by headphones which positioned the individual audience members in the cockpit's aural interior (engine and propeller noises), as disembodied women's voices told stories of their sexual fantasies about the archetypal warrior pilot.

Gordon Bennett's *Performance with Object for the Expiation of Guilt* (*Violence and Grief remix*) was presented via video with artefacts from the performance (black whipping box and stock whip) adding a disturbing physical presence. Exploring the complexities of black/white racism and the construction of the Other, his was one of the most overtly political works in the festival.



From *Video Positive 97: Escaping Gravity*

Also included in the *aliens.au* program were two video programs and five CD-ROMs: Martine Corompt's *The Cute Machine*, Josephine Starrs' and Leon Cmielewski's *User Unfriendly Interface*, Brad Miller's *Planet Of Noise*, Lloyd Sharp's *Invert* and Patricia Piccinini's *Genetic Manipulation Simulator*. These works were presented as part of a 'CD-ROM Forest' in the Museum for Science and Technology; inexplicably, the sound was turned down very low on these works creating a somewhat barren experience as audiences wandered between the discrete computer terminals.

Other highlights of the festival were Jaap de Jonge's (Netherlands) *Crystal Ball*, a magical kaleidoscope eye mounted into the wall of the Cornerhouse Gallery in Manchester. Viewers responding to the message *touch me* were rewarded with fragmentary images of TV and cable broadcasts scanned from the mediascape. In Liverpool at the Open Eye gallery, Thecla Schiphorst's (Canada) *Bodymaps: Artefacts*

of *Touch* incorporated sensors under a white velvet surface. A near life-sized figure projected onto the surface twisted, turned and moved in response to audience members touching and stroking the velvet. Jane Prophet's (England) high-tech fibreglass cyborg *Sarcophagus* was animated by the audience passing their hands over different 'body' zones—head, heart and stomach—which displayed images representing biological and informational systems.

The success of the exhibition installations was due in no small part to the impressive array of equipment the organisers of the festival, FACT (Foundation for Art & Creative Technology), based in Liverpool, were able to secure for the artists. A pool of equipment from MITES (Moving Image Touring & Exhibition Service)—including 25 video projectors as well as computers and laser disc players—made up approximately half of the equipment used, with the remainder secured through various sponsorship deals.

ISEA98 (themed 'revolution') is set to build on the VP97 collaboration between Liverpool and Manchester and is being organised by FACT in conjunction with Liverpool University and Manchester Metropolitan University, and with the support of local councils which are demonstrating a high level of commitment to the cultural and economic opportunities presented by new digital technologies.

More information on the festival and the artists can be found online at: <http://www.fact.co.uk/VP97.html>

The homepage for the *aliens.au* program can be found online at: <http://www.anat.org.au/aliens>

Kathy Cleland is a Sydney-based writer and curator. Her attendance at Video Positive 97 and the Cosmopolis Conference was arranged as part of the *aliens.au* program curated by Linda Wallace, and financially assisted by the Australian Film Commission.

Video Positive 97, Liverpool and Manchester, April 11–May 18

Outside outward display: tradition and the derivative

Eleanor Brickhill re-thinks tradition in Australian dance and surveys performances and debate at The Performance Space's *antistatic*

The *Sydney Morning Herald's* dance writer, Jill Sykes, in her not-so-kind comments about the performance programs in The Performance Space's *antistatic* festival must have known she was poking a stick in a hornet's nest. Perhaps she was emphasising her desire (*Performance Space Quarterly*, Autumn 1997) to express 'one person's view' in what should be—ideally, but is not—in our economic rationalist climate, a widely diverse debate about innovative dance practice. The sort of attitude expressed in Jill Sykes' review reveals the ease with which alternative discourse is effectively silenced. Different notions of the body have engendered much innovative dance practice, but in Australia, these differences seem doomed to invisibility within the larger public domain.

To wit, the National Library of Australia is currently host to a travelling exhibition, *Dance People Dance*, curated by Dr Michelle Potter. Despite the Director-General's comment that the exhibition "examines how theatrical dance in Australia has moved from its strongly Western European beginnings to now also reflect an ethnically diverse society", this exhibition tells a story of Australian dance shaped entirely by its relationship to European tradition. Max Dupain's photographs bring to life the early tours of Pavlova and the Ballet Russe which were so influential in developing our national ballet.

centre on a person as an inherently mobile and expressive being? Can the body be seen as a site of inquiry, investigation and negotiation, rather than some unruly and inchoate pit of desire and impulse requiring severe discipline in order to achieve a pre-established social demeanour? Certainly these used to be fashionable ideas. The early practices of Murphy or Tankard were well-funded, ostensibly on the basis of their 'modern' desires. To see clearly where an artist's aesthetic aspirations lie, you simply look to daily technical training regimes. These individuals have always sat comfortably within balletic practice. Whether they have "dented the canon" or not, to use Russell Dumas' description of innovation in ballet, is questionable. The point is that if the idea of innovation is fashionable, its actuality is usually too problematic for public presentation.

The suggestion that our Western European theatrical heritage still provides the most influential model, would probably raise little dispute among the six member panel at the surprisingly named *National Dance Critics Forum: Dance: What Next? Who Says So?* Few of the panellists would have experienced dance which was about physical negotiation and investigation rather than proclamation and spectacle.

If Valerie Lawson sees the cult of the creative personality as 'unhealthy', to be discouraged in favour of 'creative

de- and re-constructed idea, within the post-modernist frame.

Lee Christofis, commenting on funding problems for independent artists, equated the term 'independent' with 'emerging', conveying the idea that once artists have 'emerged' they will no longer be 'independent'. Further, he implied these artists might just be unwillingly 'independent' of funding bodies' financial assistance. Either alternative misunderstands a more pertinent notion of independence, ie mature, wilfully artistically independent choreographic artists deliberately seeking to develop practices which speak diversely of the body—not as a well-oiled culturally 'international' machine, or couched in pre-defined terms which devalue difference. Such artists engage in a dialogue about practice that acknowledges Australia's monogamous relationship with its Western European cultural referents, at the same time setting about widening cultural precepts and creating a truly independent identity.

To this end, perhaps, the *antistatic* festival's centrepiece was the three ten-day workshops conducted by guests Jennifer Monson (NY), Julyen Hamilton (Spain via UK) and Gary Rowe (UK), designed to develop choreographic and improvisational practice and performance—the very practices evident in the performances which failed to impress Jill Sykes.

If a choreographer makes work to which only a specific audience can relate, is that grounds for dismissal? Such was Gary Rowe's *A Distance Between Them*, in which the iconography may well have related to an audience (HIV positive men?) which did not attend. Indeed, the images remained static, distant and difficult: tight in a circular frame a woman singing Doris Day love songs, a sparse film showing a mother's pregnant belly, a man's throat. A tortured dancer, pinned in a hard-edged spot, dances as if forever on a steadily speeding treadmill. Tiring, repetitive phrases accumulate. Unexpectedly, sympathy finally arises for someone caught in the grip of a difficult life.

Julyen Hamilton's *40 Monologues* was like being taken for a ride. No need to specially watch for anything in this pre-edited stream-of-consciousness movement and dialogue. His art of movement non-sequitur used physical latitude that would amuse fans of old John Cleese-type word association football games. It was probably in that same wave of innovation 30 years ago that his technique developed, on the contact improvisation platform, fused in his case with more established modern techniques. These days he moves and talks with the facility and impeccable timing of a well-practiced comic.

On a similar 'contacterly' platform, Jennifer Monson's work, *Lure* was far less

strained by early modernist vocabularies. Her strength and fluidity revealed glimpses and passages of tricky sensibility, of magical ticklishness. Sometimes the sea, its myths and enticements manifested. She stepped through waves of piquant suggestion, continuous currents of shifting sensibility. Dynamics grew and abated. She gathered her energy and hurled herself in belly flops to the floor, or else engaged with feathery and evasive wisps of tiny paper sails which rode on her breath.

New work rarely springs from nothing. Russell Dumas' and Lucy Guerin's works *The Oaks Cafe*—*Traces 1* and *Robbery Waitress on Bail* shared a stylistic linearity given vigour and depth by webs of allusion. If, as Dumas says, ballet, like most hybrid arts, is sterile, *The Oaks Cafe Project* seemed to assert that the accumulated contributions of individuals (Sally Gardiner, Trevor Patrick, Pauline de Groot, Catherine Stewart), because



Jennifer Monson

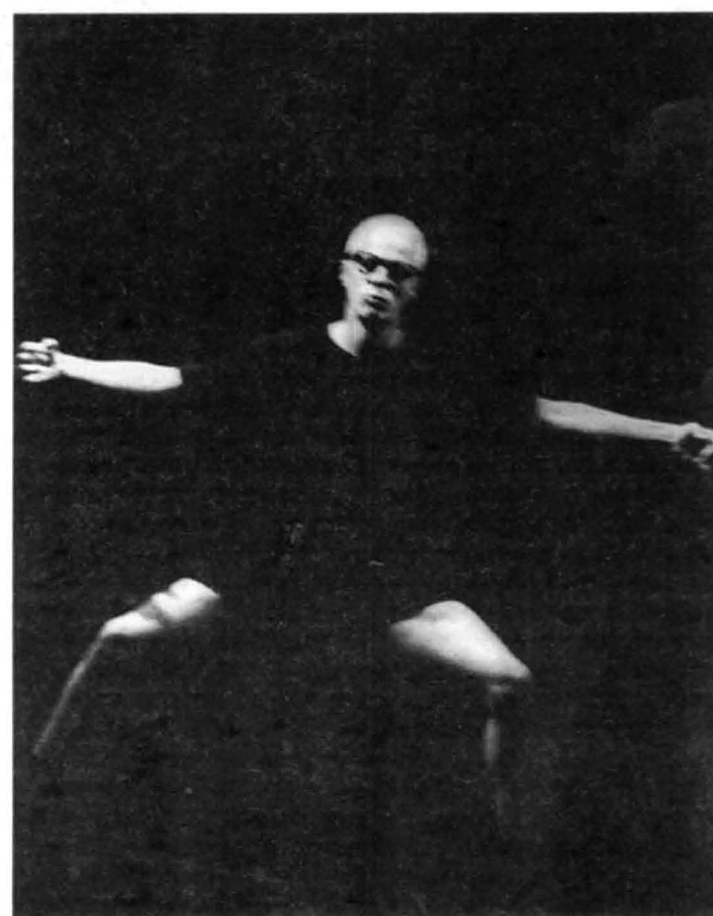
Heidrun Löhr

Thrown into prominence are a group of contemporary Australian artists defined by this same theatricality: Meryl Tankard, Graeme Murphy, Stanton Welsh, Gideon Obarzanek, Paul Mercurio—all with European balletic pedigrees falling clearly on the right side of well-worn tradition.

For reasons unspecified, there are few developed references in the exhibition to other non-balletic dance traditions practiced in Australia for generations. Early Modernists are given little more than glancing recognition: the odd TasDance and One Extra poster. Neither is there material from more recent visits of, say, Steve Paxton, whose work has inspired generations of dancers in Australia. There's an awkwardness in the way that Indigenous Australian dance is barely accommodated within the body of the exhibition.

Can interesting, successful dance be conceived of as more than commercially viable entertainment? Might different understandings of the body and dance

collaboration', I wondered, without denigrating such enterprises, where Sydney Dance Company would be without the public charisma of Graeme Murphy. Simultaneously, even from within this 'cultist' mentality, contemporary economic argument requires that singular innovative artistic vision be smoothed out by less problematic, consumable, easily-toured, blander 'international' fare. In the case of Western European dance, you're always in reassuringly familiar terrain, knowing how to talk, what values to acclaim. One talks about a certain style, extreme physicality and virtuosity. Dancers can travel all over the world and all partake of this same discourse. Perhaps this is what Robin Grove referred to, when discussing classical tradition in the 21st century, as "the high democracy of this art, where everyone is king". And he wasn't just talking about ballet, but about a classicism in which one apportions "harmonious lines in an internal coherence", a notoriously and meticulously



Jon Burt

Heidrun Löhr

of their particular relationships with Dumas' artistry within their own layered experience, can suggest ways of escaping such perceived aesthetic inertia.

Lucy Guerin's allusions perhaps highlighted an uneasy relationship between Australian/American and European escapist imagery, throwing together bland journalistic accounts of a *Pulp Fiction*-like restaurant theft story with the angst-ridden world-weariness of say Anne Teresa De Keersmaker's women, who show their legs and nickers with a familiar double-edged indifference.

Lines of movement inquiry can become inert behind stylistic facades. *Butoh Product* (de Quincey/Lynch Performance Union) refers to 'traditional' Butoh, which, having been engendered in revolt, can only continue to exist by undercutting and shattering its own halo-effect, so that innovation cannot become canonised. The artists set up scenes of serious intent—'performer', 'singer', 'dancer', 'guest', 'audience' and then proceeded to expose their flimsiness. An on-stage filming later revealed a rearrangement of the same performance elements, delivering quite a different version of events.

Martin Hughes did not deal well with the familiar technical skills of straight contact improvisation. Helen Clarke-Lapin, his highly-skilled partner, might have taken this dance much further on her own, or with musician Ion Pierce, without losing that vital sense of physical negotiation, the *raison d'être* of contact, and without becoming lost in the look.

It's a big ask of any one artist to delve into totally unknown material, as Tony Osborne may have tried to do in *the velvet ca*. The results, for an audience expecting refinement at least, could be construed as

• continued next page

• from previous page

adventurous, if undeveloped and fairly yukky as the dancer dredged up his psychic child to play with.

A duet which did not lack refinement was *Duet from Trio* choreographed by Ros Warby with Helen Mountfort (cellist). Warby's as sensitive as a delicately boned, two-footed creature can be, her movement almost disappearing in an ecstasy of sentience. In this vein too was Alice Cummins' *Lullaby*, where simple, sometimes foetal movements seemed cradled in an adult text. The sound of her words soothed a difficult transition from the familiar to the unknown, like rocking soothes a baby. *Six Variations on a Lie* didn't work as well in this cavernous space as it did in its more intimate home venue. There, performers formed a sparse and elegant quartet, an ensemble of soloists (dancer Rosalind Crisp, singer Nikki Heywood, sound artist Ion Pierce, and visual artist James McAllister). In *The Performance Space*, without the focus and cohesive physical relationships that confinement produced, the four seemed to wander alone.

Jon Burt and Alan Schacher are both comedians, perhaps of different sorts. In *Cars, TVs and Telephones*, Burt was a gangly, fashionably nerdish but charming kind of guy, whose understated-yet-sexy chat about household appliances to the accompaniment of funky music and articulate movement, made this work totally watchable. In *trace elements/residual effects* Alan Schacher, working in caricature, tried to make visible his gnarled and inexplicable life in a dusty Central Australian landscape. His movement captured parched, twisted branch, dry reptilian skin, and a lost, alien and absurd human, in what started and finished as funny and moving; but fell into a hole in the middle.

Helen Herbertson, in a strange excerpt from her full-length *Descansos*, was revealed in less sympathetic light (and



The Performance Union

shadow) as a lone, almost comic figure, without the dignity and stature which characterised the original work. Shelley Lasica (*Square Dance Behaviour—Part 6/version 4*) spent a lot of time taping padding under her costume. If her comments referred to 'embodiment', or shape and line and their interpretation by an audience, the 'deformities' seemed to make absolutely no difference at all. A stronger statement might have been to simply leave the stage after the padding had been strapped on. No dancing at all. Leyline Co's comment on the facade of clothing and appearance was no more compelling, despite (or because of) the high-heeled *déshabille* of the two dancers as they pretended to clamber unbecomingly along parallel catwalks.

During the second weekend (March 28–29), the *antistatic* forums opened

appropriately with Libby Dempster ('Ballet and its Other') discussing the negative 'otherness' attached to non-balletic forms which, by default, are defined within the binary opposition which ballet sets up. Dance is either ballet or not ballet. Her paper was complemented by Russell Dumas' explication of the way in which traditional European practice has defined all Australian practices in one way or another within this inescapable binary construct. With its persuasive employment of all the theatrical forms—stage design, lighting, music, set, costumes etc—it provides a kind of inscription to the mind and muscles. Unbeknownst to many practitioners, choreographic practice in Australia is situated as an art by way of its association with this inscription, the ballet trained body. So for Dumas it becomes irrelevant whether it's deployed by MTV, musical comedy,

Gideon Obarzanek, Meryl Tankard or Graeme Murphy, because what you're seeing is a dancer trained in a regime, and the authority of this dancer's presence is the outwardness of the display. Other traditions too, various manifestations of Expressionist angst, Butoh, 'new' dance practices, are paraded as innovative, but then put within this theatrical context, which simultaneously invigorates the relationship with classical tradition, while suppressing any consciousness of that relationship.

Russell Dumas outlined a different choreographic lineage: the early German Expressionist school of Laban, Wigman and Hanya Holm, having developed as an oppositional practice to European balletic tradition, escaped to 1930s America, and being full of the angst of that position, invigorated a different kind of cultural stance—one which is traceable to that country's foundation, a rejection of these European values, and one which did not develop in opposition to the European balletic tradition. It defined itself in terms of independence, national pride, the rhetoric of which, noted Libby Dempster, Americans have felt able to work to their own ends in a variety of ways.

Dumas' intention was not to deride Australian choreographers—despite his comment that "this is indeed the land of the dance Demidenkos"—or to persuade us to emulate the American model. Rather, he suggested that by being able to cite our cultural references, understand our historical precepts, and recognise our relationship within that tradition, we might infuse life and real innovation into an otherwise derivative national choreographic enterprise.

Dance People Dance, National Library of Australia, curator Dr. Michelle Potter; National Dance Critics Forum: Dance: What Next? Who Says So? April 26; antistatic, *The Performance Space*, Sydney March 21–April 4

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A third force

Murray Bramwell on Simone Clifford's *Fast Editing*

Adelaide based Simone Clifford's current program of work, *Fast Editing*, is part of the Festival Centre Trust's *Made to Move* season. Formerly a dancer with ADT (Australian Dance Theatre) during Jonathan Taylor's artistic directorship in the early 80s, Clifford went on to work in Jiri Kylian's Nederlands Dans Theater for five years.

Fast Editing consists of two works: a new piece titled *Reluctant Relics*, created in October and November of last year and *Chasing Chambers*, a work begun in London in 1994 and completed with ArtsSA development grants in 1996.

Working with a group of seven dancers (six females and one male), a number of whom have come through the Centre for The Performing Arts dance program in Adelaide, Clifford has brought together what promises to be a third force in dance in a city already graced with the talents of Meryl Tankard's ADT and Leigh Warren's company. Clifford's work is not only distinctive but sufficiently familiar and accessible to engage young audiences—like the crowd who responded enthusiastically to the Friday night performance I attended.

The opening piece, *Reluctant Relics*, begins in complete silence with a solo dancer standing on one leg while raising the other to waist level, clasping it in her hands and swivelling around. Her arms are raised and then lowered along with her whole torso. It requires an acrobatic poise the dancer appears not quite to possess and it lends the movement an oddly poignant vulnerability. In another movement the dancer drops to the floor, raising her legs gauchely before turning on to her stomach and raising her rump to inch slowly across the stage. It is, again, unguarded, a stolen moment, erotic but innocent. We are intrigued but the gaze is not compromised. We have caught a human glimpse, literally an unthinking moment.

The silence continues as the soloist joins the male dancer for a classically inflected duet. Then, like emergent chrysalises, the remaining company moves slowly across the stage on their backs, propelled by raising their knees and sliding in unison like strange solipsistic figures in those George Tooker paintings where human figures yearn to connect but are separated by cells and compartments like so many pale bees in a hive.

The work strengthens as Catherine Oates' percussion, performed live on the stage, begins to insinuate itself into our hearing. The tentative scrapes and cymbal strokes give way to a steadier beat and with it the performers develop a fluency and harmony of movement—like stepping from a distracted inner world into a socially ordered one. Oates' beat grows more insistent and segues into a mesmeric

barrage from New York ensemble Bang on a Can.

Lit strongly from the wings in Geoff Cobham's design, the dancers are momentarily soaked in a stripe of white light over their faces and shoulders only to have the signature reds and blues resume. The rite ends abruptly and soloist Alissa Bruce returns to restate several of the opening figures to the haunting sounds of Evan Ziporyn's work for bass clarinet, *Tsmindao Ghmerto*.

Simone Clifford describes *Reluctant Relics* as a pivotal work in her development. She abstracts it by suggesting it is "a work about perspective and perceptions of mind". Her comments are cryptic, but she elaborates: "I kept saying to the dancers, 'You don't need to try to perform the work to the audience, but rather concentrate on your own commitment and meaning and the audience will then observe you.'"

Chasing Chambers is a more external work but also a pleasing counterpoint, an exhilarating second course in *Fast Editing*'s appealingly succinct 54-minute running time. Built around Steve Reich's chamber work for strings and voice, *Different Trains*, *Chasing Chambers* is lit with a row of white spots set low along the back of the stage, the performers dressed in black pedal pants and black anklets. Moving in staccato fashion they could be a eurhythmics class in 30s Berlin, the white light licking over them as triumphs of physical culture. But as Cobham's light mellows, so the movement becomes more playful and humanised. Just as suddenly the vigorous strings in Reich's infectious composition create a flurry of Chattanooga choo-chooing, energised by a row of vertical spots sidestepping over the dancers as they take their seats near Track 29.

Simone Clifford's work is an interesting mix of classical fluency and idiosyncratic personal expression. The contrast between the self-conscious, almost ungainly *Reluctant Relics* and the exuberant facility of *Chasing Chambers* is refreshing. The choice of accompaniment is also interesting. Reich's work may be, for some, not just last year's model but a rather unfashionable exhumation. Perhaps it is the refreshing youthfulness of both the dancers and their audience that reminds me that everything is always new to those who are coming along next. Clifford's work has integrity and wit and it is building valuable bridges. I hope their plans for a regional tour come to pass.

Fast Editing, choreographed by Simone Clifford, *The Space*, Adelaide Festival Centre, May 1-10

A full dance card

Virginia Baxter previews a new life for One Extra and Sue Healey's *Suite Slip'd*

Annette Shun Wah, Chair of the Board of the One Extra Company, believes the secret of longevity is adaptability. As she stepped into the spotlight at the very showbiz launch of the company's new season at The Seymour Centre, she announced that the Board had taken a long hard look at the way the company serves the dance community and meets audience expectations and consequently adapted the position of Artistic Director to Executive Producer. This decision follows a trend in senior appointments in performing arts companies (see Eleanor Brickhill's article in *RealTime* 17). This Board's brief to their EP is "to guide the artistic vision of the company in a program which offers possibilities to a range of independent artists—choreographers and dancers as well as designers, musicians and visual artists, brings in new audiences and presents attractive opportunities for new funding partners". A very full dance card indeed even for the energetic and confident EP, Janet Robertson.



One Extra Company, *Suite Slip'd*

The institutional architecture of the York Theatre was transformed into an unusually moody and intimate setting for the launch in which the audience of dancers, arts bureaucrats and well-wishers shuffled conversationally to light lounge music. Janet Robertson spoke from the seats accompanied by backing vocals and video clips. She quoted from *Culture, Difference and the Arts*—"Innovation is a dialogue between tradition and possibility"—before elaborating on her plans to build on the twenty-one year history of the One Extra Company founded by Kai Tai Chan with a season of works by some of our brightest choreographic sparks.

Reflecting her own background, Robertson sees the featured work as being highly theatrical and speaks passionately of One Extra's firm commitment to dance that questions and reflects Australian culture. The season begins in June-July at The Performance Space with Sue Healey choreographing a new version of her work

Suite Slip'd which premiered in Canberra when she was artistic director of Vis A Vis. One Extra's invitation offers her a rare opportunity to re-think and extend a work. In October-November the company presents *Two*, a double bill of two new works from Lucy Guerin and Garry Stewart to be performed in the York Theatre at the Seymour Centre.

In *Suite Slip'd*, Sue Healey begins with the movement patterns and demeanours of 17th century French courtly dance—"But don't expect a period piece", says Janet. The dance suites are the impetus for more contemporary explorations. Rather than using a conventional theatrical framework, Sue Healey is creating a work in which performance structure and character spring from the movement itself. The dancers, Philip Adams, Michelle Heaven, Nicole Johnson, Luke Smiles and Sue Healey move from tightly interwoven ensembles into spacious solos and duets. Music by Darren Verhagen is as slippery as the movement, veering from Handel to noise. Costumes

and design are by recent NIDA graduates Michelle Fallon and Damien Cooper. One Extra has plans for a tour of *Suite Slip'd* to regional New South Wales in 1998. Sue Healey will also take the work to Auckland and in February to the Dance Space Project in New York.

One Extra's main program is supplemented by an Affiliate Artists program which invites artists to use the resources of the company as a place to explore work with other artists and as a venue to show new work in development. The impressive list of affiliates includes choreographers Kate Champion, Rosetta Cook, Bernadette Walong and Garry Stewart, lighting designer Damien Cooper, dancers Lisa Ffrench and Felice Burns and stage designer Eamon D'Arcy. As well as strengthening links with the Centre for Performance Studies at Sydney University and the University of Western Sydney's Dance Department, the company will institute a series of schools-based workshops. Importantly, One Extra is also in the final stages of securing a home base as company-in-residence at The Seymour Centre.

Formalities over, Annette Shun Wah and Janet Robertson sashayed onto the dancefloor to begin their dialogue of possibilities. They had no shortage of partners in an air of genuine excitement and celebration. Janet Robertson has come up with a program that is ambitious for artists, integrating new collaborations and connections with institutions, with clear goals for developing audiences and with a theatricality that builds on the tradition of Kai Tai Chan's One Extra.

Cheek in progress

There are times when what we see in performance or visual art speaks more about us as witnesses than it does about the artist. So it seemed for me with *Ricochet*, the latest work presented by Perth-based independent contemporary dance company Physical Architecture is Dancing at Canberra's Choreographic Centre. The bureaucratic game is the subject here, explored and teased out in all its nightmarish incarnations.

There is a worshipping of false gods to open the work, as six power-suited women move through the space, each carrying a different plastic icon on a platter—toy car, Barbie's couch and taut Ken doll. A confession-of-sorts to the plastic demi-gods gets the piece going, and the momentum is maintained.

Running towards us, stomping, marching, sometimes bouncing, slapping the floor, vertical lines in the space, backwards and forwards. Voices hang in the air, almost tangible, but more often creating a layering of sound with Lee Bradshaw's original sound composition. There's mention of 'quality assurance' and a meeting about 'how to cope with change'. The text sits remarkably well in all this, set against the pace of the movement in one section and mirroring it in the next.

Choreographer/Artistic Director Tamara Kerr has also drawn on mask work—a result of the developmental creative process that a residency at the Choreographic Centre affords—and it is effective. Twisted, exaggerated expressions with lips absurdly distorted. Lunging towards us, declaring, "make my day" and "kiss my arse", the women play up their roles oh so deliciously.

Ricochet is noisy, manic and energetic. It is also a tongue-in-cheek examination of the juggling game of women's goals and desires in the corporate world.

Julia Postle

Ricochet, Physical Architecture is Dancing, *The Choreographic Centre*, Canberra, April 19

Fieldworks works the room

What I wanted, more than anything, for this piece of work was a clearer commitment to abstraction in its own terms. All of the elements of the work—the dancers, the choreography, the engagement of music to movement, us sitting there in an implausible performance space, were diminished for me through the application of narrative. I wanted to honour these parts of the sum, to follow the lines offered up through the dancing bodies, through the very idea of that hotel dining room being the space to have generated the work. I have been in enough old buildings made into museum sites to know about the layers of story, traces left behind. I wanted to be allowed to do some of that work of interpretation myself without the imprint of storytelling.

Aside from that interpretive space I yearned for, the work with all of its leaning, its support and withholding, of passion and its repercussions, was pretty satisfying. To start with, the dancers were fine and spirited, making dramatic the otherwise prosaic space. Paul O'Sullivan, Setefano Tele, Jane Diamond, Shelley Mardon. In solo and in often fiery relationships, the register of passionate gestures and movement was always engaging, as long as it wasn't trying to illustrate words (ban the words!). There was some deeply sexy choreography here, bodies slamming around in quite a charge. An encounter between the two men was a particularly thrilling, physical delight.

I don't want to deny dancers their voices, but the eloquence of their movement surpassed all story lines offered here. Fieldworks continues to attract fine performers, and the collaborative approach of making work is also to be admired. The inclusion of blues musician Ivan Zar to provide what sounded like an improvised guitar and harmonica track was another delight.

Terri-ann White

I Lean on You, You Lean on Me, directed by Jim Hughes, *Fieldworks Performance Group*, Old Peninsula Hotel, Maylands, Perth. April 1997



Photographer Sandy Edwards was invited to Indonesia by Russell Dumas, an Australian choreographer who has a long association with the distinguished Balinese choreographer and musician, I Made Djimat, a master in the classical Batuan style of Balinese dance. In the village of Batuan, the most treasured classical dance—Gambuh, Topeng, Calonarang and Wayang Wong—still flourishes and is an integral part of temple ceremonies. In preparation for a forthcoming film on I Made Djimat, Sandy photographed the master preparing a young pupil for his first public performance in which he would play an old man.

On another night, under a full moon, she photographed the Rejang, a dance performed by women each night over three to four months of the year to ward off illnesses associated with the rainy season. In the public square at Batuan village, the women dance in lines, moving slowly in elegant, tai-chi like movement towards the male gamelan orchestra. Children move through the space, life goes on around the dancing.

Some of the photographs were exhibited during The Performance Space's *antistatic* festival in the Dance Exchange Sydney studio. Some made small dances on the wall. Others were displayed on drying racks, some spilled onto the floor, awaiting assemblage, in progress. In another part of the room, videos showed the dances in more complete form. The audience entered the white studio through an ornate Balinese stage curtain.

Virginia Baxter



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Locked Stationery pad

crop circles info 2

>>> rye. Grains of truth, bread of life, noxious weeds. Soon it will all be cotton balls to store retouched memories of places never seen, things never been.

Document: A perfectly formed circle carved clockwise into the brittle corn.

Version: Experts warn of a virus from beyond the stars. Are you alive? Are you dead? Are you a fictional character? Are you Australian? Are you notorious?

Version: The case for the white picket defence. I remember lying on a table. They looked at me through big round eyes. They poked, they prodded. Why don't they go back to their own planet. They're stealing our children, our memories.

Version: A ute, a rope, a plank, a soythe, a mate. We'll make the city come to us.

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Book review

Common Knowledge
by Jan McKemmish,
published by Harper Collins, 1996
ISBN: 0207 18915-3

When I rolled up my sleeves and pulled on my RM Williams boots to stride across the dusty expanses of Jan McKemmish's bucolic saga, it was with a certain grim determination. My surface loafahed smooth by years of urban dwelling, I had to call upon the subcutaneous reserves of my own rural past. It is going to be a long haul, I thought, arid and flat. I would have to drive straight through without stopping. There would be no poetic oases to linger in, no philosophical forests to wander in, just stark realism as far as the eye could see. *Common Knowledge* is an historical tale focused on the lives of the people of Corella, a small farming community in Victoria. It claimed to deal with the great events of the 20th century: war, the Depression and modernity. But how, I wondered. In Corella the world would have to be gleaned from ABC Radio broadcasts filtered through the wireless; through staccato telegrams and the wide-eyed tales of pilgrims returned from the big smoke.

My initial expectations seemed to be confirmed as the first story began with its descriptions of sunburnt plains, sheep grazing, and strong billy tea. Even the story, brutal and bizarre, of loggers going mad on toxic potato liquor and ending up in a violent orgy under the shade of a billabong tree, did nothing to improve everything that is bleak and gruelling about Australian realism.

My interest was first stirred by the splitting of a single narrator into two. The

simple, unsophisticated historical narrative began to evolve with the device of double narration. Leonie Smith and Anne Mack step up to tell similar but different tales of their ancestors and backgrounds from Corella. Their stories intersect at times and run parallel at others. Then these two narrators, who remain the central roots of the story, occasionally split into other tributary narrators. A returned soldier tells the tale of his proposal to a strapping country lass, and of grubbing out a living on the land. A spinster schoolteacher recalls her displacement when she tries to escape her past by seeking out the rural isolation. New tendrils of the story begin to sprout. One narrator leaves their story hanging, only to have it picked up by another. Not only do the narrators change but also the forms of narration. Stories unfold through postcards, poems, diaries, letters and shopping lists. Stories criss-cross, spread out, develop a rhizomatic structure rather like Kikuyu grass. That is, the stories move outwards rather than going deeper.

Another saving grace of *Common Knowledge* is that it leaves Corella. Warming as I was to the hardbitten local rustics, I was eager to see new places. Anne Mack and Leonie Smith, unbeknownst to each other, leave Corella to see the world, or at least London in the swinging sixties, and Melbourne, if not swinging at the time, at least shimmying its hips a little. While their ancestors pioneered a foreign landscape, they become the sexual pioneers in smoky bars where women with blunt bobs exchange glances and kiss like grown ups. It is when Anne Mack meets Leonie Smith, she tells us, that she begins writing. Theirs is a literary relationship, an affair



with storytelling, history, coincidence and revelation.

Despite being a glorybox stuffed with relationships and weddings, there is surprisingly little romance or passion in *Common Knowledge*. All of the narrators seem like relatives who come from the same pragmatic stock. "Love. How did it

go?...Something about her, which I know is only availability and particular physical attributes." The novel is populated by stoical, taciturn men and sturdy-legged women, braving the elements and shutting down the more sensitive nerve endings of their personalities. Their stories are told through barely opened mouths, they squint at each other. They do everything to shut out the vastness about them, the infinity which threatens chaos. Making themselves hard, they also become brittle; murder and madness hover like vultures at the borders of their histories.

My journey through *Common Knowledge* was not as bleak as I had predicted. It had a lightness and pace that was surprising. It had a generosity. I felt like I had been invited into people's houses for cups of strong milky tea and slices of pink-iced Chelsea bun. I enjoyed listening to the blunt accents of taciturn men and the good humour of the women with sturdy legs. I admired them for

finding peace in passionless moments. I felt my neck prickle at the presence of a brutal sexuality alongside their tender domesticity. But I knew I couldn't stay long or a lassitude would creep over me. I had had enough provincial hospitality to last me for a while. I get my kicks from champagne.

Annemarie Lopez

(Un)common writing, unforeseen consequences

Novelist Jan McKemmish interviewed by Maryanne Lynch

Imagine a broad Australian accent slowed down to a drawl. Picture a window through which one can see a wide river coursing its way from delta to ocean. Two dogs, rambling architecture, a razor-sharp mind. This is the residence of Jan McKemmish, contemporary writer, primarily of novels, and one of the many places she has called home.

*McKemmish, who also runs the MA in Creative Writing course at the University of Queensland, is a tricky person to pin down on 'home'. Most of her work explores its possible meanings in terms of personal, social and (at times) national identity and in a setting that is always and unmistakably drawing its sense from the Australian continent, both as construct and geographical feature. Through formal experimentation, the use of such 'incidental' documentation of everyday life as shopping lists and postcards, and that unmistakable Aussie drawl, McKemmish has written out various configurations of contemporary Australian experience. Her work has been called postmodern but is not easily categorisable, as our discussion about her latest work, *Common Knowledge* (HarperCollins, 1996), and other matters revealed.*

ML I see your work as inquiring into national, social and personal identity, and at the same time very coolly ambiguous, which doesn't mean an absence of compassion. Instead, there's a distinct lack of psychologising, unlike much contemporary fiction.

JM I'm not primarily interested in myself in writing. Or the self. I am interested in myself in the world and in a sort of writing that engages with the world constantly. Which doesn't mean you can't engage with yourself. But I'm interested in identity that is social. I'm not that interested in national identity; it seems to be a diminishing idea. I've always been interested in the international, the relatedness of places and ideas, of literatures.

ML For me, psychological narrative is often unconsciously part of a larger ideology about individualism in Western society. Not that there's no validity in it, but...

JM I've always been writing in opposition to that idea of [the psychological narrative] being the only thing that writing can be. And it started off partly as a response to the sort of dominance in early feminist writing of personal stories, of identity politics. Although it was those early feminist actions, those recuperations of the social into the personal, that actually allowed the intervention I've attempted. I was probably fairly fortunate in writing against a dominant feminism and yet trying to write within a feminist aesthetic.

What I'm really interested in is how writing tells stories and how it is possible to tell things that are not focused on the 'I' or fitted within conventional modes of storytelling. If you tell a conventional story conventionally, the room within that story tends to get cramped. I'm interested in finding other ways of narrating things so that what gets written about, how it is told, moves the social into the personal, shifts between central

and marginal positions (often within the one character), and inhabits contradictions (the many, not the one).

*In *Common Knowledge* the narrators are lesbians, sometime lovers, and thus generally marginal, but they own the telling of the narrative and they travel through their lives into middle-class and managerial positions. Their lesbianism is not the main story, just a fact, almost coincidence, but it is this coincidence that allows the stories to be told. Their identities are not structured primarily through their sex life, because the book is about place and family and memory and storytelling. Their identities are only revealed in as much as they are part of the story of the book, which is partly about how stories are told.*

ML Can you identify some common features in your writing? I see a preoccupation with knowledge, power, landscape, as well as the refusal of the centrality of the 'I'.

*JM In the last two novels (*Common Knowledge* and *Only Lawyers Dancing*, Angus and Robertson, 1992) you can see the use of the dual narrator. It's an attempt to at least allow the ability to move into that space of showing how stories are told, collected, assembled, reflected upon. The first novel [*A Gap in the Records*, Sybylla, 1985] has a fairly unconventional heroic figure and structure. The other two novels are more conventional but the intention's the same.*

ML There seems to be a layering of information, detail, the grand and the inconsequential, in an almost detached, yet carefully constructed way.

*JM There are three elements to this strategy. One is how you make the reader aware of what you're writing—what you're attempting to do. Actually invite them into the text. If you do that, it's fairly obvious that the reader has to say, "Oh gosh! I have to think about writing". The second thing is I always want to give space to the domestic detail—the daily life. In the first book it was theoretical, the idea that daily life and the accumulation of things, the scenery, will throw up multiple narratives. There are different layers of different events. Different words and different actions. The third thing about that layering or level of detail is about how you build up in prose fiction stories that don't harken to nostalgia or romance, or the ugly side. In *Common Knowledge*, a book about the rural and thus prey to just such an either/or, I wanted to step away from these two types of fiction. I actually attempted to reach that narrative 'coolness' to make some other fiction possible.*

ML You obviously are informed by various discourses about writing, about narrative, and yet I feel your concern about the materiality of 'things' and your participation in a social politics.

*JM I'm really interested in finding out how things are and work, and what I call 'their consequences' are, and often in writing—and this is something I'm more interested in now—it's the unforeseen consequences in things that I'm interested in and finding. With *Common Knowledge*, the unforeseen consequence*

*of a whole host of decisions and lives and everything is the destruction of the farming land. And it was all done for various ideological and other good and bad reasons, but this happens—things occur and we have to know about them. And this is true of feminism and writing and academia and postmodernism in theatre and all sorts of things. You know. Smoking. Dogs. All that stuff. I think probably now that's my really big interest. And that's what I'm calling my next collection of writing—*Unforeseen Consequences*.*

ML Speaking of unforeseen consequences, have you found that there has been much exchange between your writing praxis and your teaching.

JM Yes. I have a very privileged teaching job. The people I work with are close to being my peers in a number of aspects. Every single week I can go up to my classes and talk about writing. I work on my students' manuscripts—and I work quite intensively on big manuscripts over several drafts so it means I have to keep revising and rethinking and being able to restate ideas about structure (each work has its own structure) and have to articulate over and over again for each manuscript the idea that the structure must derive content. And having to engage with those issues over and over again on other people's writing is very informative of my own.

On the other hand, I find that my own writing I keep quite separate from the teaching. I never teach it. I never show it to the students. I never—or very rarely—talk about it. You never get the sort of discussion going about your own work that you can get going about another person's work. However, I'm not adverse to saying "When I wrote this..." or "My experience of writing is this".

ML What approach do you take to your course?

JM I take a very structured approach to it. I set up a structure of seminars and workshops and writing exercises and reading, and I make them all do it and they all do, in some way or another, and they all produce great stuff, and it's always a real surprise. We don't read a huge amount of fiction as exemplary text; we read a lot of essays and articles and bits of fiction. The philosophy that underlies the course is that writers learn from writing and from other writers. The majority of students find fellow writers in that group that they work with—they work on each other's work; they share reading; they ring each other up and talk; they meet outside of classes—which is really important because that is what they have to take away from the university. Some sense of being a writing community.

ML Did you create the course?

JM I had a total free hand. The only thing that was imposed upon me was the requirement that the students also write a 15,000-word critical essay, and I actually approve of that. You're in a university for a particular set of reasons which have to do with getting a deeper way, a deeper knowledge. And I think it's good that the students come out with at least two sorts of writing. I would like

it to be more, actually.

ML What do you think more generally about the phenomenon of Creative Writing courses?

JM We had a big conference last year. It was the first conference of the Australian Association of Teachers of Writing in Universities, or something like that. There were hundreds of people there from all over Australia; it was one of the best conferences I've ever been to, and it was full of people who are writing and teaching...And the issues and the work which was presented there was of a really interesting and very high standard. It was academic, and some of it was not. It is probably one of the places where you can't do the job in a closed circuit. I think there are enough good people doing it and the differences are exciting.

I think too once upon a time we had a culture where there were lots of small presses and lots of stuff going on in the writing community that was really exciting and accessible to all sorts of people, and you could work hard and produce things. And that kind of got swamped by the mainstream publishers. So while you have a huge increase in the number of actual people writing out there, you have less contact between them, and I think, certainly for Queensland, I think one of the reasons people apply to come to these courses is to meet other writers and to work on producing their own work, and other people's work, in a way that they would once have done as their social and political activity.

ML Is this from where the impetus to create such courses has come?

JM I think it has come from an interest on the part of academics in writing, in ways of writing for themselves. They also look around and see that first-order production of text, that is, the novel, seems to happen whether they have anything to do with it or not and it's puzzling to them, so they step out.

ML And your own next step?

*JM *Common Knowledge* was the end of a cycle. I actually perceived of those [three] books as a set. And that's the end of that for me. I don't actually think I can go off and do a completely different sort of writing. If I go on writing fiction...it's very difficult to change your style often. But I'm certainly thinking and realising that it's the end of a writing project. You know how people talk about things, about their work in that way. I actually don't know what the story is—I think one would normally have begun with *Common Knowledge*, a 'sensible' novel, and ended up with *A Gap in the Records*. I did it backwards. I want to go back (or move on) to the original ideas I had when I began writing, about writing as action, about discontinuous narrative, about sources and voices and fragments and ideas and dialogues etc, that more experimental writing that I have tried to maintain in the novels against the pressures, the demands, of narrative...and have always discovered that it is the frame of the narrative that allows those fragments to flourish—now, that's a contradiction!*

Youth festival makeover

Mary Anne Hunter engages with the ambitions of Adelaide's *Take Over 97*

"A massive party. A 17-day celebration. Theatre, music, dance, technology, cyber arts, film, comedy, politics, dance parties, visual arts, bands, fashion, food, architecture." Programs with names like Arts Madd, Allwrite!, Convoy, 1st Site. "A platform for young people to question and reflect upon the world they live in." For people aged 3 to 26. The slick program promised it all: a festival to mark the "turning point for youth arts both in South Australia and nationally".

There were many individual performance-based highlights to Take Over 97, particularly for young adults: Linda Marie Walker's account of Doppio Teatro's *DJSquat* is testament to this (*RealTime* 18). So, too, Arena Theatre's *Autopsy* was an enormously popular performance with its intended audience (14 years and up) and succeeded where many others have faltered—suffice to say, it's easy to do bad internet theatre. *Autopsy* dealt with the experience of electronically-based communication in an intelligent, street-smart way. Directed by Rosemary Myers and Bruce Gladwin, *Autopsy*'s visual, aural and emotional onslaught left no room for a quiet think—both my Blur-devoted companion and I were left exhausted—but it had me punting on a return viewing.

The 1st Site program for emerging artists looked exciting, with the right verbal prompt, *unseen and deadly*. That aspects of the program were deadly in both senses of the word meant the program was a success: risky and innovative. The Insite cabaret night I attended did not pull the crowds, but perhaps a drafty circus tent on a chilly Adelaide evening had something to do with it.

Respectable Shoes by Patch Theatre Company featured the impressive voice of 17-year-old Heather Frahn and the musical talents of Mel Watson and Marty Wilson in a collaborative work about "youth culture and identity, grief and rock'n'roll". Devised by Dave Brown, Richard Tulloch, Ian McDonald and Lisa Philip-Harbutt, this was contemporary music theatre performed by young people for young people. More concert than theatre event, *Respectable Shoes* canonised the Doc Marten and Razer and Robbins, and unleashed an original score with irreverent tracks like *Daddy's a Wanker*. It may be a time-honoured tradition for polities and bureaucrats to periodically rave about young people as the vital future of the cultural industry. This production demonstrated that young people are also the now of that cultural industry: many are already competent and experienced artists in their own right.

There was also impressive performance programming for younger audiences—such as *The Fly* by Boatteater and Teater TT from Denmark, a country renowned for its consistently impressive professional theatre for young people; and Company Skylark's *Wake Baby*, commissioned for the 1996 Out of the Box Festival. *Wake Baby*'s wondrous elements of visual fantasy entranced its all-age audience, but it was particularly dismaying to see this Canberra-based company playing to an almost empty house. Even bribes could not get me a ticket for its season in Brisbane last year.

But the performance program was just one small aspect. *Take Over 97* was a grand organisational feat, and a big ask for

artistic director Nigel Jamieson, the creative strength behind Red Square, the 1996 Adelaide Festival's outrageously successful performance venue in the very heart of Adelaide Festival territory (both conceptually and geographically). Yet, what *Take Over 97* seemed to lack was its own central pulse. Spread over many days, many artforms, many ages and many programs, this national festival (with underwhelming national representation) struggled to generate a core vibe. Despite the individual gems, the overall deal left me searching for the elusive 'festival experience', the environment where, in general manager Carmel Dundon's words, "you don't just go to the show—you do a whole lot of other things, you're totally immersed" (interview with Paul Champion, *Lowdown* January, 1997).

Maybe I was simply at the wrong place at the wrong time, or perhaps the right place at the wrong time. But as I loitered with intent amongst the fete-like circus tents and teepees in Elder Park at various times during the day and night, I seemed to keep missing the party and maybe the point. But I was sure something was about to happen—the program told me so. The entirely convincing hype lured me to Capital City—the place where thousands of young people were to "take over" Adelaide—only to experience entirely unconvincing gado gado and repeated capture by earnest market researchers seeking my age, my stereotype and my projected economic worth to the great Festival State. These researchers' recurring surprise that I should be an interstate

visitor for this festival became a little unnerving—wasn't this meant to be the hot event on the Australian and international youth arts calendar, the Australian Festival For Young People? Even a scheduled companion event, the National Forum on Youth Performing Arts—the first since 1994—was cancelled due to lack of interest...or was it lack of time?

Perhaps the closest Take Over came to generating the 'festival experience' was between the daylight hours of 10 and 2 when primary school-aged children snaked amongst the tent city, and on the occasional nights when Blink, the 1st Site Festival Club was pumping, such as Black Night when young Indigenous bands 'took over'.

There are many months of innovative arts processes and creativity invested in this festival by young South Australians and by artists and artworkers. This makes *Take Over* an integral part of the Australian arts calendar; a vital opportunity for artists to showcase their work nationally. *Take Over*'s programming, publicity and collaborations with educational institutions were impressive, as were many individual events. But in attempting to establish an identity distinct from its community-based forerunner, the *Come Out* festival, perhaps the size, scope and ambition of *Take Over 97* overshot the mark. In an environment where young people are finally being recognised as the diverse artists, participants and audiences they are, it will only become more difficult to be everything to everybody.

Mary Ann Hunter is a Brisbane-based arts researcher, director and tutor in performance.

Welcome a bright world

Murray Bramwell attends Magpie2's opening in Adelaide, with the double header *Future Tense*

Magpie has returned. It now has a series number—like a software package, or an engine: Magpie2. Reconfigured by former State Theatre Company Executive Producer, Chris Westwood, the company has set aside its theatre in schools charter to provide theatre works with the 18 to 26-year-old constituency in mind. It is a big move and there are no guarantees. The post-secondary cohort is hardly a demographically defined group and they are often unified by what they *don't* like, and not the other way round.

Director Benedict Andrews and his creative associates have made a bold bid—not to please their peers by second guessing them—but by doing what all serious young insects should do: pleasing themselves first. For a start they have set up at the Queen's Theatre, historic relic of the colonial drama which, with its flaked lime walls and long use as an inner city car park, passes very respectably as an industrial ruin as well.

Andrews has also arranged for Dirty House and Mistress Sirena, high profile avatars in the club scene to run The Bunker for the duration of the *Future Tense* season. This is not opportunism—blue light discos by other means—but a plain recognition by the young director that the aesthetics (and the chemicals) of rave culture combine streams of influence from film, from postmodern text and from new media that are evident in contemporary performance also. Magpie2 is interested in renewing the claim for theatre as part of this cultural coalescence.

The director has chosen well, and uncompromisingly, uncovering two works any company in the country would be hard-



Frank Whitten, Nathan Page, *The Solitude of the Cotton Fields*

David Wilson

pushed to make a fist of. *Mercedes* by German playwright Thomas Brasch is a fractured narrative which echoes some of the events around the kidnapping and murder of Hanns-Martin Schlyer in Cologne in 1977. But the exact chronology of events and the players are ambiguous. Sakko, a former delivery driver for Mercedes Benz, is not so much downsized as atomised, reduced to counting Mercedes from a street corner. Oi, a young woman, co-conspirator, lost soul, succubus—who knows what?—taunts and tempts him, shares a sacrament of datura with him and helps him drive nails into the temples and knees of their unidentified hostage.

Designer Imogen Thomas uses the large performance space with cinematic flair.

Lit with huge sprays of sidelights by Geoff Cobham and Mark Pennington, the performers, assisted by astutely managed voice mikes, maintain a stillness, a studied dissociation which is riveting. The landscape is like that of a crummy Western—cattle bones and scrub, with bits of Mercs sticking out of the ground. Downstage right is one full size model, hood down, lights flashing, all mod cons for the Berlin badlanders.

As Sacco, Nathan Page, is a suitable case for treatment—the narrative is framed by the naming of 16 experiments with lugubrious announcements such as "The Experimental Subject: First Dialogue" and so on. He also convinces at a more naturalistic level. Rebecca Havey is excellent as Oi, creating a hotchpotch of Australian suburban slang and American movie cliché. Affectless and disingenuous she provokes and observes her feckless comrade. As the unnamed hostage, Frank Whitten radiates a terrible despair. His death speech—just as the last nail goes in—is as startling and incidental as Brueghel's fall of Icarus.

The second work, by French writer Bernard-Marie Koltes has the aromatic title *In the Solitude of the Cotton Fields*. It is a

dialogue between two strangers—one known as the Client, the other, the Dealer. As Andrews writes in his program notes, "Each speaks in vast aria like speeches about what it means to deal with each other, to fear each other and to need each other...language is used as a weapon, to probe, to protect, to subdue, to bargain, to lie, to betray and to strip".

Frank Whitten is hypnotic as the Dealer, unctuously conciliatory, temptingly reasonable, at turns kindly and menacing. As the Client, Nathan Page is a match for the game, except his character keeps watching the goal posts move. The two players circle and stalk each other across the vast stage, their voices muted but completely audible, Heuzenroder's soundtrack lightly agitating the exchange. Imogen Thomas's decor still includes the Mercs, now parked in rows. At the back of the stage is a large cloth which captures silhouettes of the actors.

Koltes' writing is poetic and compressed, the situation could be something from David Mamet or 'My Menacing Chance Meeting with Andre'. Benedict Andrews has found a fine text here—as when the Dealer says, like some mysterious tempter, "Speak it as though you were speaking to a tree or facing the wall of a prison or in the solitude of the cotton fields where you are out walking naked at night. Tell me without meeting my eye".

Future Tense is a creditable beginning for Magpie2 and for Benedict Andrews. It stakes a claim for new theatre in Adelaide that has already raised questions about accessibility and those fugitive fears about drama being too brainy. But Andrews has done his part, he has no need to defend his choices. It's not his fault if the future is tense. But we can thank him for making it this bright.

Future Tense, two plays directed by Benedict Andrews for Magpie2, Queen's Theatre, Adelaide, May 23–June 7

Fleshing out

Keith Gallasch questions performance principles in The Party Line's *Whet Flesh* with comments from director Gail Kelly

Narrative

The Party Line's *Whet Flesh* combines an elaborate physical telling with an investigator's voice-over that film-noirishly (with glorious stage techno-colour) evokes mystery—the search for an un-named life-and-death artefact. An initial exchange of bodily fluids, immediately symbolised by the mixing of drinks at a party setting (disembodied arms, hands, glasses), takes a group of vigorously sensual women into a nightmare of invasive and careless medical experimentation that can kill. Individuals fight back, the artefact object of medical science is named, the women live...or die. This is a performance work (a series of dynamically juxtaposed images) but it is also a sustained narrative. Other performance works you might let seep in, wash over, reflect on later. You feel compelled in *Whet Flesh* to tell the story to yourself because so many cues are narrational. But the images are discursive, often sustained long beyond the narrative moment; performers change personae and costume; simultaneous acts the length of an epic traverse demand synthesis. This is not radical disjuncture (the old standby), sometimes it's just plain discomfort. However, between first and last performances in a short season, the gap is reduced, images are sharper, brisker, voice-over more audible, performers manifest personae defined beyond the merely sensual and the fearful, and the noticeably young audience is more fascinated than distracted.

Gail Kelly *There was a lot of discussion about whether we wanted a narrative or not. We didn't want to do a journey, we wanted to do an investigation, and that's how the narrative emerged—in the process of creating the show. So we had an investigator, and suddenly Peta had to write a text for the investigator.*

Text and simultaneity

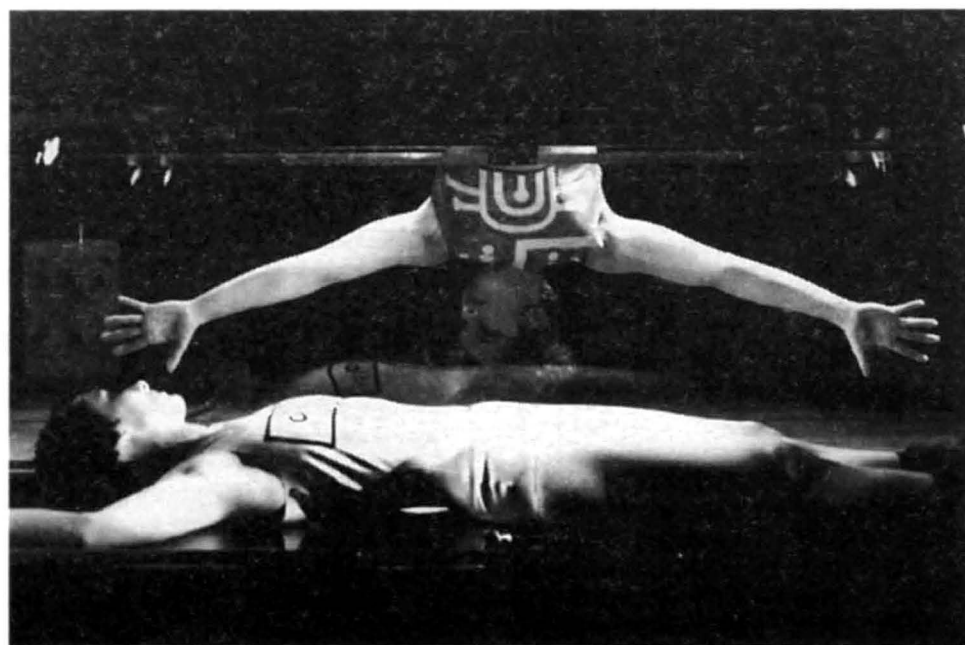
Peta Tait was the writer for *Whet Flesh*. This is a collaborative work and performance has marked itself out by being all those things that conventional theatre is not, including *not* serving the solo visions of playwrights. Doubtless she wrote the voice-over, which finally announces that the "artefact" is the Body. This was not news and certainly didn't meet the considerable narrative or intellectual expectations that had been built up—including the complexities offered by Linda Dement's projected female automaton that one of the performers tentatively engages with. Despite occasionally strong images, Tait's investigator voice-over text not only sounded in serious need of dramaturgical sharpening, but it was delivered almost deadpan with the speaker facing away from the audience. In this big traverse of a performing space who knew where the voice was coming from? The investigator's engagement with a bank of computer graphics (like vivid x-rays, mappings of women's bodies inside and out) that should have otherwise been critical to the show's meanings was blunted, even as she addressed them, climbed up and across them. In a highly choreographed show the climb seemed curiously unfocused (for an experienced performer) and had to compete with other stage actions. Equally, the images were devalued—the refusal to give them real focus might have been true to performance notions of simultaneity, but it denied them, yes, theatrical power and refused them a potential link with the voice-over. Juxtaposition without dialectic.

Gail Kelly *I think Peta would say as I would, the writing needs to meet the performance. In the same way the performer playing the investigator needs to*

*meet the bank of screens. In fairness to her she only had a day to work with it before the show went on. I sat there for ten nights seeing where the show could be sharper and faster. As for simultaneity, it's been a feature of my work. I like the audience to make choices and I'll keep doing it. But there are moments in *Whet Flesh* where I'd drop it now for the sake of the narrative and to give more space to the investigator.*

Personae

The physical assuredness of the performers—some of Australia's physical theatre best—was entirely appropriate. Their strength becomes the very strength that is threatened by science as they are reduced to laboratory specimens on a frightening glass and chrome table (replete with running water and gas burners), and one of their number is closed within it—an image of repugnant beauty. The strength is also lyrical as they dance on and over the table in acts of emotional and physical empathy that magically revived the sleeper within. However, narrative expectations were complicated by performer doublings (even triplings), especially late in the narrative where it was not clear who was ganging up on who and why—a performer is saviour one moment, an oppressor the next. Nonetheless, Angus Strathie's costuming helped distinguish between 'real' bodies (an impressive painterly latexed nakedness) and the scientists in their stiff plastic smocks. And more defined personalities, more grotesques,



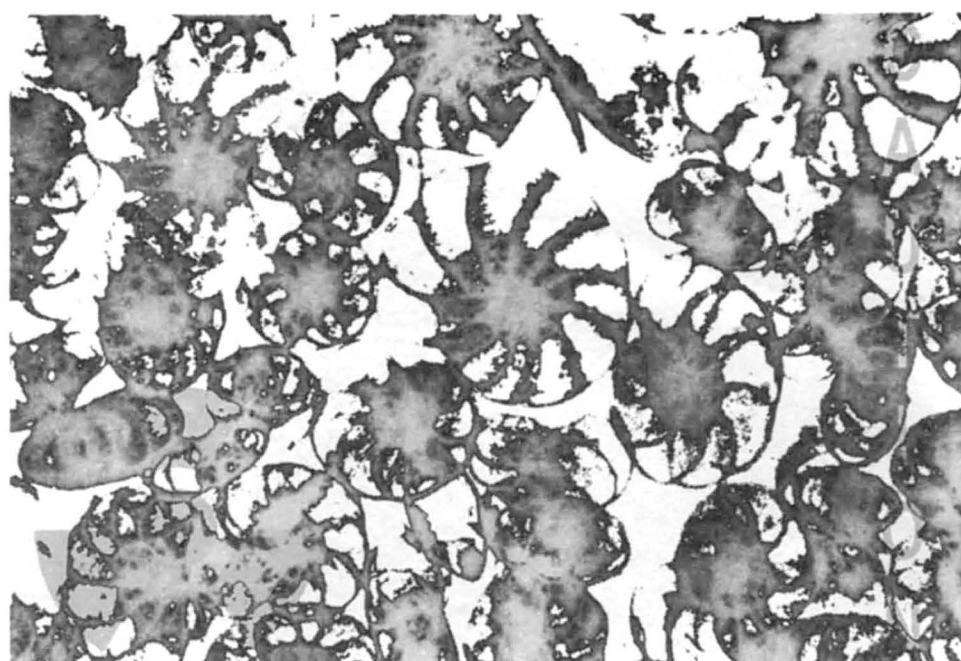
Barbara Clare (below) and Simone O'Brien

more focussed states of being had emerged in the last performance to help shape the overall work. We don't look for character development in performance, but each moment of a persona's realisation must be total, and that's not always easy without a single line to play in an evolving plot. I wanted ten performers, five wasn't enough in a work with these narrative and thematic ambitions.

Gail Kelly *One of the challenges of working with physical performers is that everything is invested in the body, that's their first concern. So to get differentiation, to get emotional performances is not always easy, but it happens. I'm always exploring what else the physical is capable of.*

Physical theatre

The Party Line's first work, *Appearing in Pieces*, was special for its break with physical theatre expectations. In it, physical theatre performers exploited stillness, slow movement and vocal strength. *Whet Flesh* puts the company firmly back in the vigorous physical theatre realm, no bad



Rea, Shell Virus

thing but problematic when too many episodes looked dangerously like set pieces and their sustained duration outweighed the intensity required of the dramatic moment. The best moments were those when a remarkable action flowed from the shape and telling of a scene rather than from overwrought choreographing or routine-based episodes (like the tossing of a body from one person to another one too many times). Save for the 'live' voice-over, no-one speaks, the focus is on bodies, the context is musical—again an over-abundance, non-stop wrap-around riches, though tempered by delicate passages and some distinctive scoring for live cello, guitar, glass harmonium, by hard-working sound artist Liberty Kerr. The music had its own physicality, not only in a driving dance pulse and melodramatic surges, but in

it (a bank of striking computer-graphic images from Rea, Linda Dement, Jane Becker; Dement's projected virtual woman). But any relationship between bodies and technology is uncertain. What does the virtual woman mean for these women—another technological threat? Whose creation is it in the narrative—a mad scientist's or a radical techno-feminist's? Well, it wasn't played as threat—rather as one of three simultaneous erotic couplings. The virtual woman is a powerful image and a witty one but its role is difficult to place. *Whet Flesh* oscillates between blunt didacticism and curious complexities.

Gail Kelly *We were trying to create ambivalent feelings about technology—the images on the screens are beautiful, they suggest a beautiful viral world. More important, we were saying that containment, that sterility is a fantasy, the body is not containable by science. So we presented a world soaked in disease and desire. We're not rejecting science, we're putting the body and sexuality back into it. And it's not a show about AIDS.*

Process

Whet Flesh is an impressive and wildly ambitious work. It would be tragic for its creators and potential audiences if it were to disappear from The Party Line repertoire. The artistic investment has been considerable and there is much that works, including some very funny material—dodgy lab work, a party turning into an all-in wrestling match. But it is one of those works that you 're-write' as you watch and that tells you something is wrong. This is the work of mature artists but it was created over a period of a mere six weeks. The short season was just enough to show its potential for tighter narrative, development of personae and real audience appeal. The problem of the relationship between performance and narrative is in fact the work's future strength.

Gail Kelly *I watched Club Swing's Appetite for three weeks in Edinburgh, so we had a long time to work on the emerging narrative. Similarly with The Dark for Rock'n'roll Circus. So I've developed high expectations of having the time to develop a work in performance. With *Whet Flesh* we've only begun.*

*Open City administered *Whet Flesh* but Keith Gallasch was not involved in the creation of the performance in any way.*

*The Party Line, *Whet Flesh*, directed by Gail Kelly, writer Peta Tait, lighting Efterpi Soropos, music Liberty Kerr, costumes Angus Strathie, movement dramaturg Janet Robertson; visual artists: Rea, Jane Becker, Linda Dement; performers: Stacey Callaghan, Terese Casu, Barbara Clare, Simone O'Brien, Celia White. The Performance Space, Sydney, May 1–9*

Technology

Even after a second viewing, a happier and more emotionally intense experience, I was struggling with the ideas the show demands we pay attention to. Women artists here challenge scientific and medical technology. They use their bodies to do it in an action thriller scenario—chases, fights, rescues, romance—with goodies (lesbian outlaws) and baddies (the scientists). As artists creating *Whet Flesh*, they use modern technology to do

Marty Cunningham and Karen Roberts, *Kaos World*

Corporeal chaos

Theatre engaging with academic discourse can leave me a bit cold; sometimes before you can say "gee whiz" you've been transported out of the theatre and into a rather irritating classroom. In *Kaos World* (a collaboration with scientist David Blair), Phil Morle and his Kaos crew managed to avoid the lecture by poetically hinting at complex scientific ideas via the dilemmas of characters. Morle problematizes technological notions (that the increasing power of "artificial intelligence" will lead to a sort of redundancy of the flesh) by engaging with ideas surrounding Einstein's theory of relativity. In *Kaos World* it is suggested that the nature, form and extent of consciousness is a question of faith. The human condition is more about corporeal chaos than mathematical formulae—a theme personified eloquently by the virtual Alex (Scott Koehler) and Julia (Karen Roberts). The considerable physical talents of Marty Cunningham as Simon were a little under-utilised and I would have enjoyed more textually integrated physicality as displayed by Kaos UK in *Caligula* last February. There were many nice touches though, such as Alex's haunting presence (nothing virtual about Koehler's androgynous performance) displaced by a video-only view; the large suspended bowls of water refracting light and a superbly integrated soundscape by Tony Bonney and Michael Shrapnel. "We are tightly scripted algorithms forming the illusion of life" posits 'mad scientist' Simon who is countered in his polemic by a confused David (Ben Laden), "A man is what he believes". True but access to this consciousness is only available via the visceral complexities of the body—fibre optics, zeros and ones can only ever imitate the human condition not replace it.

Tony Osborne

Kaos World: A Millennial Tale, Kaos Theatre, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, April 16–26

Jacqueline McKenzie and Aaron Blakey, *The Governor's Family* Heidrun Löhr

Not another buried child. Not another climactic, "But father, I trusted you!" Beatrix Christian's *The Governor's Family* is mighty playwrighting, performed with conviction and mastery by Belvoir Company B; but the play, for all its epigrammatic brilliance, beautiful turns of conversation and evocation of the 1890s past using our contemporary English (a relative of Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda*), surrenders greatness in the plot pursuit of the hoary old forcing-open of secrets. I was relieved early on to find that every one had their doubts about the death of the baby, and opinions ("She died of whiteness", says the Indigenous Frances Pod), and a good idea of who was responsible, so at least it was all out in the open and could be worried at and fought over. But there's more in a shock revelation about the blonde indigene Frances' parentage, which leaves the Governor's daughter, Lara, yelling at her father "But father, I trusted you!" etc.—the least convincing writing in the play at the most critical moment. I've never felt comfortable with the 'buried child' school of playwrighting: very American and matches nicely with the dark side of the American dream. Whole American plays become 'waiting for truth' ie who is guilty, what really happened ie there was a buried child ie there is guilt ie someone is responsible ie a purely moral catharsis. Like the court room dramas Americans are so fond of. Of course, Australians need to address the dark side of their culture (as the reconciliation drama indicates and as Neil Armfield argues in his director's note), but that's not a justification for conventional play plotting, the heaping up of discoveries and revelations which become dramatic ends in themselves. Better to get the truth out early on and then go tooth and nail at it. Nonetheless, *The Governor's Family*, moment by moment, is rich in moral complexity and true to the period it presents—the twins at the centre of the work are admirers of Oscar Wilde and *The Bulletin*—these twins are apparently radical (she dressed like a man), but at a time when radical opinion was against the aboriginal, seen as a race in inevitable decline. Their conservative father turns out to be more liberal (or is it just guilt?) The introduction of an Indigenous girl into the twins' home is an embarrassment. It changes them. That she has been the victim of rape by white men likely to die for the act adds complexity—it is their father who will decide to grant these men mercy, or not. The play's great power is not in revelations (the unsurprising surprises) but in the changes the characters live through, the sheer otherness of a moment in Australian history (we recognise it, but it is alien), the incursion of dreams into reality, the clash between the mother's insidious herbal cures and the aboriginal girl's ritual curses, the son's venturing into the edge of the bush, on the edge of escaping the drugs with which his mother binds him to her, the daughter's encounter with a writer whose class politics reveal him a snob and fearful of a woman in trousers, the mother's diminishing world—she literally skirts the dirt (a great square of earth she refuses to enter occupies the centre of the floor of this fire-damaged house). KG

The performer and the video screen

Beth Jackson speaks with video-makers about performance

Beth Jackson in conversation with John Gillies (Sydney), Ellen Pau (Hong Kong) and Eder Santos (Brazil), guest artists with the tele:VISION project, Metro Arts + Experimetro, Brisbane, April

BJ Let's discuss the difference between video that is made for screen, and video that is made as part of performance.

ES My first video-performance work used live performers and musicians behind large screens, like Chinese shadow theatre, with projections onto the screens. Pre-edited tape was mixed with live performance from behind the screen, and there was also live mixing and switching that I was doing during the performance. However, at the end of the performance the audience thought it was all filmed. They couldn't realise it was live, even the sound!

BJ So the audience went into a practice that's familiar to them, fulfilling a pre-given set of expectations.

ES Ellen said to me that perhaps video was not being used as a tool for performance, but rather performance was being used to enhance video.

BJ Did that mean that the work somehow failed?

ES Yes. In the second performance of the work we decided to open the screen at the

end so the audience could see all the performers.

JG People forget that film was originally a performance event with live music and sound. In Japan, benshis stood at the side of the stage and did all of the voices from the film and it's a fantastic performance. There are still a few benshis left. The space of cinema is theatrical.

ES It's important that performance is not lost in the middle of image and technology. But for me it's difficult to think of performance as actors with pre-programmed scripts, because for me performance is also a thing that happens. In my work I place everybody in a 'net', and they stay looking at it, and in the end you have something.

BJ All of your works address, in a self-reflexive way, the technologies that you're using and the references that you draw upon. Is self-reflexivity an effective strategy in making work? Is it important to declare yourself as a video artist?

JG I think self-reflexivity for me is just there. It's just part of the way that we make things. It's not the only element, but it's one among many in the work. Self-reflexivity is important, but it's not the only strategy in the work.

BJ In an ethical sense do you think?

JG More as a question of representation. I want work to be something in itself rather than to represent something else, so it has self-reflexivity built into it.

ES Whether I work in video-performance, video installation, or single channel work I always want to say the same thing: "this is alive, this is not alive, this is image, this is film, this is video, this is an object".

BJ How does that sit with collaborative work, where meanings get propelled beyond your arrangement and become part of someone else's arrangement?

ES I think it's still the same, you have one more person, another variable that is also trying to say the same thing, otherwise we can't work together. But we maintain our own identity—it's important to maintain identity.

JG For me no. I find working with other people lets you express other parts of yourself.

EP I feel similar to John.

BJ It strikes me that there may be two different notions of identity here: for Eder identity seems to be a unity, for John and Ellen it is a multiplicity, or it is fragmented.

EP I don't see it as fragmented, but rather open-ended. In a collaboration, I may contribute more in video, but I will also contribute to the performance if I can, and I want the performer to know what's in the video, what I am doing.


JG Rather than being hired as the artist to create the video for the performance.

EP Right. I don't write a script for the performer, we work at it together. I want to have the 'sense' of performance coming from both the video and the performance. I think one of the major problems for collaboration is that you can't put a strong identity into the work right from the beginning. Because, as a video artist, I have a certain technical skill and a machine, I find myself in a position of power. I think most performers are not used to working on one channel video, or with video installation, or with questions of space and structures. I have the privilege to do it, so I don't want to force people to follow.

JG In some of the videos I've done with performers, I've been interested in creating a kind of screen-based form that is not representational. The aim is to try and shutter the representation of the performer so that the performing body breaks through the apparatus of representation.

Beth Jackson is the Director of Griffith Artworks, Griffith University, Brisbane.

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Singing change and loss

Terri-ann White sees
Mary Morris' *Voices*

In this current landscape of desolate and poignant change, shot through with loss, *Voices* was a tough performance. Walking through the recently de-commissioned state prison to the old workshops, passing a group of dear old men tinkering with model rail systems in an adjoining workshop, I arrived on a chilly night for this show about women. Angela Chaplin utilises a community women's choir to act as chorus—an amazing bodily stage presence—and the speaking parts are handled by just five actors. The twenty-odd bodies, then, make it work on a big scale, this play about the women imprisoned in Sumatra by the Japanese during that (last) war to end all wars. A play about resourcefulness and respectful friendship and love. Its features are too numerous to detail here, but I can say that each element: the individual characterisations, the sense of solidarity, the staging, and the music from that fine and modest chorus, works and builds to make a cumulative effect.

In her script, Mary Morris uses all of these imprisoned women's voices to build a wall of stories, of contest and resistance, of regret and yearnings, of everyday exchanges. It works wonderfully: we learn so much about these characters, particularly the Australian nurses. The English colonial woman, presented as the linchpin agent of resistance who organises and keeps the choir singing against the screeching whistle sound that signifies the Japanese captors, manages a despair of loss and a requisite amount of sheer ruling class arrogance.

This production contains some exquisite scenes. Particularly, the opening tableau of women in their funny red-shawled nurses uniforms waving in a languid fashion to Australia. In a bunch, simply singing, on a ship and leaving, with their backs to us; the backdrop a long straight wall lined with bamboo. It was a wonderful way to begin. The play is affecting and more: about responsibility in adversity.

Voices by Mary Morris, directed by Angela Chaplin, Deckchair Theatre at Fremantle Prison, opened May 24



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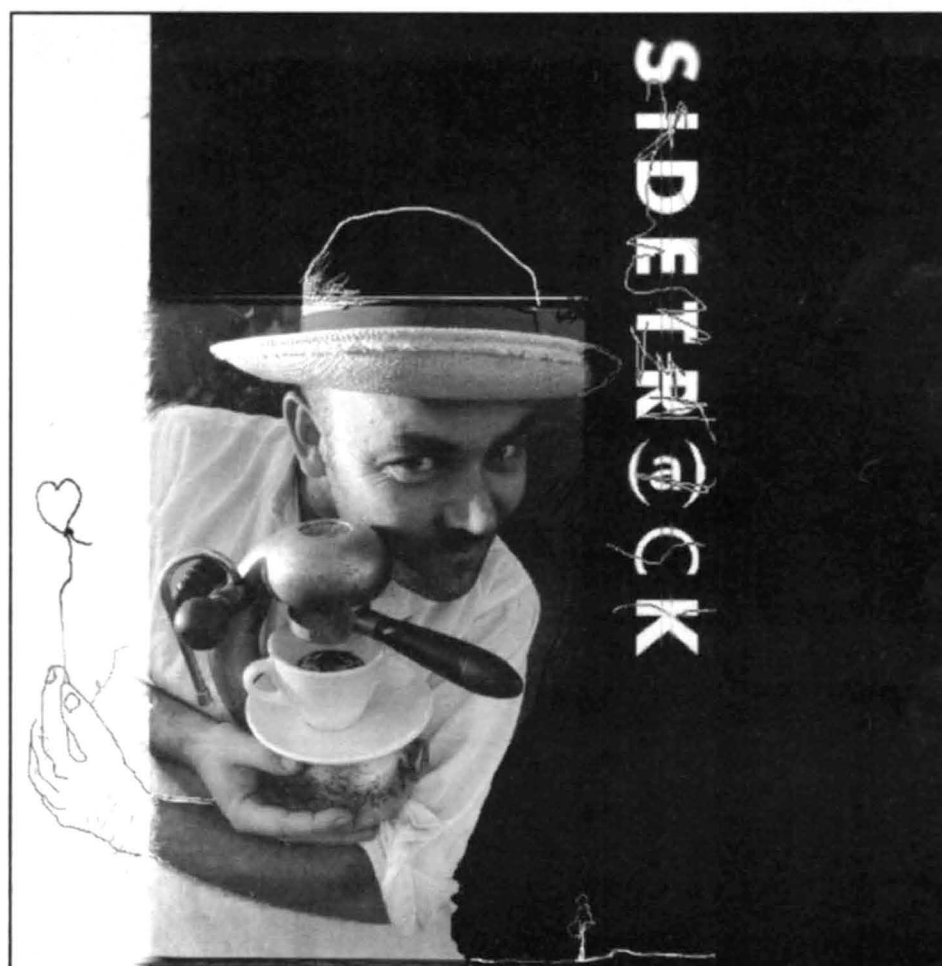
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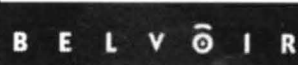
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The power of musical networking

New Music Network's Marshall McGuire interviewed by John Potts

*Marshall McGuire is one of Australia's leading harpists, and an enterprising interpreter of contemporary Australian composition. His acclaimed CD *Awakening* features Australian works for the harp. He is also the President of the New Music Network, an association comprising member groups ELISION, the Song Company, The Spring Ensemble, Sydney Alpha Ensemble, The Seymour Group, Synergy, as well as associated ensembles such as *austraLYSIS*, *SIMA* and *Machine for Making Sense*.*

JP What does the New Music Network entail, and why was it formed?

MM The New Music Network was formed as an initiative of Daryl Buckley, the artistic director of ELISION, who wanted to get all the new music ensembles in Sydney together to talk about the direction of new music, and how we could all access each other's audiences. There seems to be a fragmentation of audiences in new music, so the idea of a network captured the imagination of some of these groups. It's still at a formative stage as we haven't officially launched the network, but we've received seed funding from AusIndustry which has taken us on board as a cultural development project. We're just about to launch the membership drive and a publicity drive so we can represent contemporary music in Sydney and in Australia.

JP Do you envisage working together to stage concerts, festivals?

MM Yes, all these things are possible. Obviously it will be driven by what the membership wants and what audiences want, this will take some time. I see collaboration between groups. For instance, I think it would be interesting for groups like the Song Company and SIMA to get together on a project, coming from two completely different backgrounds. I think interaction with other contemporary art forms is important—this is something where music has been lagging behind, existing on its own. We can think of any other contemporary art form, be it film or architecture or design or dance, which have good followings and profiles, whereas somehow music doesn't have that profile.

A lot of people say they don't understand contemporary music, so they don't go because they might feel alienated and not enjoy it. But you could use the same argument about Bach: not many people would understand how a Bach suite is put together, but we can still react to it emotionally. Living in a predominantly visual age as we do, music is more difficult to understand because you can't access it in five seconds as you can with a painting. This makes it difficult but it's not impossible. It's up to us, the musicians and the ensembles, to present it in such a way that people don't feel alienated.

JP Audiences for contemporary music are often surprisingly small and relatively old. A younger audience, who would go to a challenging film or play or performance work, don't seem to know about new music.

MM To a certain extent there's been a lack of engagement with that audience. But it's also because the gulf between popular music and what you might call 'serious music' has widened. It's not so long ago that the two forms of music were much closer together, but now there's more relevance for kids in Regurgitator or Silverchair, mostly in terms of image and lyrics. There are more young people now

experimenting with new music, because they've reached the end of their interest in old music. There are too many teachers in institutions who recycle old ideas with a lack of passion and a lack of relevance, so kids who have seen the possibilities of expression in other forms of music want to now explore it in 'serious' music. Hopefully the Network, with the breadth of style and the expertise each group can bring to it, as well as the people like marketing consultants we can call on, can tap into contemporary culture.

JP When you say new music, of course, there's a great range of styles within that term.



MM We struggled with the title a little: it came down to 'contemporary' or 'new'. We figured that 'contemporary' has been taken up with rock music; we thought that 'new' was good because the music is new, whatever comes out. Whatever's written now is new. It can be anything from Ross Edwards to Elena Kats-Chernin or SIMA's improvisational music, or Machine For Making Sense, which is a different way of making music or sound. The term 'new' tries to encompass the diversity of the Network.

JP There must be a sense of frustration for new music practitioners, that the music hasn't been reaching the people it should be reaching.

MM That's the common factor for all these groups: we get sick of playing to small audiences. This is an initiative to identify first why we have small audiences, then how we can get larger audiences. A lot of these groups have their own audiences: for instance the audience which goes to ELISION might never go to the Song Company. The common thread with all these audiences is their interest in some form of new music, and by extension in

contemporary culture, the exploration of the new. They're not necessarily going to come along expecting something to be successful all the time, and I think this needs to be identified too. Not everything is going to be a hit when you're presenting new works for the first time. But the thrill is in being there to hear it happen, the creation of something new. This is an old-fashioned concept: audiences going to Mozart operas were seeing something for the first time, and if they didn't like it they said so—and that defined whether it succeeded or not.

The big organisations now, like the ABC and the orchestras, have gone very safe in their programming, they're only presenting

MM It's actually more selfish than that. I got very sick of playing the traditional harp repertoire, needed something more challenging to do, and so it seemed logical to commission Australian composers. A number of these works have come through personal contacts with composers. For instance Elena Kats-Chernin's *Chamber of Horrors*, which will be on my next CD. She wanted to write a piece for harp, I wanted a piece for harp—let's see what we can do. And she came up with a gem. And then there are pieces by Gerard Brophy, Gordon Kerry—again, people I've worked with through ELISION and various other areas. It just seemed logical to explore with them their ideas for the harp. I think a lot of composers are fascinated by the harp, it's a very complex instrument to write for and always the last chapter in the book on orchestration. And harp players have been a little reticent to challenge themselves—they haven't gone to composers and said, "Ask me to do something". So that stifled the creativity in harp music for a while. I believe in Australian music, and I think it's up to instrumentalists to fulfil their part of their contract, to stimulate new compositions and challenge what instruments and performers can do.

JP Now I'll ask you a question that always gets asked, which people hate to answer.

MM Why did I take up the harp?

JP No. Do you think there's anything distinctive about Australian composition, or is it part of an international approach?

MM I don't find anything distinctive about Australian music *per se*; what I find exciting is its diversity. Maybe that is distinctively Australian. Other than that, I'm not sure what distinctively Australian could be...I have a problem with appropriating didgeridoos. The younger composers perhaps feel they're more able to express their individuality nowadays, rather than subscribe to one particular school of composition. The young composers I've worked with display a great technical knowledge, they're very well trained in that sense, and they have a wide choice of people they can turn to for advice. They have the benefit of drawing on an eclectic mix of tutors and styles in Australia.

JP One more question, since you brought it up. Why did you take up the harp?

MM I'm not going to answer that. I think I liked it because no-one else was doing it, it's very expensive and it's very difficult.

JP It wasn't Harpo Marx?

MM It could have been. He gets the frosted lens in his harp scenes. They're extraordinary, and he was such a great harpist, apart from everything else.

Sydney Alpha Ensemble, Opening Concert of the Women's Music Festival, September 26. Tel (02) 9417 6797

Synergy, Radical, July 27, Eugene Goossens Hall. Tel (02) 9320 9000

Seymour Group, Revelations, Turbine Hall, Powerhouse Museum, September 13. Tel (02) 9310 3716

Song Company, M for Murder, Access Contemporary Art Gallery, June 20–21. Tel (02) 9364 9457

music they know people will want to come and see. They're not challenging these audiences, and I think audiences do like to hear something new. I was shocked to see in the Melbourne Symphony's program for this year that there are only four Australian premieres in the whole year. I'm deeply saddened by that. New works add a level of stimulation to music-making and music-going, which is lacking a bit at the moment.

JP What are your thoughts on contemporary Australian music?

MM It's actually very healthy, underneath. I'm surprised that so many people are still writing as much as they are and getting performances, despite all the obstacles put in their way—the lack of money, the lack of recognition, the lack of approval by the large organisations. There's a great wealth of talent and imagination out there. It's been thriving in an underground fashion, what we want to do now is bring it out into the light.

JP You perform Australian works and commission compositions for the harp for concerts and recordings. Did you set out to be an advocate for new Australian works?

CD reviews

Dancing To The Flute
Celestial Harmonies 13135-2

The Music Of Bali Vol. 2
Celestial Harmonies 13137-2

Celestial Harmonies CDs usually come complete with lavish information booklets, detailing not only the recording at hand, but also its musical and cultural context. These two releases excel in this area, providing copious information on performers, music styles, the cultural meaning of each work, even mini-histories of, respectively, Indian and Balinese music. *Dancing To The Flute* is a collection of recordings released to coincide with the like-named exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW from June to August. Supervised by New Zealander David Parsons, the CD ranges over various styles, traditions and instrumentations of Indian music. In covering so much scope, it is inevitably highly eclectic, but the accompanying notes help locate each work in a specific context. The only stumbling-block is the opening track, *Om*, based on a concept from Parsons, in which a mantra is chanted over the drone produced by a tambura. New Age drippiness hovers, unfortunately, very nearby. The rest of the album, however, is a delight of textures, ancient instruments, percussive rhythm and, of course, the Indian bamboo flute, or bansuri. As for *The Music Of Bali Vol 2*, there are no reservations. Performed by the Tirta Sari ensemble, these gamelan performances, part of the legong dance tradition, are mesmerising, often transmitting a shimmering beauty.

John Potts

Talk is Cheap
Machine for Making Sense
SPLIT Records 4 1997

Sonic Hieroglyphs from the night continent
Jim Denley and the Random Module Twins
SPLIT Records 3 1997
PO Box 445 Potts Point NSW 2011
splitrec@ozemail.com.au

This grows on you, or (more accurately) into you, this "five acts and twenty scenes of unexpected machinations" called *Talk is Cheap* with the Machine playing mostly short tracks in various membership permutations. The title is perfect. *Talk is cheap* on *Talk is Cheap*. Talk is the noise of talk, its musicality, its chance capture, words gulped and kicked out, guttural, barked and screamed. Therefore the Machine's *talk* becomes all the more important for being incommunicative—you hear everything else in

and around and about talk that you ignore in the usual give and take of conversation. You hear snatches of talk, you hear the voice as a musical instrument amongst other musical instruments, the breath of Jim Denley shakuhachi-ing, *speaking* through wind instruments, among other sounds Rik Rue has plundered from everywhere real and synthetic, creaking and gnawing, sometimes distant, sometimes epic Bladerunner-y (without tunes), sometimes too real—a nearby whistle makes you take off the headphones in an empty room. Talk is everywhere crying out for interpretation, but the Machine doesn't wait for you. Sometimes you are desperate for almost two seconds to be swept away by that dark deep bass riff (shades of John Zorn in mock movie sound-track mode) or a female sigh or that word you recognise as yours. Sometimes you think Chris Mann is making sense with the curious stream of music of bureaucrat and other non-sense talk, but that's like thinking you understand a foreign language in a movie where you've drifted away from the subtitles. There is, though, reprieve from talk, in markedly musical tracks like Scene 5, quite elegantly symphonic, slow pulsed, Stevie Wishart's versatile hurdy-gurdy riding into momentary sitar reaches. Elsewhere Amanda Stewart's multiplied voice is all edges, plosives, throat, psssts running in quick breathless overlap like many persons in one. The subtitle about acts and scenes is also appropriate, many a track and many a moment evoking fleeting characters, surprise actions, brief monologues, scenes, conflict. But nothing fixed, because this Machine spits out beautiful noise first and foremost, mimicking the world, but distilling its languages.

Sonic Hieroglyphs from the night continent is Jim Denley on wind instruments, vocals and electronics. The untreated clarity of acoustic instruments warbles against thundering synthetic textures, an echoing watery hall is traversed by chugging flute breath and techno-creature sounds flit, a jazz riff half-melodies through, the world breaks up into static. There's a touch of the apocalyptic in *Sonic Hieroglyphs* signalled by the range of palette from pure breath to electronic landscapes. Denley's cover note reads: "This music is an offering to the Budawang mountains south of Sydney. They appeared to me once as the lair of the night-continent, The mist descended and I wandered lost through dark bush, down labyrinthine wallaby tracks where, in a state of heightened awareness, I met a mountain crab". Although not often literally programmatic, the track titles combine with the performances to suggest a real space, an actual experience as in the seductively dramatic Track 9, 'with kokatoos (black)'.

• Keith Gallasch

Radio previews

The audio arts are increasingly well represented on the ABC. Apart from flagship *The Listening Room*, innovative radiophonic work can regularly be heard on *Radio-eye*, and on *Airplay* (Radio National, Sundays, 3pm). *Airplay's* June program has the theme "Sounds Like Teen Spirit" with works concerning young people, written and performed by young people. Six productions, including *Am I Your Dream* by Camile Scaysbrook and *Not Your Mob Next Door* by Helen V. Anu, showcase emerging radio talent.

The Listening Room in July is presenting a month of works concerned with devotion, contemplation and the power of the voice—the role of confession in Ireland, a polyphonic Lord's Prayer in English and Hebrew, the mortal sin of gluttony, the ancient link between the voice and the divine. Most intriguing of all is a return broadcast of Moya Henderson's *Meditations and Distractions on the Theme of the Singing Nun* (July 7, 9 pm, ABC Classic FM). This hour-long sound play, including music for six sopranos and folk instruments, takes us through the extraordinary life of Jeannie Deckers, known internationally as the Singing Nun. Despite earning millions for the Church, she never received a penny of the royalties—yet she incurred a massive tax debt for those royalties, eventually committing suicide in 1975. This production combines an evocative use of reverb with its narration of this tragic tale.

A different angle on religion is provided by Patrick Gibson in *Do The OCA*, a series of short pieces featured on *Radio-eye* throughout July (Sundays 8.30 pm, Radio National). What is the OCA, or Oxford Capacity Analysis? It is, disturbingly enough, a "personality test" of 200 questions devised by the Church of Scientology. In the hands of Gibson, however, they become found objects, 200 starting-points for radiophonic adventures. Tom and Nicole would probably not be impressed.

John Potts

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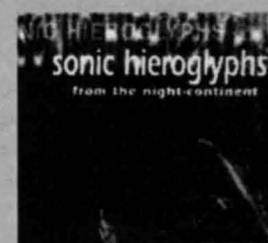
Talk is Cheap
from Machine For Making Sense...
Rik Rue, Stevie Wishart, Jim Denley,
Amanda Stewart, Chris Mann



"five acts and twenty scenes of
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Shorts

In 1993 two American photographers, **Chris Riley and Doug Niven** visited Toul Sleng—a Khmer Rouge prison in Cambodia during the Pol Pot regime. There they discovered entire walls covered in un-named photographic portraits and a large number of negatives. Riley and Niven formed an organisation called the **Photo Archive Group** and with the support of the Cambodian government, began a three year project of cleaning and cataloguing the remaining 6000 negatives to create a permanent archival record of one of the worst genocides of this century. A portfolio of 100 photographic prints has been created from this archive and since 1995 has been exhibited throughout Europe and America. The exhibition, **Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia's Killing Fields** has been brought to Sydney by the **Australian Centre for Photography**. The exhibition will be opened by Mr. Por Heang Ya, President of the Khmer Community of NSW on **June 7 running until July 5**. Following the opening **Dr. David Chandler and Dr. Helen Jarvis** will speak about the archive in its political and historical context. On June 28 **Dr. Helen Grace** will speak at a public forum entitled *Atrocity, Recent History and the Photographic Archive*. **Australian Centre for Photography 257 Oxford Street, Paddington Tel 02-9332.1455.** <http://www.culture.com.au/scan/acp>

In their annual workshop program, **Playworks, the National Centre for Women Performance Writers** offers some new takes on generating writing for performance. For example, on the weekend of June 28-29 stage designer **Eamon D'Arcy** and dramaturg **Kim Spinks** will be in Adelaide running a workshop on writing from the space in which the performance takes place (**Writing for the Chiasmus**). On July 27, in collaboration with Perth Institute for Contemporary Arts, Playworks presents **Found in Translation II** in which WA writers and performers unravel the knot of 'language' in performance. **Playworks Tel 02-9264.8414 Fax 02-9264.8449**

Melbourne-based dancer/choreographer, **Shelley Lasica** makes dance performances for different spaces in many parts of the world. In June she's heading for New York where she'll make a collaborative work with fellow Australian choreographer, Sandra Parker, and New York-based choreographers Bebe Miller and Susan Braham. The work entitled **Live Drama Situation** premieres in Cleveland and is the first part of a series of solo and larger works over the next two years.

In 1987 **The Actors Centre** opened in Surry Hills as a small professional resource centre serving Sydney's acting community. Ten years down the track, the Centre celebrates its anniversary by offering an even more expansive program of long and short-term workshops and courses, forums and seminars designed to keep artists in touch with their craft between engagements. **Tel 02-9310.4077** for brochure.

More celebration. Renovations completed, Melbourne's bigger and better **Dancehouse Centre for the Moving Arts** is holding an open day in July, featuring classes, exhibitions, performance showcases, discussions and video screenings. The **Some Bodies** and **Mixed Metaphor** programs will open the new theatres and launch the rest of the year's ambitious projects. **Information on Dancehouse Hellen Sky or Sylvia Staehli on 03-9347.2860**

Death Defying Theatre has a new name—**Urban Theatre Projects** and a new artistic co-ordinator, **John Baylis** who sees his work with one of the country's leading cross-cultural performance companies as a logical extension of his work with the Sydney Front. "The Sydney Front was about opening up the relationship between audience and performer. Working with diverse communities in western Sydney will allow me to take this project further, out of the arthouse context where experiment can easily degenerate into novelty, into a place where more is at stake for both artists and spectators".

The pitch: Bundaberg Rum is offering **\$5,000 for a photograph**. The catch: (a) the pic has to "capture the spirit of Aussie good times"; (b) you have to include a reference (subtle is OK) to Bundaberg Rum somewhere; (c) you have to be over 18 to enter; (d) for legal reasons the shot must not include people aged under 18. The prize: \$5,000 cash plus a Minolta X300 camera and photographic kit worth \$580 and if you win your photograph will be included in the company's 1998 calendar. Eleven runners up will also receive the camera. The competition is open to professionals as well as student and amateur photographers. Closing date: 17 July 1997. For a free brochure **Michelle Flynn or Kristi Conacher 02-93613777. <http://www.bundabergum.aust.com>.**

Sydney audiences who had a tantalising taste of playwright **Raimondo Cortese** in his three short works, **The Fertility of Objects** at Griffin Theatre last

month can catch the new play by this exciting young writer **Upstairs at Belvoir Street Theatre** in June-July. **Country Love** has been written in collaboration with Sidetrack's **Don Mamouny** and will be performed by **Sidetrack Performance Group** June 19-July 13. **Information: Lauren Sarti Tel 02-9560.1255**

Two performance-based website events in Far North Queensland. **Traversing Sense <http://www.altnews.com.au/kickarts/traversingsense>**

Laura Aboriginal Dance and Cultural Festival <http://www.qantm.com.au/laura/>

Green Mill Dance 97, Australia's annual festival of contemporary dance now in its fifth year will be held in Melbourne from **June 28-July 5**. The week long program curated this year by **Lee Christofis** features over 100 dancers, choreographers and dance practitioners including the premiere of the **Taipei Dance Circle** ("near nude, bald, muscular, male, oiled dancers on a greased floor") and performances from Taiwanese soloist **Ku Ming Sheng** and Australian dancers **Louise Taube, Steven McTaggart and Michael Collins, Rosalind Crisp, Alison Hait & Dancers, Sandra Parker, Anna Smith, Natalie Weir and Garry Stewart** plus improvisers, **Trotman and Morrish** expanding on the theme of this year's congress, **Heritage and Heresy**. Keynote address this year is by **Barrie Kosky** and the **Peggy Van Praagh Memorial Address** presented by Ausdance will be delivered by **Ross Stretton**, Artistic Director of The Australian Ballet. Bookings: **CUB Malthouse 03-9685.5111. Green Mill 03-9682.7113. email mw@greenmill.asn.au**

The 1998 Performing Arts Market will be staged in Adelaide in February next year in conjunction with the Adelaide Festival of Arts and the Adelaide Fringe and funded through a partnership between the Australia Council, Arts South Australia and South Australian Tourism Commission. **Information: Lancia Jordana, Public Affairs Manager Tel 02-9950.9013 Fax 02-9950.9111**

Sydney Improvised Music Association (SIMA) busy June program includes the first Australian tour by new generation jazz pianist and composer **Darrell Grant** performing with **Jason Cooney** (tenor-sax), **Lloyd Swanton** (bass) **Toby Hall** (drums) in **Sydney** (June 12, 18 and 19) **Bass Note, Brisbane** (June 10) **Bennetts Lane, Melbourne** (June 13, 14) **Kiama Jazz Club** (June 20), **Armidale Jazz Club** (June 21); and solo at **Eastside Parish Uniting Church, Paddington** (June 23). Also in June at SIMA Headquarters at the Strawberry Hills Hotel **Mike Nock/Cameron Undy Duo** (June 3); Trombone player **James Greening** (June 4, 11) **Impro Night with Chris Halliwell/Trevor Brown Duo + Jo Truman/Shannon O'Neill Duo** (June 9); **Guy Strazzullo Quintet CD Launch** (June 10); **The Engine Room** (June 17), **Tim Rollison Quartet** (June 24) and **Bernie McGann Trio** (June 25) AND don't miss **New Music Night** (Monday June 16) featuring Australian music which draws on the influences of jazz, ambient and classical music with **Inner Voices and Elektra String Quartet + Craig Walters**

Poles Apart is the June double bill at **The Stables Theatre** in Kings Cross. Two short plays by London playwright **Danusia Iwaszko** (Still Life) and Melbourne writer, **Monica Raszewski** (White Mud). Iwaszko's play won the UK New Playwrights Trust Prize in 1996. It concerns an outwardly neat and orderly suburban housewife who discovers the art of stillness. In **White Mud**, two women friends find themselves unexpectedly in conflict over the biography of a Polish explorer. **June 17-July 13. Tel: 02-9361.3817**

Like a short, sharp, inventive and/or experimental five or ten minute video of your performance/play/dance as well as an archival record or for promotional purposes? Telephone **Smith Street Films** and arrange to see their showreel of performances shot for ABC and SBS TV as well as community organisations. **Tel: 02-9557.0818**

In **Pre-Millennial** at the **Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia** **Ronnie van Hout** (New Zealand) and **Mike Stevenson** (Melbourne) look at some ways the coming millennial changeover might encourage a revisionist look at the art of the last century. Mike Stevenson discovers subliminal messages in well known images from the 1960s and 70s. Re-drawn and encrypted, Cindy Sherman's blurry backgrounds can be seen as a seedbed of evil messages. Sherrie Levine's copies of Walker Evans' photographs are revealed to be about much more than that. **Ronnie Van Hout** uses kitset models and dioramas to depict a mock history of 'modern art'. In July, **John Barbour** curates **Mutant Paradigm**, an examination of the current attempt in art schools to position art as a form of research. Barbour wonders whether this strategy is likely to produce distortions in the way artists think of themselves, some valuable expansion in the field or to spawn a race of monstrosities. 14 Porter Street, Parkside **Tel: 08-8272.2682 Fax: 08-8373.4286**

Sport

TOOTH AND CLAW with Jack Rufus

Of all the no-hopers and deadbeats in the history of sport, the biggest loser of them all must be...Garry Kasparov. Sports stars have cracked up under pressure before, but nobody has let down more people than this so-called champion. Not only did Kasparov let down all chess players, and all Russians, but he let down the entire human race, over its four million years of evolution.

When he threw up his arms and ran off stage after a 19-move whipping from Deep Blue, Kasparov shamed us all. His tearful press conference only made it worse. If he was any kind of sportsman he would have retaliated, John McEnroe style, by smashing into that bloated box of circuitry with the nearest axe or sledge-hammer. At least bad sportsmanship is something we can all respect.

What are we to do now? If we're stuck with Kasparov for the re-match, we need to toughen him a bit. He should go into it doing what humans do best: cheating. He could soften Deep Blue up early, by "accidentally" spilling his glass of water into its mainframe. Then, while its minders aren't looking, he could yank out a few circuits or sabotage its program. With Deep Blue reduced to the level of a dolt, even Kasparov could trounce it and give us back our self-respect. Only then will Garry Kasparov shake off his title as the greatest loser of all time.

TEE OFF with Vivienne Inch

It's been a while since I've witnessed the disciplining of a golfer for refusal to honour something as simple as the Fore regulation. It was therefore shocking this week to watch the PM publicly ostracised at the Reconciliation Conference after a failure to call 'Fore', followed by a pathetic display of pique that had the audience turning their backs in silent protest. The Fore regulation is part of the very civil code of behaviour that attracts me to golf. This code requires that players take account of everyone on the course, repair any damage done along the way and utter a cry of warning to anyone who may be liable to be struck by the balls they hit. The word itself is an aphetic variation on the word 'before'. Howard's game this week lacked all sign of civility. I've said it before, the man is a weak player and all the coaching in the world will not make him any more convincing. He approaches each tee cold, practice-swinging like a man wondering what's wrong with his game. He shuffles his feet and wriggles his eyebrows and blusters about his ten point game plan. At no stage at this week's outing did he address the damage that this plan would do, nor give warning of its disastrous impact on those who, backs turned, stood directly in its path.



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+ Jo Truman/Shannon O'Neill Duo
10 Guy Strazzullo Quintet CD Launch
12, 18, 19 DARRELL GRANT - USA
17 The Engine Room
24 Tim Rollison Quartet
25 Bernie McGann Trio

NON-SIMA MONDAYS
2 Gordon Brisker Big Band
16 Elektra String Quartet + Craig Walters
23 Nick Hampton Quartet
30 NSW Conservatorium Student Ensembles



New generation US jazz pianist, composer Darrell Grant has played in the groups of Betty Carter, Roy Haynes, Tony Williams and more. In Sydney he is joined by saxophonist Jason Cooney, bassist Lloyd Swanton and drummer Toby Hall

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Kiama Jazz Club June 20
Armidale Jazz Club June 21
Eastside Parish Uniting Church, Paddington solo June 23.

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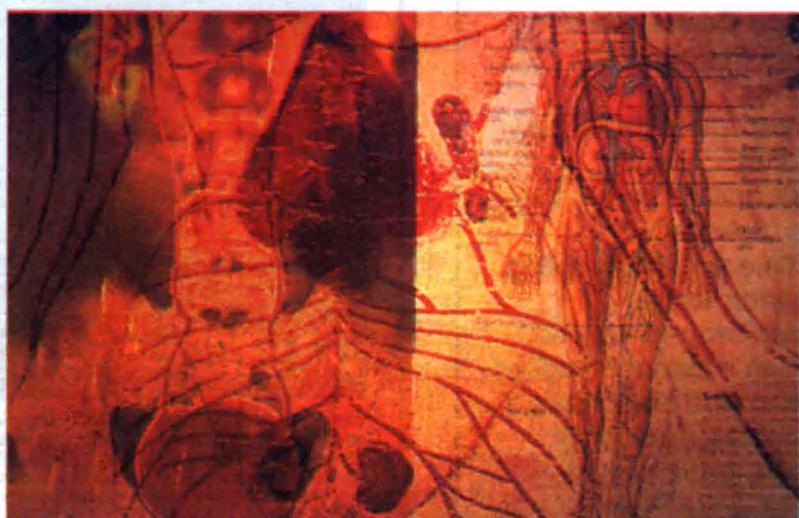
Bali

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Bali

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