

RealTime

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AUSTRALIAN
PERSPECTA 1997

BETWEEN
ART & NATURE



The national arts August–September 1997 **free**

OnScreen
RealTime in London: LIFT97
Education: issues and courses



RealTime has great pleasure in providing readers with a substantial introduction to the "Between art and nature" theme of Australian Perspecta 1997. The idea for a set of articles on issues and participating artists was initiated in discussion with Perspecta and the articles have been commissioned and edited by Jacqueline Millner. Managing editors Virginia Baxter and Keith Gallasch have just returned from Europe where they travelled after *RealTime*'s participation in LIFT97 (London International Festival of Theatre). They included in their itinerary a three day visit to Kassel for the massive visual arts event Documenta X. As with LIFT's Daily Dialogues, the Documenta100 Days series of talks and lectures was rich in political themes and debate. The sense of a foregrounding of political concerns in both events was widely evident, especially about the city, about the environment and about the city as environment. That Perspecta has bravely embraced an topical (and enduring) theme will doubtless yield criticism in the usual quarters; for the rest of us it's a hopeful sign.

Also commissioned for this edition is a set of articles on tertiary education in the arts. Related pieces can be found in *OnScreen* where Annemarie Chandler reports on the Vanstonisation of film education, in Visual Arts where Dean Chan looks at the effects of funding cuts in the context of *Hatched*, the National Graduates Show at PICA, and in Literature where Annemarie Lopez interviews writer and writing teacher Stephen Muecke. It's interesting to note in the context of funding cuts the kinds of strategies academics are adopting to guarantee arts practice its place in the university. Rod Wissler in Brisbane, Di Weekes in Adelaide, Jude Walton in Melbourne variously address facility sharing, cross-disciplinary courses, accreditation and innovation. Indicatively, an interview with Dean Carey, director of Sydney's Actors Centre, reveals the centre's participation with the the University of Newcastle in its Master of Creative Arts degree.

In London, with a team of nine writers (six Australian, three British) covering some 20 theatre and performance works as well as Daily Dialogues, we produced four special issues of *RealTime*. In this and the next editions of *RealTime* we present a selection of our writers' responses to LIFT 97, to give you a taste of the festival and the range of works in a determinedly and adventurous cross cultural event. We enjoyed ourselves immensely, made many fruitful contacts and new friends, and felt we were greatly appreciated. *RealTime* offered LIFT 97 an alternative commentary to that of the mainstream press, encouraged audiences to look at works in new ways and to consider writing as an active part of a festival. In the Daily Dialogue devoted to *RealTime* late in the festival, our readers applauded the sense of community the writing generated, the calibre of the writing, its intimacy, and its challenge to the conventions of critical judgment. Long in preparation and epic in execution, *RealTime*'s participation in LIFT was a unique venture. We showed we could do it at the 1996 Adelaide Festival, but LIFT took us that step further into cultural exchange, more of which in *RealTime* 21. You can read the full *RealTime* response to LIFT on our website. In *RealTime* 21, more from Europe including Documenta X, William Forsythe's *Sleeper's Guts* for the Frankfurt Ballet and *Chora* from another impressive Frankfurt dance company, S.O.A.P. We'll also be beginning to look at the first of the Cultural Olympiad festivals, a not-to-be-missed Festival of Dreaming (previewed page 31), celebrating contemporary Indigenous culture on a gigantic scale. We'll also respond to a smaller but nonetheless significant event for the performance community, Sidetrack's Contemporary Performance Week 8 (page 30) with its striking roster of international and local artists as teachers.

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Sherre DeLys and Joan Grounds, *Say Ahh* (detail), 1997, mixed media. Royal Alexandria Hospital for Children, Westmead. Australian Perspecta 1997: Between art & nature.

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Perspecta in perspective

Jacqueline Millner introduces the *RealTime* survey of issues and themes in Australian Perspecta 1997: *Between Art and Nature*

Between art and nature, we've covered all bases. Such a broad rationale for an exhibition of contemporary art might lapse into an incoherent mire, or turn out to be the very saving grace of a thematic Perspecta. Certainly, for all its open-endedness, the title does evoke specific debates about the social construction of nature, including the cooptation of nature into an anthropocentric view which casts everything non-human into instrumental mode. In turn this evokes the politicisation of the concept 'environment' and the development of agendas and strategies set to focus attention on the holistic needs of our planet, attempts (however doomed) to craft responses outside the myopia of anthropocentrism.



Lauren Berkowitz, *Follies*, 1997 banskia, lavender, chillies

Conjoining art and nature also of course invokes the concerns of recent philosophy to confound the duality these terms connote. While the traditional schism between culture and nature continues to dominate our thinking, we can no longer assume that these terms necessarily represent radically different, let alone mutually exclusive, terrains. It is this complex relationship which perhaps can most usefully inform this curatorial device, and it is indeed this slippage which the majority of writers commissioned by *RealTime* to prefigure Perspecta 1997 have found central to the theme, "Between art and nature".

This interrogation of art through nature and vice versa can illuminate a vast array of disciplines, from architecture, to aesthetics and art history, to ecology, to activist art, to the implications of new technology, and it is these wide implications that we asked our writers to address. After contextualising this Perspecta in terms of its forerunners, Mark Jackson goes on to reflect on the enduring problem of separating art and nature in our cultural endeavours. Andrew McNamara takes a fascinating tour through the changing conception of the relationship between art and nature in the history of aesthetics, while Sue Best convincingly posits installation art as a privileged form to renegotiate our position vis a vis the environment. Kevin Murray provides an idiosyncratic and writerly response to what he terms the false separation between nature and technology, using Harry Nankin's *Wave*—eloquently evoked in Anna Dzenis' description—as a point of departure. Finally, Julia Jones reminds us of the effective deployment of art for environmentalist ends in recent Australian history.

Our writers emphasise and reflect the breadth of issues foregrounded by the phrase 'between art and nature', hence valorising the theme in its multiplicity and fecundity. A glance through the enormous range of artistic response to the theme would serve to underscore this richness. However, our writers also maintain a critical vigil on overweening curatorial rationales which might seek to impose, as McNamara puts it, a sociological gloss on the art. In other words, perhaps the writers here have taken to heart the open-endedness of "between art and nature" to maintain an interested but vigorously independent approach to such a rubric.

Jacqueline Millner
Editor, *Perspecta* supplement

The between-ness of art and nature

Mark Jackson speculates on ecological thinking

It is not unusual these days to come across critical writings in the visual arts and cultural studies which explore the nature of art museums, galleries and other types of visual arts institutions. We have all come to realise that spaces for exhibition are not neutral and disinterested white containers for presenting the form of the work of art. Galleries are highly circumscribed spaces with well-defined attributes of cultural and economic capital. Studies in the make-up of these spaces of the seen may even be considered as a form of environmental studies, whereby we come to understand 'space' as a politically and culturally contested arena.

In this contested ground of the seen, Perspecta has had a significant history. The Perspecta exhibition takes place every two years and has as its privileged locus the Art Gallery of New South Wales, an exhibition space we necessarily associate with the legitimacy of significant cultural capital and prestige. This is an 'official' State site which sanctions authenticity on visual arts productions. Where Perspecta is most interesting, though, is in the play and slippages that go on between this legitimising housing of art and the very things housed. Generally Perspecta is an event for the showcasing of emerging artists across Australia, artists who would otherwise exhibit in very different kinds of spaces, and whose exhibition history may otherwise be quite limited. These other spaces have neither the cultural capital nor public exposure of an environment such as the AGNSW, and it is here that a two-fold rupture may be seen to take place. On the one hand, artists, their work and a public collide in a unique way, afforded precisely by the prestige associated with this institution housing the exhibition. On the other hand, that very institution, with its capacity to legitimise visual arts production, is subjected momentarily to an interesting challenge and scrutiny of its authority.

Hence Perspecta has tended to become an event which draws out in some relief the visibility of that which both gives boundary to the spaces of the seen, and determines limits to the recognition of those objects we readily digest as art. If I have dwelt on a certain issue of 'environment' in attempting to delineate some agenda points for Perspecta, this is principally to emphasise the extent to which Perspecta 1997 has itself pushed the horizon of its own environment, for an exhibition which has as its principal focus the issue of environment.

While Perspecta in the past has always involved satellite events at exhibition spaces in Sydney, spaces such as the Australian Centre for Photography, Artspace and the Ivan Dougherty Gallery, the privileged focus has remained at the AGNSW venue. In 1997 things are different. This is the most ambitious Perspecta yet staged, with the co-operation of 20 major galleries and institutions, involving the work of more than 80 artists, 20 curators and 40 speakers from throughout Australia. Significantly, this year the AGNSW has down-played its pivotal role as the focus, and has attempted to present a more complex series of foci as the spaces of the seen. This strategy is expressed in the following terms by Victoria Lynn, Curator of Contemporary Art at the AGNSW and coordinator of the whole project: "The new model for Australian Perspecta 1997 allows for the diversity of expression that characterised previous Perspectas, while introducing exhibitions and events that have discrete identities. While individual exhibitions are smaller than the early Perspectas, the overall event is much larger than ever before."

What are we to make of the theme: "Between Art and Nature"? This overall

theme of the relationship between culture and nature was inspired, according to the AGNSW, by the Sydney artist Simeon Nelson, and is considered timely and relevant in the context of public debate about the 'Green' Olympics and our general awareness and concern for ecological imperatives. Events are literally too numerous to elaborate here, though it may be useful to present some indication of what's on before presenting some commentary on this thematic and the composition of the program. The AGNSW has organised four different types of events as its response to the exhibition. There is a collaborative exhibition undertaken by Arnhem Land weavers and Lauren Berkowitz, Simryn Gill, Fiona Hall and Steven Holland. The work is presented as five installations responding to the relation between cultural expression and our interactions with the natural world. As well, the AGNSW has a public program of artists' talks, a film program and a Friday lecture series commencing August 8 and continuing until September 12. And finally, there is a secondary schools program addressing the exhibition theme, in conjunction with the Museum of Contemporary Art and the Royal Botanic Gardens.

Other significant events take place in August-September at Artspace, the Australian Centre for Photography, with Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Campbelltown City Bicentennial Art Gallery, Casula Powerhouse, the Ivan Dougherty Gallery, the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Museum of Sydney, the SH Ervin Gallery, the Performance Space, College of Fine Arts, University of NSW, the Architecture Faculty, the University of Sydney, and the University of Technology, Sydney.

Australian Perspecta 97 provides a significant arena for addressing some fundamental issues concerning ecology and sustainability. However, it is necessary in determining the efficacy of such a range of projects, exhibitions and forums, to consider the long history of art's relation to 'nature', and the degree to which this historical condition already frames the enterprise. Such framing not only exists in the referential possibilities afforded by a thinking of art and nature, that is, canonical instances one could draw upon in delineating the close proximity of these terms (for example, nature perfected being the great paradigm for beauty, of which human artifice is but a mimetic labour). There is also the doubling of the nature of 'nature' whereby one can use an expression such as 'the nature of art'. 'Nature' is on the one hand the referential context for considering the production of visual art works, 'nature' here being a dispersed series of concerns and registers: ecological imperatives, invocation to a land assayed and privileged by Indigenous Australians, sensuous apprehensions of soundscapes, critically contrastive accounts of the urban and the 'natural' and so on. And 'nature' doubles as that peculiar unifying and homogeneous ground which gathers such a dispersed and disparate array into a singular event.

Is there a problem in all of this? I don't

think one should go out of one's way to be critical of events such as this. However, there are a couple of unsettling issues. Firstly, let's be clear that Perspecta itself has, as I have intimated above, a significant history as a visual arts event that may be explored in terms of how it affects the environment or spatial conditions or even, one may say, the ecology of visual arts production. This exhibition is no exception on this score, and perhaps takes some of the radical dislocating of spaces of the seen even further than it has before. Coupled with this is a theme for the entire event which demands from both artists and a receptive audience a critical and politically activated attitude to visual arts production. Concern with anything approximating 'disinterested' form would find some difficulty crossing the curatorial boundaries established for the range of events and projects. Despite all of this I yet harbour some concern.

The media release for Australian Perspecta 97 suggests that "that which lies between Art and Nature can be a mediation, an intercession, a communion, a conciliation or an intervention". The problem here is a significant but subtle one, and it presents a space precisely for committing to repetition that long history of art's engagement with nature we consider as romantic aesthetics. The problem is this. Already, with the title we are set up to encounter art and nature as two entities with a problematic divide, or at the very least separated by a space of between-ness which constitutes the ground of agency, of affect or work. An implicit priority is presented for the givenness of the entities 'art' and 'nature', and the possibility of engagement is precisely the possibility of inhabiting that 'between' as an agency or force. However, to think this relation ecologically may require quite a different approach. Indeed, to begin to consider that there is an ecology to the



Stephen Holland, *Untitled*, 1997, bird wing

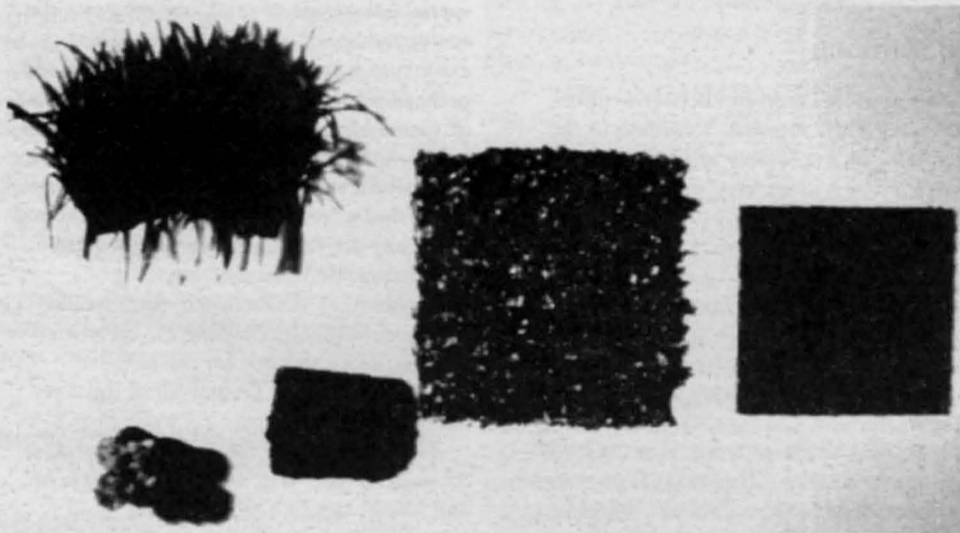
possibility of an event such as this would demand such a different approach. How does one reflexively encounter the question of an ecology of an event whose directional concerns are the ecological?

In as much as ecological thinking is implicitly relational thinking, it is precisely the 'between' that constitutes the ground, and hence a 'ground' which can be said to be neither art nor nature. Rather, the agency of this between, its force or affect, is the constitution of complex assemblages we name provisionally and momentarily art and nature. Each of these names designates spatio-temporal events precisely as effects of the activation of a relational 'between'. In this sense, neither art nor nature can be thought of as the prefiguring grounds which somehow configures a milieu between them. It is this 'between' that relationally and ecologically prefigures the possibility of the eventing of art and nature. The degree to which the institutional stakes invested in Australian Perspecta can limit the instrumental project or task of harnessing art and nature in the service of a good cause will ultimately be contingent on the degree to which these institutions can think their very project of engagement ecologically.

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Filling the void

Andrew McNamara looks at what the history of aesthetics has to say about art and nature and finds promise in decay and technology



Vera Möller, *My Wild Life* (detail), 1996

Between art and nature. What does this mean?

We could look at it two ways. The title implies that we are dealing with neither art nor nature, but something else that straddles the gap between the two. It is not clear what inhabits this interstitial orbit, but it does not appear to be "art" strictly speaking. It would be fair to ask then, why mount a major contemporary art event around this non-art thematic? This is not a case of being dogmatic about terms, for it goes to the heart of any strong curatorial premise: one has to decide whether the thematic contributes to a fresh understanding of contemporary art or whether instead it imposes a clumsy sociological gloss upon the art, is it a case of latching onto the cause of ecology and then scratching around for art to fit the bill? (These remarks must be prefaced by the fact that they respond to the curatorial premise of *Perspecta* and are made in advance of the exhibition itself.)

On the other hand, the title hints at some communion between art and nature—the bringing together of two different things. This raises the question of how they would be linked. If one looks at Western art history, in which the mediation of art and nature has been a major thematic, the relation between the two appears far more complex than one would first imagine. Of course, many people presume there is a natural affinity between art and nature. For some of our more vociferous journalist-critics, the straying from the presumed organic link between art and nature is the root cause of the malaise of contemporary art, if not the whole of contemporary society. But can it all be this simple?

If we take the example of two of the best known formulations linking art and nature, we soon realise that differences of basic definition are vast. The perceptual model of art that EH Gombrich outlined in *Art and Illusion* (1960) confirmed the idea that art draws its inspiration from the observation of nature. Gombrich thought artists tested prior perceptions and artworks against nature. By means of this 'mix and match' process of perceptual testing, artists continually elicited gradual modifications of existing schema in an effort to achieve ever greater ocular accuracy. The perceptual model of art, as Norman Bryson has suggested, assumes that the artwork spans "an arc that runs from the brush to the retina". (Norman Bryson, "Semiology and Visual Interpretation", *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation*, N Bryson, MA Holly & K Moxey eds, Cambridge, 1991) Bryson's complaint with perceptualism is that it reduces the artwork to an artificial, seamless coherence, devoid of any of the fuss of representation or of the social world.

As far back as the early 15th century, however, Leon Battista Alberti had proposed a Neo-Platonic view of art that differed markedly from this model of empirical testing. Alberti pronounced that an artist should not follow nature blindly like some compliant puppy. The artist should avoid sheer nature and instead extract only its best qualities. Artists, in effect,

should abstract from nature; they need to fabricate its ideal form. Under no circumstance should an artist follow a literal perception of nature because that meant obeying it in all its errancy. To follow nature blindly is wholly un-aesthetic. The ideal is a form of artifice, Alberti would seem to suggest, and it cannot be found in the empirical reality which Gombrich believes grants art its impetus.

Yet the linking of art and nature is far more complicated than even this divergence of opinion implies. In 17th and 18th century aesthetic thought, the term 'nature' was used so extensively it became something of a catch-all. In 1927, a Romanticist scholar, Arthur Lovejoy, attempted to survey this variety of meaning (Arthur O Lovejoy, "Nature" as Aesthetic Norm", *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. XLII, 1927). A remarkable feature of Lovejoy's account is that it reveals how similar definitions and uses of the term 'nature' can, particularly with the advent of Romantic thought, provoke quite antithetical understandings. For an artwork to acquire the designation 'natural', it had to adhere to certain requirements—Lovejoy lists 19 subcategories, many of which are contradictory: symmetry (regularity and geometry), asymmetry (wildness), naiveté (unadorned emotionalism, lack of sophistication, the qualities exemplified by 'primitive' art), adherence to the rules and standards of objective beauty (the immutable in human nature, imitation of long-accepted models), the disregard of rules and precedents (free expression, feeling as spontaneous and therefore more 'natural').

To confuse the issue further, the term 'nature' could mean anything from that part of empirical reality not transformed by human endeavour or art (a view which contradicts both Gombrich and Alberti) to qualities associated with the artist ("freedom from influence of conventions, rules, traditions" and "self-expression without self-consciousness"). The latter values suggest the advent of modernist aesthetic principles, but these, too, would appear to derive from a definition of 'nature'. Despite its brevity, Lovejoy's informative survey contains so many variations of categories, so many qualifications and contrasting sub-categories, that it causes one to pause and reflect on just how loosely the terms art and nature are bandied about in contemporary critical parlance. Might we not ask whether we really know what we are talking about when linking art and nature?

An intriguing response to the art-nature nexus was offered by the German critic-philosopher Walter Benjamin. He was inclined to examine the concept of nature by coupling it with what it is usually opposed to—history and technology. A problem arises, he suggests, when our views of art and nature rely upon a symbolic idealisation which emphasises nature as plenitude or an idyllic stasis. Benjamin felt it necessary to cut this organic tie between art and nature. One could say, in the wake of Benjamin, that our

concepts of nature are deeply embedded in an aesthetic philosophy heavily burdened by organicist thinking. This might not sound surprising when dealing with the concept of 'nature', but Benjamin found it inevitably avoids a key (though perplexing) feature of the 'naturalness' of nature—namely, decay.

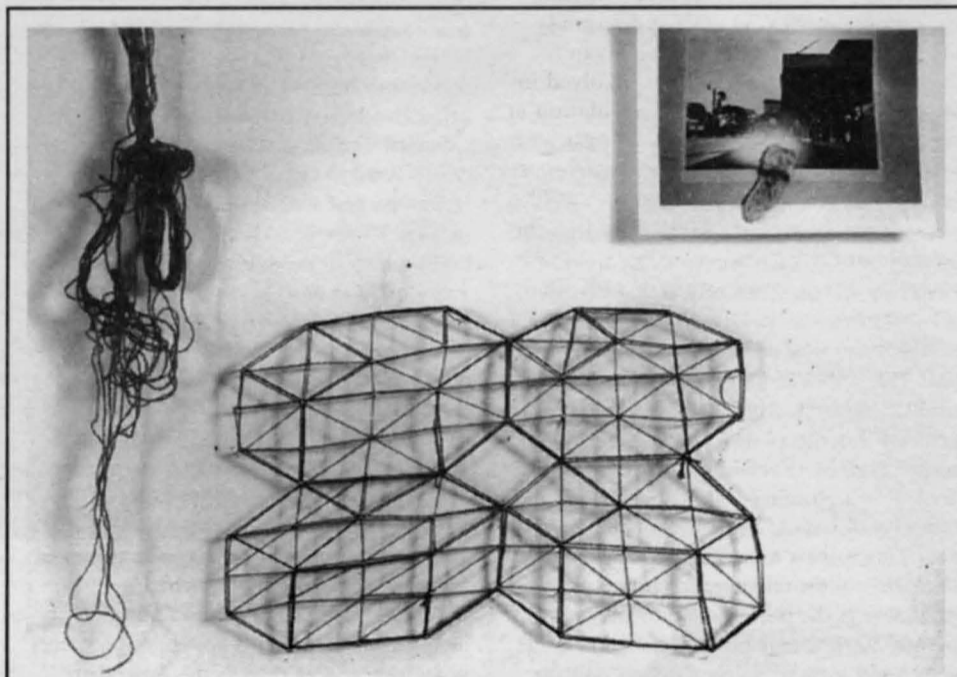
Decay is an inherent feature of nature, but one which we have difficulty accepting, especially in our thinking of art and nature. In contrast to the aesthetics of the classicist symbol, Benjamin advocates an allegorical approach which emphasises the "eternal transience" of nature, its overripeness or imperfection. It contemplates an "extraordinary crossing of nature and history", which he calls "nature-history". History then acquires the quality of a perishing nature. The allegorical brings us into the creaturely domain of historical-natural understanding. This means shrugging off that part of a tradition forged upon the teleologies of perfection, eternal harmony and the human mastery of technology and nature. To Benjamin's mind there is something peculiarly lifeless about this vision of nature as harmonic plenitude, which is nearly always accompanied, even necessitated, by presumptions of technical mastery. He counters it with the only activity worthy of a perishable nature-history and that is a destructive creativity bent upon making room or clearing paths.

This does not mean, Benjamin offers, that we lack a 'cosmic' view. For him "the paroxysm of genuine cosmic experience is not tied to that tiny fragment of nature that we are accustomed to call 'Nature'". Any gesture in regard to a communion 'between' art and nature will read as quite empty if it relies upon nothing more than a vague hope

of fulfilment. It is because this 'between' of art and nature remains a void that Benjamin proposes we can fill it, and obtain a grasp of cosmic proportions, by means of the traditional antitheses of nature, technology and history. In technology, he argues, a new "physis is being organised"; but this is only possible if we realise that "technology is the mastery not of nature but of the relation between nature and man" (Walter Benjamin, "To the Planetarium" in "One-Way Street", *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Verso, London, 1985). In effect, Benjamin might warn us that we are at our most imperious when we presume ourselves innocent in our approach to nature. The notions of an imperious technological mastery that at once seem so remote from art and aesthetics find their counterpart in Gombrich's perceptualism which will only recognise nature as an eternal standard when it is totally inert and ready for appropriation.

Benjamin causes us to reflect upon the artifice in our very vision of nature. Hence, he treats the mechanical as organic and the human as inorganic. For him, the creaturely realm of the allegorical is as much composed of images as it is characterised by the imprint of technology. If our perceptions of nature are a little bit Mickey Mouse, then Benjamin could be happy with that. For Mickey Mouse was the machinic body *par excellence*, one that even outstripped contemporary technical capacities. "Mickey Mouse shows us that the natural creature still remains even after it has divested itself of everything resembling mankind. It breaks through the hierarchy of natural creatures that is conceived of as culminating in man" (W. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften, Collected Works VI*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1972-89).

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Sue Pedley, *Listening to Clara, Ethel and Ada* (detail), wool, photos, mixed media

Sue Pedley's project *Listening to Clara, Ethel and Ada* is concerned with representing those ineffable values about community, intimacy and human-scale time so undermined by the ascendancy of economic rationalism. Her evolving installation, set up in a row of shops long vacant in the heart of Erskineville village, plays host to a sense of suspended, slow time which seeks to elude the instrumentalism of the economic paradigms driving recent changes in her suburb, including the closure of essential regional services in the name of efficiency; the destruction of old industrial landmarks, and the relentless encroachment on public land.

Pedley evokes this non-instrumental time by focusing her attention on the laborious process of weaving. Not only is her three-dimensional wool-modelling painstaking and time-consuming, it is in a sense never complete, always in a state of gradual change. Her project is not driven by the desire for a finished product; rather her work comprises the very process of making small, subtle connections between one thread and another, so that after time these connections begin to transform the room, organically evolving into a large, indomitable structure. Pedley's weaving takes a very specific pattern—it is modelled on the molecular structure of gypsum, the main component of her favoured material, plaster. Pedley has long been investigating the subtle secrets of plaster, its architectural history as well as its chemical properties. In this installation, her rendering of plaster's unseen inner intricacies embodies an apt metaphor for the seemingly fragile, yet inherently strong, community ties in her neighbourhood.

Pedley's project of 'listening' also entails a fast and loose documentation of the groundswell of community opposition to certain developments in her suburb: a barrage of snapshots of community protests and events, counterpoised with historical images of Erskineville village and protest placards. With these photos and signs, Pedley's project plays the traditional galvanising role of community art, yet this more traditional role is inflected with the subtleties of the artist's specific process-based installation practice. This interplay grants the project a greater complexity, characterised by that sense of non-instrumental time which renders Pedley's studio/gallery/shopfront a place of respite from the exigencies of the economically driven, rational world.

Jacqueline Millner

Listening to Clara, Ethel and Ada, 106-112 Erskineville Rd, Erskineville, August 1-September 14, part of *The Performance Space's response to Perspecta*, Screaming Green, also featuring works by Julie-Ann Long, Mark Joseph and Rod Berry

The nature of things

Sue Best puts the case for the special power of installation art to thematise our relation to the environment

This year *Perspecta* is a sprawling event taking in not only the usual venue—the Art Gallery of New South Wales—but also Casula Powerhouse, the Royal Botanic Gardens, The Performance Space and many other cultural institutions. The stretch is not just physical but also conceptual—an old and venerable theme is expanded and reinvigorated with the pressing concerns of the present. In the past, the theme of art and nature might have conjured notions of the perfection of nature; the imitation of nature (either as precept or process); Romantic affinities with nature; early and late Modern abstractions from nature, and so forth. In the exhibitions opening this August, the spread of concerns is somewhat different: some will be tackling ecological issues (Harry Nankin, Australian Centre for Photography), others will be hailing a new era of artificiality (Patricia Piccinini et al., Museum of Contemporary Art), while a more spiritual, perhaps even deep-ecological, turn will be evident at the SH Ervin Gallery (Janet Laurence, Hossein Valamanesh and others). While these issues can be successfully tackled in a variety of media, I want to make a case for installation as a particularly suitable form for thematising our relation to the environment.

There is, in fact, what almost amounts to a tradition in Sydney of women installation artists whose work is concerned with our cultural and natural environment: Joan Brassil, Joan Grounds, Robyn Backen, Joyce Hinterding, Anne Graham, Simone Mangos and Janet Laurence. Perhaps coincidentally, almost all of these artists are involved in this year's *Perspecta*: Brassil's work, *Where Yesterday may be Tomorrow*, is on view at Campbelltown City Gallery; Grounds and Backen are both showing at Ivan Dougherty Gallery; Graham is involved in the collaborative multimedia installation at the Museum of Sydney, *Harbourings: Remaking Sydney's Industrial Landscapes*; and Laurence is in the group show at SH Ervin, *Temple of Earth Memories*. It is the example of their work, or more to the point, the provocation of their work, that has persuaded me that installation is the artistic form or practice most suited to a reconsideration of our environment. While the provocation to consider the powers and possibilities of installation remains utterly specific, to account for the propensities of this form requires a broader art historical view. If we regard the form of these works as the "expanded field" of sculpture, the particular suitability of installation for this environmental theme will come into view.

The phrase "sculpture in the expanded field" comes from Rosalind Krauss' famous essay of that name published in the journal *October* in 1979. Using this phrase, Krauss endows the sculptural practices which emerged in the early 70s with a coherent and purposive structure. Thus instead of reading the onset of the postmodern moment as the removal of bounds—"the dematerialisation of the art object" (Lucy Lippard) or "anything goes" (Paul Taylor)—Krauss presents postmodernism as an historical rupture in artistic practice which is nonetheless structurally bound to the terrain of its emergence. Postmodern sculpture becomes, in her hands, the exploration of sculpture's others: the things that sculpture traditionally was not. Herein lies the expansion. Yet in this retelling of the logic of artistic change it also becomes clear that these 'others' are not only the things from which sculpture must be distinguished, but also the adjacent or contiguous categories (architecture, landscape) to which sculpture is most closely related. Such an understanding of postmodernism opens up the insular purity



Janet Laurence and Fiona Foley, *Edge of the Trees*, 1994. Museum of Sydney

of formalist modernism. Instead of the inward-turning essentialist urge, where each medium is understood to be propelled towards the realisation of its irreducible identity, now contiguity and relation feature in this rethinking of the limits of sculpture. Surprisingly perhaps, the postmodern mixing of categories which flirts with categorical dissolution is presented by Krauss as a logical progression from modernism. Indeed if postmodernism is posed as an expanded field we can only conclude that modernism was rather narrow.

It is precisely in order to rescue this contrast between the expansive and the narrow that I have returned to Krauss' phrase, "sculpture in the expanded field". This is not to deny the usefulness of the term 'installation', but rather to try to infuse it with something of the rigour that Krauss brings to bear upon the term 'sculpture'. In particular, her critique of historicism is just as relevant to the recent literature on installation as it was to the discussion of sculptural practices in the 70s (see, for example, the history of installation by De Oliveira, Oxley and Petry). The tendency then, as now, is to seek the meaning of recent practices in the quest for historical precedents, no matter how remote or obscure. Art historical scholarship here is reduced to little more than iconographical fossicking for 'the similar': the credentials of this new art, as art, are then established through the revelation of the accumulated examples of 'precedents'.

The cost of this exercise is the loss of any relation to the immediate past and the obscuring of the specific conditions of emergence in the present. More importantly, in the effort to explain the new, its newness is removed. Indeed, the result is that installation is paradoxically positioned as *the* art form of the 90s, the newest thing, and yet not new at all. In this peculiar balancing act, difference, expansion, opposition are diffused by History, the force and weight of which marks out installation as significant and new at the very same moment as it obscures these features with the mantle of tradition. This paradox is probably the condition of all historical emergences; however, it needs to be thematised as such rather than remaining the result of the unthinking application of a very tired art historical method.

It is against the background of this very common approach to art and art history that the rigorous and original contribution of a thinker such as Krauss can be seen. While I am not entirely convinced by her

construction of the emergence of postmodern sculpture as something akin to a logical necessity, her approach does signal a decisive shift from the modernist concern with the autonomy of art, to art with a more expansive view. The registration of this shift very effectively counters the

homogenising iconographical tradition, which still dominates much local and international art history, and also explains the possibility of works concerned with the environment.

Installation, then, becomes the result of both a formal and a conceptual shift—form and content are, as it were, simultaneously expanded.

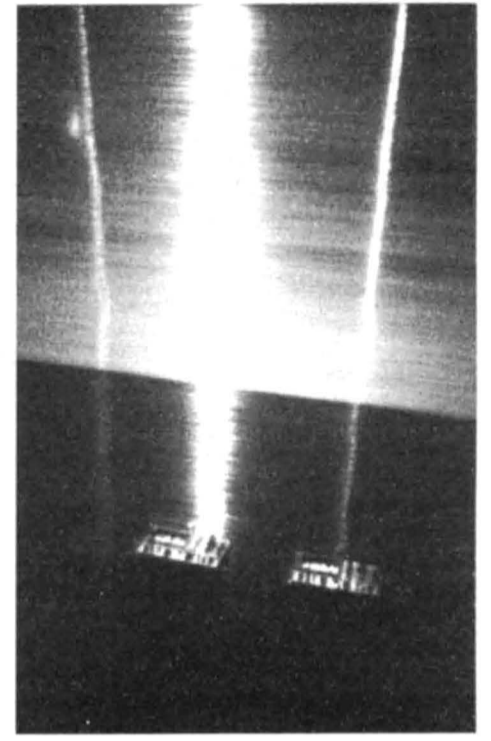
Modern sculpture remains the reference point in this refigured account of installation. One could say that in the expanded form of installation, sculpture is no longer conceived as a presence, or a bounded object, but rather it has become a milieu offering an immersive experience—in other words, one is plunged into the space of the work rather than being separate from it. The form (or relative formlessness) of installation thus lends itself to the contemplation of our surroundings. Indeed, installations can incorporate the surrounding natural or cultural milieu in a way that few other art forms can even begin to approach. Installations can genuinely be between art and nature: part of the work is always the 'given' surroundings and how that 'given' is handled rests with the artist.

These last points are best illustrated with reference to particular installations. The two I want to examine are Janet Laurence's collaboration with Fiona Foley for the Museum of Sydney forecourt, *Edge of the Trees* (1994) and Joyce Hinterding's recent installation at Artspace, *I-Tone Aeriology*. The two pieces are vastly different: the Foley/Laurence installation is permanent, and is concerned with the meaning of permanence, in so far as the work participates in the production of a kind of critical institutional memory. In contrast, the Hinterding installation is transient, and conjures up the fleeting and the evanescent: it reveals an unheeded and invisible electromagnetic environment. The common link is the extraordinary capacity to illuminate the notion of 'site'.

The Laurence/Foley piece is about very particular site(s): the site as it was in the past—the place of the first Government House and its vanished natural setting—and the contemporary site, an exquisite museum which is itself a work of art. The installation thus has twin orientations: it serves as a memorial to the past; and in the present, operates as a signpost for the museum—signalling what to expect inside and offering a kind of welcome. The signpost function is quite complex: it operates in one mode at a distance, and then very differently close-up. From a distance the installation emphasises the integration of the museum about Sydney, into the fabric of Sydney: the work seems to almost melt into the surroundings and yet to highlight the play of colours and textures in the immediate vicinity.

The 'close-up' is where past and present interweave: this is experienced when one enters the work's narrow space. The viewer is quickly absorbed into this space: soaring poles of treated wood and steel—which simulate a dense grove of mature trees—dwarf the viewer. There is a strong call to explore the grove: to read the inscriptions on the poles, and to find and identify the pockets of substances within them. The complex intermingling of names (First Fleeters' signatures, the names of their Eora contemporaries, botanical species once grown in the governor's garden) and substances (ash, hair, bones etc.)—many well out of reach of both eye and hand—adds to the strange mixture of

participative inquiry and human diminution. One yearns to understand and see all, and yet the work resists the gestalt which makes visual appropriation possible. This refusal to set into a single, complete image prepares the viewer for the highly reflective and interpretative view of



Joyce Hinterding, *I-Tone Aeriology*

Ian Hobbs

the past presented inside the museum, where singular, 'definitive' accounts of the past are eschewed.

If *Edge of the Trees* is a complex interweaving of past and present sites, *I-Tone Aeriology* is a mapping of the immediate landscape. Formed by 20 kilometres of shimmering copper wire wound round a line of columns, the work appears at first to be a giant copper veil which nets and transduces the particular electrical impulses coursing through the air at any given moment. It forebodes that 'something' we suspect is in the air, giving visual form to the elusive no-thing we register in the complex meanings of 'atmosphere'. The visual form of the electrical landscape is provided, or transcribed, by four oscilloscopes attached at various intervals to the copper net: the 'catch' appears as green, spiky waves constantly moving across a small monitor.

We too are part of the catch; to the side of the copper coil is a surveillance camera attached to another oscilloscope. On this screen the green waves are not as frenetic: there is no strong rhythm or pulsation. Rather we see that our bodies moving about in space can also be transcribed as movements and displacements in a sea of green waves. The more sluggish constitution of these waves makes one reconsider the role of the copper coil: does it really just reveal electric currents, or does it excite them like an electrical coil? Or, like a lightning rod, does it draw electrical energy towards it?

The indeterminate function of the coil is further underscored by its shimmering, indeterminate form: it reflects so much light that it seems to hover between appearance and disappearance. The fluttering, ethereal form, and the production of a bewildering 'something,' seemingly out of thin air, fosters speculation and uncertainty. Indeed, one is left to consider *what* has been made manifest—is the electronic landscape natural or cultural, or a complex amalgam of the two—and to question *how* this manifestation is brought into being—is it created, revealed, or merely amplified? In this fundamental questioning of what is around us—in the case of Hinterding—and what can be comprehended (both perceptually and conceptually) of our surroundings—in the case of Laurence and Foley—is a clear demonstration of the immense critical power of installations about environment.

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The nature of sound as art as sound

A brief guide to sound in Perspecta 1997

PERSPECTA 1997 has committed itself to sound in several dimensions—in the gallery, as installation in a children's hospital, in live performance, on radio in many forms, and in conference—confirming the ubiquity of sound as art and a mindfulness of its preoccupation with nature as 'raw' material. It also entails the unexpected, unusual ways of working with and from sound as well as distinctive ways of thinking about it as an 'acoustic ecology', and of looking at visual art through sound.

Listen out for and look into:

Sound Frames: A Guide to the Artfulness of Nature. "An acoustiguide tour of the Gallery's 19th century Australian collection, re-examining many well-known images of the Australian bush in terms of contemporary thinking about the environment and history". This is made up of 15 soundscapes that you take with you to selected paintings. The writer of *Sound Frames*, Martin Thomas, put it this way in a *Sydney Morning Herald* interview: "The paintings become so familiar that people stop looking at them. I thought it was an important part of the agenda to get people to look through listening". Presented by *The Listening Room*, Radio Eye, AGNSW. Throughout PERSPECTA 1997.

Social Interiors: Spatial Circumference. Rik Rue, Shane Fahey and Julian Knowles, performing together and apart "aim to accurately map the organic aural characteristics of particular 3-dimensional outdoor environments"—"a series of concentrated habitats within and around rainforest regions in New South Wales." Their sounds will be juxtaposed with videomaker Peter Oldham's "super close perspectives and distortions of natural habitats". Presented by SIN (Sydney Intermedia Network). Art Gallery of NSW, Sunday August 24, 2.30pm. Domain Theatre, Level 1; \$12/\$9

SOUNDcheck.two: Terra Acoustica: features papers by Martin Harrison, Alan Lamb and Virginia Madsen "addressing 'acoustic ecologies': representational practices using the medium of sound to explore and negotiate 'natural' and constructed environments". Theatre, Level 4, Sunday, August 17, 2pm. Free.

The Listening Room: "Australian and international sound works that explore, compose and remake the natural world". Featuring: Jane Ulman, Sherre DeLys, Rik Rue, Andrew McLennan, Jim Denley, Stevie Wishart, Virginia Madsen, Tony MacGregor, Gareth Vanderhope (sound design on *Shine, Babe, Romeo+Juliet*) and Elwyn Dennis. Mondays 9pm August 4-September 15, ABC Classic FM.

Radio Eye: "documentary features, discussion and performances that investigate—and celebrate—the many ways in which human beings think about nature". Listen out for special guests Eric Rolls and the French philosopher and novelist Michel Serres recently interviewed by Tony MacGregor in Paris.

Say Ahh. Sherre DeLys and Joan Grounds "create installations of embodied sound to re-animate environments, awakening the world of fantasy and invoking the inner life of nature", in this case creating a walk-through installation with sound at the innovatively designed Westmead Children's Hospital and employing glass-domed (and wired for sound) botanist cases (*RealTime* cover photograph) of a kind once used for the transport of plants. Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children, Westmead, July 31-September 14. Check *The Listening Room* for related programs created by DeLys. Grounds and DeLys also have work at the Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Selwyn Street Paddington, and will be part of an Artists' Forum on Wednesday August 12, 1-2pm. RT

Quotations are from press releases provided by Perspecta 1997.



Simryn Gill, *Rising Damp* (detail), 1997, digital image

Simryn Gill is reticent to describe her work in advance of its exhibition—she likens this to a game of Chinese whispers where inevitably the description will become but a poor translation of her artistic intent. However, she does divulge her process, sketching out a number of anecdotes which provide an interesting background for reading her work for Perspecta, renamed (from *Rising damp*) *Between a rock and a hard place*.

Gill is a recent and somewhat reluctant arrival to Sydney, having lived most of her life in South East Asia but relocated here for her partner's professional opportunities. Given her reluctance, she feared that unless she came to negotiate Sydney head-on, perhaps she might never feel settled here. Hence, she devised a means of seeing Sydney at close quarters, underside exposed, unadorned by the glitz of nightlife or the glint of harbour reflections. After lengthy negotiations, Gill managed to persuade a demolitions contractor to take her along on his rounds. Armed with the trusty companion of the erstwhile traveller, the map, Gill would set off to obscure Sydney locations as the demolition jobs came up, thus forcing herself to traverse her new city. In the demolition's aftermath, she would trawl the detritus in search of compelling pieces of broken walls, in themselves strange custodians of Sydney's history. Some chunks might betray five layers of paint, corresponding to the fashion colours of different epochs—purple, and you knew you'd hit the 70s! Gill collected these remnants, and then overlaid them with text—not with the nouns we are accustomed to reading on maps, but with verbs in the present participle, sporting the suffix which transforms nouns into verbs: 'ing'. Gill sees her project as akin to a Richard Long walk, if back to front: a walk through the urban wilderness punctuated not by evocative poetic fragments about the landscape but by seemingly random action words. Gill hopes the entry of these pieces of domestic rubble into the museum will prompt one to ask: who collects? who names? She hopes that her work's resonance with modernist antecedents such as Long and Carl Andre might beg the question, who may quote and who may only mimic?

Jacqueline Millner

Simryn Gill's *Between a rock and a hard place* will be exhibited as part of *Websites* at the AGNSW from August 2-September 14, along with works by Fiona Hall, the Arnhem Land Weavers, Lauren Berkowitz and Stephen Holland.

Catching a wave

Anna Dzenis details Harry Nankin's creation of a shadowgram

I'm trying to overcome the limitations of the landscape tradition in the visual arts, in broad terms, not just in photography, because it is predicated historically on the separation of humans from nature...of the sense of the environment as an object to be observed, appreciated, used...it is essentially a utilitarian view of the world...even in its romantic version...it is all about what human beings can get out of it whether that's material like coal or gold or an aesthetic response, a sense of beauty...and I'm dissatisfied with that. That to me is part of the problem. My interest is an ecological engagement...an ecocentric engagement with the world...the shadowgram for me was one way of achieving that...

Harry Nankin

In the middle of Melbourne's summer, photographic artist Harry Nankin and an assembled crew trekked down to Bushrangers Bay on the southern Victorian coast to execute Nankin's vision—a shadowgram of a wave. This was no small undertaking. Nankin's aim was to record a massive life-size image of an ocean wave breaking on a wild seashore, directly onto photographic paper. This was made by immersing a 25 square metre raft of black and white photographic paper in the sea at night and exposing it to flash and moonlight. The result is a photographic shadowgram of a wave frozen in motion—a detailed negative picture of churning seawater, foam, kelp and detritus overlain by the linear shadow of marine cables holding the assemblage in place. It was layered with the artist's superimposed text and imagery and various separate hand-applied, post-photographic modifications.

The Wave is part photograph, part sculpture and part performance. As photograph, it is an act of 'geographical divination' revealing an imprint of nature which would otherwise be invisible to the naked eye. As sculpture, it symbolises contradictions in our responses to nature by its sitting at the juncture of abiding realms

(land/sea), its juxtaposing of chaotic organic forms (wave/shadow), and the geometric contrasts to be found in its tools (raft/imaging technology). As performance, the work's creation is approached as a photokinetic, communal public ritual—it is a collaborative art work undertaken in a natural environment. There have been five *Waves*—two *Summer Waves*, an *Autumn Wave* and two *Winter Waves*—spanning the period from the Summer Solstice to the Winter Solstice.

Nankin has previously worked extensively as a photographer of the wilderness. This in part led to his revision of the nature-commodifying conventions of the modernist landscape tradition which include single-point perspective, the miniaturised image, the material separation of viewer from subject and subject from recording medium. It also led to his rejection of the nature-denying 'groundlessness' of postmodern relativism, in favour of strategies privileging the unmediated interplay of artist, emulsion and ecosystem. The result is an amalgam of analogue phototechnology, late-twentieth century *plein air* 'land art' and the applied insights of a materially-grounded, 'ecological' or 're-constructive' postmodern philosophy.

Nankin's *Cathexis* show at the MCA in 1994 illustrated the possibilities of such an approach. Under the cover of darkness he discarded the camera in order to produce terrestrial shadowgrams, capturing the shadows of entire living trees on huge sheets of photographic paper. The images caught the immense scope and scale of their subject. But Nankin's drive to expand the



Harry Nankin, *The Wave*, fragment 2 (detail), 1996, silver gelatin shadowgram

boundaries of environmental expression has led him to aim for the shadow of nature in motion—setting his sights on the very edge of the world—the breaking wave on the shoreline. *The Wave* extends the work of *Cathexis* to the marine realm, to the sea



with all of its beauty, grandeur and danger.

The sub-title of this project—*Theoria Sacra Undarum* (The Sacred Theory of the Wave)—parodies, with its marine twist, Thomas Burnet's mistaken Flood-based conjectures on topographical genesis, published in 1681 as *Telluris Theoria Sacra* (The Sacred Theory of the Earth). Despite Burnet's disdain for the wild, the sheer grandeur of his observations generated public fascination with nature and greatly influenced the direction of Romantic ideas including the seminal treatise on environmental aesthetics published in 1757, Edmund Burke's *Inquiry into the Sublime*. This fascination remains today, where romantic ideas about nature as Eden, an attitude of scientific rationalism, beliefs in the sacred elements of the land, and a kind of utilitarian pragmatism are in competition. For Nankin, the ebb and flow of these contested beliefs about the use, value and meaning of nature, are allegorised in *The Wave*: a single moment in the endless rhythm of nature on a certain night on the shore of a particular beach beneath the shifting dunes of Bushrangers Bay.

So how are such images made? Nankin's inspired and dedicated team of colleagues and

friends assemble a 4 x 6 metre rectangular frame of Oregon beams and angle iron tensioned with wingnuts, marine cables and turnbuckles supporting an overhead 6 metre aluminium tripod with a flash array hung from its apex. Once night falls, several prepared sheets of monochrome chlorobromide photographic paper are sewn face-up using a sail needle and fishing line onto a fishing net stretched across the structure. A thin, translucent strip of computer-altered appropriated drawings is then stapled along the paper's edge. The entire 150 kilogram assemblage is then carried to the shore and at an appropriate moment, as a wave rushes across the paper's surface, the flash is triggered, imprinting its image.

Returned to the artist's Melbourne darkroom in a lightproof PVC pipe, the exposed paper is manually processed in customised chemistry and then further manipulated in the studio with hand-applied bleach, chemical toners and pencil. The chosen *wave* will be re-sewn into the original net and raft structure for exhibition.

The Wave is a conceptually elegant and original artwork. The prints are the only marine ecological shadowgrams ever attempted *in situ*. It is one of the largest photographic artworks and perhaps the largest shadowgram ever created. In a milieu infatuated with the digital, *The Wave* re-invests traditional photo-technology with new value. It also re-asserts the importance of meaning over technique and re-affirms the ontological distinction between the virtual and the organic. It contributes to the emerging discipline of ecological aesthetics, offering perhaps the only cogent photographic equivalent of 'land-art' pioneered by practitioners such as Andy Goldsworthy and Richard Long. It challenges the way photography is used to represent nature. It also employs the familiar Australian location of the beach in order to point to the mystery, wonder and fragility of the coastal realm itself.

The Wave will be exhibited at the Australian Centre for Photography August 8-30 as part of *Perspecta*. *The Wave* has also been invited to Lisbon's Expo '98 as part of The International Year of the Sea

All the world is one big Chelm

Kevin Murray tracks a few tangents to ponder the false separation between nature and technology

You wouldn't believe it. It's the week before Winter Solstice and the beach is crowded with people ... at night. They have so many layers of clothing that they look more like over-sized penguins than men and women. So, what are they doing there, on this deserted beach near Cape Schank?

Now comes the really unbelievable part. They're 'taking' a photograph. Actually, they're going to *take* this photograph and toss it into a crashing wave. Currently, the photographic paper is in three pieces attached to netting. This netting has been stretched taut on a wooden frame, five by seven metres in size. Busy hands are sewing these papers into the netting, through the damp sand, guided only by a thin moonlight.

This shadowgram has been a difficult business. On the first attempt, just before the Summer Solstice, the paper disintegrated in the swell. The second time, the process took so long to assemble that the high tide was missed. The third time, the flash unit failed to fire on time. This is the fourth and last time. Goodwill, money and patience have all worn paper thin.

Shlemiel art

Please excuse my attempt at village storytelling, but there is something folkloric about Harry Nankin's attempt to capture a wave on photographic paper. By coincidence, Nankin's family originated in one of the most legendary Jewish communities in Poland: the village of Chelm. In 1942, many of Chelm's 15,000 Jews were sent to Sobibor death camp. Before then, it was famous for the naiveté of its inhabitants. Chelm is home of the *shlemiel*, a kind of holy fool whose comic bumbling leads to a deeper understanding of the world. Woody Allen's character Zelig was Chelm's most famous *shlemiel*.

Do you know the story of the tailor Reb Zelig?

The tale is legitimately told by Isaac Bashevis Singer. My own plain version is as follows. (The writer must confess to being a non-Jew. Material for this article was not transmitted through the family, but downloaded from the internet. The Chelm stories were found in a page of the World Zionist Organisation site: <http://www.wzo.org.il/encountr/chelm.htm>.)

Reb Zelig has had enough of the humdrum life and decides to venture out into the world. After a decent walk, he comes to the crossroads, where a signpost points in two directions: one way is to Warsaw, and the opposite way points back to Chelm. Zelig chooses this spot to eat a sandwich made by his wife. Before having a rest, he takes the precaution of removing his shoes and pointing them in the direction of Warsaw, in case he forgets the way during his sleep. While he is asleep, a beggar comes along and takes Zelig's shoes, but on noting their poor condition, he drops them. The direction of the shoes is now reversed: they point back to Chelm.

Zelig wakes and departs for what he thinks is Warsaw, but is actually his own town of Chelm. On arriving at his destination, Zelig is impressed at the friendliness of the people and how similarly this town is arranged to his own. While wandering down a street just like his own, a woman who resembles his wife calls out, 'Zelig you fool, stop standing there, dinner is ready.' Not quite believing the coincidence, he takes his position at the woman's table.

Zelig has not enough money to return home, so he decides to stay in this very strange town. But he tells no one his secret, and dreads the day when the real Zelig finally returns home.

Singer encapsulates the story in a few wise lines:

Those who leave Chelm

End up in Chelm.

Those who remain in Chelm

Are certainly in Chelm.

All roads lead to Chelm.

All the world is one big Chelm.

It's Chelm out there

So, is Harry Nankin a modern-day Zelig? Does he leave behind the artificial lifestyle of

the city and seek out wild nature, only to reduce the whole world to the technology of the camera? This is a rhetorical question. It is asked to 'rehearse', as they say, a theoretical speculation about the relationship between technology and nature.

You know the story of Western positivism

Intrinsic to the Western understanding of philosophy, as voiced by Francis Bacon, is a positivist faith in the expanding empire of truth. Just as science uncovers new mysteries, ready to cast light into their shadows, so fleets of colonists advance upon the New World spreading agriculture, trade and divine light.

Today, this wonder at new frontiers prompts an ironic, postmodern response. As *X-Files* proclaims, "The truth is out there". The first scan of this sentence suggests that truth is like an animal, waiting outside the door. That's the romantic set-up of truth. The second reading provides an opportunity for self-reflection: perhaps truth is only possible as a phenomenon 'out there', at a distance from immediate experience. By this logic, the concept of nature is a mere product of technology, which needs an object to consume/protect. The truth is also 'in there'. The same out of reach character applies to the 'black box', the inscrutable space of technology. The camera is the paradigmatic



Harry Nankin, *The Wave*, raft at dusk before immersion, 1996

'black box', for which the uncontrolled intrusion of light from 'out there' spells ruin.

Just like the myth of Minerva, the owl of wisdom that only flies at dusk, the *X-Files* deft characterisation of occidental knowledge arrives just when this knowledge is on the verge of extinction. From our enlightened position today, we know this story as a cautionary tale about cultural profligacy. Ecologists such as Tim Flannery and Jared Diamond have centre stage, with their stories of the recurring human mistake in assuming nature's inexhaustibility. Today, there's no 'out there' left, or as Lévi-Strauss claims, "there will never be another New World". (Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. J & D Weightman, Harmondsworth, Penguin 1984)

Always Cambrian

A retired Jewish-doctor, whose father also migrated to Australia from Poland, is fond of bringing the big picture down to earth. He describes to me the origin of life. "You see, it begins in the Cambrian period. First, life forms were only one or two cells in size, and they received all the nourishment they needed from the brine around them. The water would also wash away their waste products. Everything came to their door. The problems started when more sophisticated forms evolved, with many more cells, and it was harder to get the water to reach all the cells. To solve this problem, the cells began to enclose water within them. They had a world of their own. With an internal pump to circulate the water, they could move about. Evolution took off." And then his story goes to ground: "That's why, if you measure the salt-level in your body, you'll see that it's the same level of salinity as the sea during the

Cambrian period". In the flow of this practical logic, it's a short step from multi-cell evolution to mobile phones.

The doctor's story has overtones of Bruno Latour, a French anthropologist who has studied lab technicians as though they were shamans. Rather than analyse the story science tells about itself—romancing the data—Latour looks closely at what scientists actually do, which is a glamorous form of paperwork. Not simply reflecting the world, science constructs it in a way that makes the very act of science possible. Before it uncovers any 'truth', it must sterilise, disinfect, cable, insulate, pave, seal, grid etc. BYO truth.

As the official biographer of Louis Pasteur, Latour claims that the normal 'black box' argument about the difference between life inside and outside the laboratory cannot withstand scrutiny. With pasteurisation, the regime of the laboratory extends to the farmyard. Science requires a grid of clean transport in order to function as a universal system of knowledge. In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour compares scientific facts to frozen fish: "the cold chain that keeps them fresh must not be interrupted, however briefly" (Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* trans. Catherine Porter, New York, Harvester Wheatsheaf 1991). In order to function as a reliable knowledge factory, science must close its door on the outside world.

No one has ever observed a fact, a theory or a machine that could survive outside of the networks that gave birth to them. Still more fragile than termites, facts and machines can travel along extended galleries, but they cannot survive one minute in this famous and mythical 'out-there-ness' so vaunted by philosophers of science.

Bruno Latour, *Science in Action*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press 1987

This point stands to reason: the real challenge in Latour's position is his lack of cynicism. For Latour, there is actually no 'out there' unmediated by the retinue of doorkeepers. The politician, the answering machine, the angel and the hole in the ozone layer are all mediators of greater forces.

One response to Latour's argument is to create a world where technology fits snugly within the ecosystem. Paula Dawson's 'Greenworld' (<http://www.vislabs.usyd.edu.au/gallery/paula/>) is such a place. Her *You are Here* lunar hologram, to be installed on a Queensland island, is conceptualised within 'Greenworld', based on Shakespeare's Forest of Aden—"tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, good in everything". In this world, data gatherers fossick the forest floor for information that can be registered into the central database. As in the film *Twister*, electronic transcription blends seamlessly into other natural phenomena.

Harry Nankin responds to the false separation of nature and technology too, but in the opposite way. Rather than turning technology inside nature, Nankin tosses it out. The panoptic regime, in which photographer captures the fleeting moment in his black box, is

overthrown—paper is cast into the sea. In the process, foamy salt water and floating seaweed react directly with the chemicals on the paper. At least that's the theory.

Fourth wave

One or two elect to give the signal and 40 odd hands hoist the frame along the sand and into the water. I let the braver souls take the seaward side where the surf is waist high. Harry waits until the right moment in the swell for us to lower it onto the receding water. In semi-darkness, we wait for the wave to surge onto front stage. Here it comes, but Harry hesitates. A cloud covers the moon and it's difficult to see what's happening. The wave retreats unrecorded. Another takes its place, but still Harry waits. Finally, the third is flashed, but after successive waves, it's hardly a clear line. Yet another failure.

Fortunately, Nankin's friends have brought a spare roll of paper. They are determined that this be the last outing. Perhaps the camera operator just wants to heighten the suspense.

Salt of the earth

But I digress...

One of the beliefs we used to mock in 'pre-scientific' culture is the notion that the sky is solid. The ancient Jewish and early Christian understanding of the firmament was of a hemisphere of beaten metal that separated the fiery heavens with a layer of cooling water, which would occasionally descend to earth as rain.

In the Old Testament (now called the "First Testament") there are specific contracts made between God and the people of Israel. One of the most interesting of these is the 'covenant of salt'.

And every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings, thou shalt offer salt.

Leviticus bk 2:13

According to an interpretation in the Midrash, the origin of the covenant of salt stems from a complaint by the lower waters at their distance from God in the heavens. Thus, God requested man to include salt on the altar in sacrifice. (<http://www.yated.com/salt.htm>) A grain of salt thus seals the pact between God and his people, higher and lower waters.

Without salt, there would be no empires. The British colonised the world on salted beef, and the Dutch sailed the world on rollmops. With some Latourian license, it may be said that the salt crystals in photographic emulsion laid the foundations of a global culture.

As world building moves on to digital terrain, this material packaging of colonisation begins to unravel. This process is dramatised in Sue Pedley's installation *Listening to Clara, Ethel and Ada*. Pedley's art is strategically designed to highlight the threat to Erskineville's local post office posed by the inexorable forces of economic rationalisation. Her metier of plaster serves well to reflect the standardising force of institutions like the post office. By working down to the molecular composition of gypsum, Pedley is able to demystify this material. Hers is a Canute-like art that bathes in the inexorable tide of progress.

Cut

It's past midnight and we're back again on the beach. This is definitely the last chance. With Nankin's signal, we lower the frame onto the wet sand. On cue, the wave surges forth over the paper and this time Harry triggers the flash at just the right moment. For a second or two, everyone relaxes, as much as it is possible in the freezing water. Unfortunately, that brief moment of relaxation is long enough for the backwash to apply force against the paper and...rip. The seaward section is torn in two.

For the sake of team spirit, Harry tries to repress his disappointment. To me, it seems a fitting conclusion. Through this poetic act, of bringing technology to nature, the sea has recovered its elemental wildness. There is a world outside Chelm, but you have to travel to Chelm to find it.

Kevin Murray is a Melbourne-based writer. His web site is at <http://werple.net.au/~kmurray>

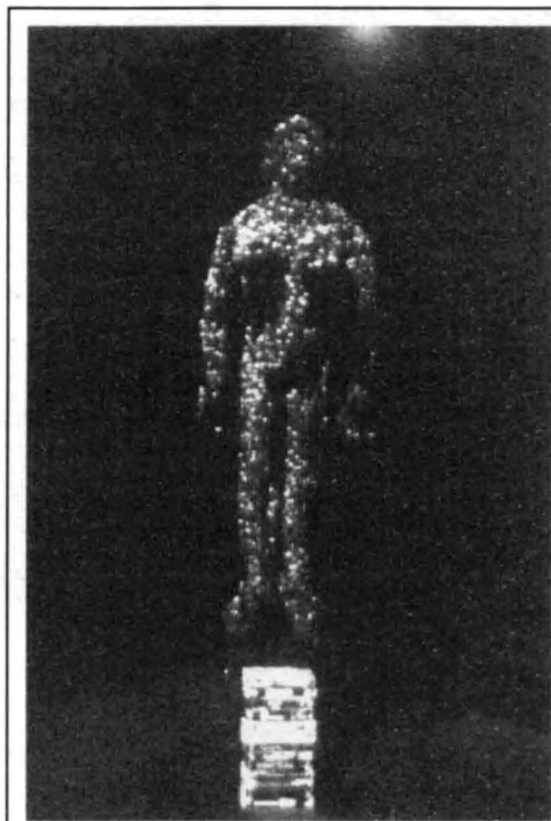
Artful protest

Julia Jones reviews the tradition of environmentalist art in Australia

Australian artists have for many years expressed their concern for the environment. Take for example Arthur Streeton's *Silvan Dam and Mount Donna Buang, AD 2000*, painted in 1940, and now recognisable as a prophetic vision of the barrenness which accompanies the clear-felling of a native forest. Unbeknown to Streeton at the time he painted the work, the year 2000 would become a focus for environmental concerns in Australia, with the staging of the 'Green' Olympic Games in Sydney and an increased eco-consciousness compelled by this impending watershed. In the run-up to 2000, the bi-annual flagship exhibition of Australian contemporary art has undertaken a major shift in keeping with this focus.

How is 'Nature' to be regarded in the 1990s? What role can art play in relation to environmental issues? Can art create positive change? How do environmental action groups relate to art? If art should be, as the artist John Wolsley recently declared, "about the way we live", then the subject of this year's *Perspecta* is timely in the sense that "the way that we live"—or more specifically the impact of human society on the environment—is the most pressing issue facing us in the late twentieth century. By interrogating nature through art and vice versa, *Perspecta* has the potential to stimulate thought, discussion and action: art can, for instance, take the approach of raising awareness through imagery, presenting practical visual solutions, and/or incorporating positive action, such as regeneration, into the actual process of the work. One salient example of the power of imagery to move political ends in recent Australian history is the galvanising force of Peter Dombrovskis' photograph *Rock Island Bend of the Gordon-below-Franklin river*, which featured in a Labor Party campaign poster in 1983 accompanied by the caption "Could you vote for a party that will destroy this?" As Greens leader Bob Brown has noted, "It was the right picture at the right time. And it was crucial in saving the Franklin". The 'No Dams' campaign signified a turning point in public awareness of environmental issues in Australia, and an evocative image was at its centre.

An example of environmentalist art a little farther from home might be found with Joseph Beuys, a founding member of the German Green Party, and his work for



Fiona Hall's new work for *Perspecta* continues her exploration of the body and its intersection with junk culture. *Slash and Burn* comprises a series of life-size body fragments, including heads and limbs, which the artist has knitted from video tape and suspended in a darkened room on simple frames to achieve a fully-formed yet lifeless look. Hall has specifically chosen to knit video tapes of war films, fictional representations of actual wars such as the First and Second World Wars, the Vietnam War and the war between European settlers and native Americans, her titles including *Apocalypse Now* and *Gallipoli*. The video cases form an integral part of the work; they sit in a regimental grid on the floor, underneath the body part they have helped create, their remaining tape tugging at the severed limb with the insistence of an umbilical cord. Their configuration might evoke military precision as much as a cemetery for the war dead.

Hall has knitted each of these pieces herself, a reflection of both her concern for process—a means of entering into the meditative state created by repetitive but intimate manual labour—and for investing the work with the personal attention of one's own hand. At the same time, of course, the work also is testament to the artist's outstanding technical skill, a trademark which has no doubt enhanced Hall's popular appeal. Knitting is also important to the artist as archetypal 'women's work', long devalued as such. She seeks to counterpoise this personal, time-invested travail with the archetypal male labour of war. While she states that this piece is not so directly concerned with gender issues as some of her previous work—for instance, she does not intend for the heads to be read as male, but hopes that the differences in size and shape might evoke the fact that everyone suffers in war—yet she also affirms that "If I wasn't female I wouldn't be making this work". The popular cultural obsession with war, as symbolised by the endless stream of war films Hall encountered while making the work, led her to suspect a certain masculine imperative, or as she puts it, necessity, for war, and indeed for its continual re-enactment. In contrast to the spectacular histrionics of the war movie, Hall posits a quiet, reverential space where the very material of these virtual replays of war—video-tape—has been sequestered for personal mourning and memorial.

Jacqueline Millner

Fiona Hall's *Slash and Burn* forms part of the *Perspecta* exhibition *Websites at the AGNSW* from August 2-September 14, along with works by Simryn Gill, Stephen Holland, the Arnhem Land Weavers and Lauren Berkowitz.

Fiona Hall, *Slash and Burn* (detail)

Documenta 1985. Beuys placed hundreds of rocks outside a museum and challenged the German city of Kassel to plant one tree for every rock. Each time a tree was planted, a rock was planted with it. Kassel now has many more trees than it did before Beuys' challenge. Other German cities did not take up the challenge, and the rocks left over are a constant reminder of the trees that were not planted.

Art as activism is championed by Suzi Gablik in *The Re-enchantment of Art*, where she writes, "I believe that what we will see in the next few years is a new paradigm based on the notion of participation, in which art will begin to redefine itself in terms of social relatedness and ecological healing, so that artists will gravitate toward different activities, attitudes and roles than those that operated under the aesthetics of modernism" (Gablik, Suzi, *The Re-enchantment of Art*, Thames and Hudson, New York, 1991). This prediction finds an echo in Sydney artist Jennifer Turpin's suggestion that artists work in collaboration with environmental organisations, as she and Michaelie Crawford have done with the Australian Conservation Foundation. The artists' project *Memory Line* is a symbolic restoration of the original route of a creek at Fairfield. A winding pathway of tall grass, its aim is to raise awareness of the natural formation of the creek's route, which contrasts strongly with the concrete drain through which the water has been channelled.

Speaking at a developmental symposium for *Perspecta* in February 1996, Turpin observed that an artist can step sideways to offer a new way of looking at an environmental problem,

and can assist in communicating such concerns to the wider public. In response, Anne-Marie Willis, writer and researcher with the Ecodesign Foundation, proposed another step—to go into these situations and no longer consider oneself an artist. The Ecodesign Foundation proposes creating new strategies through imagery accompanied by discussion and written comment, and declares that imagery needs to present practical solutions. Its recent project *Waste not Waste* (1996) included Samantha Donnelly's and Helen Pynor's construction *Mapping: Motions—'You have erased me, without memory'*. This work comments on the treatment of human faeces as waste and presents practical alternatives to the flushing of digested organic matter into sewerage and out to sea. The construction includes a set of small metal boxes filled with composted human faeces in which plants grow, offering an environmental and practical solution to the disposal of human 'waste'. The Ecodesign Foundation does not categorise the objects created for *Waste Not Waste* as 'art'; rather, these objects were intended to be "supplemented with conversation, to be written about and written over, to be appropriated, recycled and used in other ways". As Tony Fry comments, "Contrary to initial appearances, the objects should be regarded as means not ends...Rather than the created, the made, these objects were brought into existence in order to re-create, remake" (Fry, Tony, and Willis, Anne-Marie eds, *Waste not Waste*, Ecodesign Foundation, Rozelle, Sydney, 1996).

Another strategy might be that employed by environmental activist groups that have used visual imagery extensively in their campaigns—in protests, media promotions, merchandising and exhibitions. Certain imagery can embody the identity of a particular group. The Wilderness Society is well-known for its trademark picturesque wilderness photographs. While simple images, these photographs make a strong statement by showing the magnificent areas of wilderness that could be lost forever. Exhibitions are another way of conveying messages through imagery, for example The Wilderness Society's recent *Dugongs of Hinchinbrook*, June 21-July 6, which featured the work of 100 artists in response to the battle to save Port Hinchinbrook from the damage of large-scale development. Exhibitions such as this promote public awareness of environmental concerns through artwork, information and campaign material, and also provide a much-needed fundraising opportunity for the

cause. The 1996 Greenpeace art prize exhibition *The Environment and Me*, took the ecological theme one step further and encouraged exhibitors to reflect it not only in the subject matter of their work but also in the materials used. The winning entry, Ziv Cohen's sculpture *Trap No More*, is a protest against the overfishing of lobsters and comprised found and recycled materials, including a large rusty lobster pot.

Of course, Greenpeace are less renowned for their genteel art shows than their dramatic media events, which illustrate another powerful blending of art and protest. As Charles Zuber has suggested, Greenpeace activists "could be thought of as performance artists, producing challenging theatre pieces enacted with the involvement of mass media. Guerrilla tactic as an artform. Culture standing on the side of nature" (Zuber, Charles, "Re-working priorities: recycling materials," *Artlink*, December 1991). The media 'actions' of the organisation certainly live up to this statement. The image of the Greenpeace activist in a tiny boat floating in front of an enormous ship is a familiar one, and was employed in a series of actions held around Australia in protest against the Bicentennial Naval Review in 1988. An action in September 1990 saw the entire front courtyard of the Japanese Embassy in Canberra wrapped in 700 metres of driftnet to draw public attention to the use of this destructive fishing method by Japanese fleets. In March 1995 the Queen Victoria statue in Sydney's CBD was equipped with a gas mask to protest against the North-Western Sydney M2 tollway.

Whether art responds to environmental crisis by raising awareness, actively creating change, or presenting visual solutions, all are important approaches. Whether or not this imagery is known as 'art' is of little consequence. What is important is what art can be. *Perspecta* has the potential to stimulate ideas and discussion on the role and nature of art which deals with environmental concerns. And, in the process of this cultural examination, this wide-ranging event can continue to focus attention on one of the most important political issues of our time.

Julia Jones has recently researched the nature of visual imagery relating to the destruction of Australia's natural environment, focusing on the 1970s onwards. This year she has worked at The Sir Hermann Black Gallery, University of Sydney, and as a research assistant on *Perspecta*.



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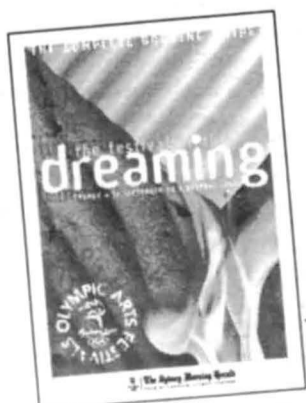
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Common ground

Libby Dempster speaks with Jude Walton, Course Coordinator of the Performance Studies program at Victoria University, Melbourne

The Bachelor of Arts in Performance Studies is a three year full-time degree offered by the Department of Human Movement, Recreation and Performance. The course concentrates on the production and analysis of innovative, cross-disciplinary performance, teaching a combination of disciplines borrowed from modern dance and drama. The course aims to produce autonomous thinkers, makers and performers who combine both discursive and bodily practices—people who will have a practical and theoretical knowledge of the counter-traditions of performance that have been largely ignored in mainstream histories.

LD The course is identified in some people's minds with a certain style of contemporary dance practice but, in fact, what is offered here is a BA in Performance Studies. Perhaps we could begin by talking about the development and orientation of the program. How did it come into being back in 1990?

JW As a response to existing interdisciplinary work by practitioners. Our concern in developing the course was to look at what actually was happening in terms of the process of making interdisciplinary work and the different processes of making performance, whether in dance or theatre or the visual arts. We took that inquiry as the base from which to develop and produce a course.

LD So, a focus on interdisciplinary

performance was, and is, one of the distinctive features of the course?

JW Yes. It's not focused on a singular genre or discipline, although it has been influenced strongly by the work of choreographers and dancers of the 1960s in New York and the interdisciplinary work of artists like Wilson, Cage, Cunningham and Foreman going on during that period.

LD So why Performance Studies as opposed to a redefined Dance or Theatre practice—what informed the choice of course title?

JW To some degree it was influenced by a joint interest that staff here had in contemporary dance and theatre practice and my own interest in performance in the visual arts. The generic label was a way of bringing together quite a lot of different perspectives on what performance is and might be. We wished to formally recognise that dance, theatre and performance in the visual arts, while retaining their particular histories and essential differences, also shared common knowledge. We took up the name 'Performance Studies' to indicate that there was common ground shared between them. We wanted to create an opportunity to investigate that common ground.

LD Presumably there was a judgement made at that time that there were enough resources in the field, aesthetic and intellectual, upon which to build a course of this type. Rather than accepting that

convention within the academy that you can only ever look at things that are at least 30 but preferably 50 years old, you choose to attend to what is actually happening now; and there are rich traditions to draw on.

JW I'm not sure that those performance traditions were established in terms of an academic environment or any institutional environment in this country and I think in a way that's why what we did was actually quite new—not in terms of artistic practice but educationally, in an institutional sense. There weren't a great number of places where a course like this could happen at that time.

I also felt it was important that work of this nature had some formal recognition and some place within an academic institution. I think there was a real sense that it would be positive to put it within some sort of recognised form or establishment and that this would be profitable, in some way, or valuable.

LD The term 'Performance Studies' is perhaps most strongly associated with academic studies of performance—I'm thinking here of the work of the Centre for Performance Studies at Sydney University. In contrast this is a very much a practice-based, hands-on course. That said, I would have to add that this fundamental orientation and commitment to practice is coupled with a vigorous engagement with contemporary cultural and critical theory. The course combines a

wide number of practices, disciplines and methodologies to enable students to productively "think through performance" as Mark Minchinton described it in RealTime # 14 (August 1997). I think the concern with an active working through of various theoretical perspectives in performance is also something that distinguishes the course. I know that my own studio practice and teaching has been challenged and I think enormously enriched by the demands of this interdisciplinary context.

JW The whole focus of our work is on the making and the talking about the making and the thinking of the making, rather than pursuing what I think of as a secondary process where you're looking at and commenting on and writing about performance in relative isolation from physical practice. The primary focus of study here is the actual making and practice of performance.

I do think we're gradually developing a language with which to talk about the ways particular disciplines, both discursive and bodily, meet, join or overlap or inform each other. I also recognise that there is a need at certain times to reflect, to acknowledge that each genre of performance, each body of theory, has a sort of separateness as well; each of the disciplines does have a distinct history and lineage that has informed it.

However, one thing that is quite important about the course is that, in fact, it's not based on old knowledge. While it might acknowledge past traditions and conventions of performance, it's actually not based on them. That for me is what continues to be interesting. I don't feel as though the course is organised around a body of knowledge that is closed down, completed and therefore known. It's much more about an attempt to stay with whatever is changing and that's what keeps it lively. We are not ignoring the histories of the past, we do actually want to have them, to recuperate them and to use them. But the challenge is to make a way to include those perspectives without taking on old structural models. In relation to dance, for example, it is important to recognise that contemporary dance has developed into forms that are not derivative of ballet. There are new forms, with different philosophies, different training systems, concepts and rationales.

LD Which returns me to the question of the association sometimes made between this course and new dance practice. At the present time, Performance Studies at V.U.T. is one of the few places in Australia where someone who wants to be exposed to new approaches in movement and movement-based composition can do so in quite a rigorous fashion. Processes and systems like ideokinesis, for example, are taken up here more in their own terms as opposed to being offered as a non-essential supplement to a mainstream dance training. But I wonder about identifying the work that goes on here as 'dance'. As course coordinator you represent the course on the Tertiary Dance Council. How do you perceive that linkage?

JW Well, it may be perceived as a little curious, but I think it's totally appropriate. Although the course is not exclusively designed for dance training, that's not what it's about at all; it is founded in movement. It has strong systems of movement education at its core. The fact is that some students will take that into dance and others will progress in other ways. I have no difficulty in terms of it being seen within the wider frame of dance.

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Growing a research culture

Rod Wissler in conversation with Maryanne Lynch

ML Could you give a brief description of the Centre for Innovation in the Arts?

RW The Centre was established in 1993 and is, first and foremost, the location for the visual and performing arts postgraduate research students in the Academy of the Arts at Queensland University of Technology. It isn't so much a physical space—there's some offices and a small technology laboratory which has some fairly high quality digital video equipment etc—but the Centre can access the resources of all of the Academy disciplines—dance, drama, music, visual art—and that's been one of its strengths. It's an umbrella for activities; a meeting place for ideas; and an organisation which continues to use resources both within the Academy and the university and connects people with those resources. Beyond that, it coordinates staff research across disciplines and initiates projects, both academic and based in arts practice.

ML How does it coordinate or initiate academic research?

RW Mainly by indicating strategic directions for research and supporting the engagement of staff members in particular projects. Case in point: the project that we have currently running, with the involvement of Queensland Performing Arts Trust is the study of 'festival culture', and that's something I initiated.

ML What about arts-practice research?

RW The issue in performing arts nationally is of teaching and working at the coalface in the studio being seen as distinct activities. To have attempted, on the one hand, to define some of that studio activity as research and, on the other hand, to claw a little more time into the daily working lives of tertiary staff in these areas has been a difficult task.

ML I'm interested to talk about an academic institution initiating and developing new artwork, particularly using new technologies.

RW The Centre prioritised the creation of new artistic works. Currently, our operation has a different balance. At the time there was an acknowledgment of, for instance, Australia Council grants within the competitive research grant structure of the national university system. This Centre was built on the fact that artistic practice would be acknowledged within the research paradigm. Unfortunately, the Australian Research Council and DEET (Department of Education, Employment, Training) reneged on that.

One of the reasons for the change in the Centre's emphasis is the pragmatic one: to try and see how we actually fund this sort of

activity in the university system. One of the other developments that's taken place is we've set up an undergraduate course in multimedia design. The way I look at that is that we are currently growing a postgraduate and research culture. Out of that and the undergraduate course, we'll reconnect with our mission in a couple of years.

ML Funding the Centre was about the need to build a foundation?

RW Yes! The arts and technology endeavours within the Academy started about 1990, and we set up the initial laboratory with Tim Gruchy doing low-end virtual reality stuff and using the Mandala system. That was a big breakthrough within the Academy in terms of focusing people's attentions on new technologies. That activity was then taken up through the Centre.

ML The Centre still seems to be initiating artwork.

RW It continues, and the fact that the PhD population has grown to 18 over the past four years is another explanation for this.

ML So doctoral studies can include a creative component?

RW A normal PhD would be maybe 80-100,000 words. We've moved to a situation where someone can write around about 50,000 words and be examined on exhibitions or productions, on other things. It's sort of half and half.

ML How do you evaluate this work?

RW It's a matter of expert readings and peer review. And those are the two benchmarks that are used, not only within the university but within the arts system. Research that is generated either at a cultural level or as part of some sort of ongoing research into visual and performing arts isn't necessarily going to be transparent to a lay reader, but the essence is that the outcomes have some sort of innovative relationship to their own field. Hence, it requires readers who are experts in the meaning-making systems of that field. There's quite a bit of activity happening nationally to sort through these issues. Part of what is going on is a clarification of the relationship between the Australia Council and the Australian Research Council.

ML Part of that discussion is about when people are artists and also work on staff at universities. Isn't it a different matter when the two roles are put together in a formal way?

RW I think it's to do with how we understand research in the different contexts and how we understand new work

itself. What we're talking about here is building a community of judgement over a couple of generations.

ML I guess that would apply even more to cross-art and multimedia work.

RW Anything that crosses boundaries becomes very difficult in terms of the supervision and examination procedures. It's important that other academic disciplines can look at the practices and be convinced that there is rigour, and that is equally important in terms of professional arts practice.

ML What procedures for development and evaluation have you initiated or would you like to implement for such work?

RW It's a matter of trying to create a new context over time. Essentially, it's making a space for artist-researchers who want to think about their work and whose work is fuelled by such thinking. The way we make that space is by trying to deal with the larger contexts, writing national guidelines, lobbying etc. At a practical level, nurturing the aspirations of that particular genre of artist, but trying to do that in a pragmatic way, reflecting the reality of the system as it currently exists which is moving much more slowly than the individual artist-researcher.

ML That's curious given the rise of interdisciplinary academic subjects. And it's not as if cross-art work is new.

RW Interdisciplinary works in big universities have, in my experience, been more of an aspiration. One of the things I feel very pleased about is that within the life of the Academy I think that the Centre has actually helped to open up some activity across formal boundaries. Whether that will go on with our different financial climate is uncertain. We did a project in 1995 called *Cybercabaret*, which was part of the Biennial. It was a flawed project but it brought together students from all of the four disciplines in the Academy, as well as the professional television production team and the technology. It went out live on the internet, and we were bringing in stuff for the performance from sites around the world. What I want now is more of that sort of collaboration happening at a postgraduate level.

ML You mean professional arts projects?

RW I don't want to give the impression that the Centre has vacated that territory. For instance, we've been supporting quite heavily the work of Brink Theatre over the last couple of years and we're now seeking partnership funds from the Australia Council for collaboration to go forward. The Centre was involved in the production of # 14 which was in the Brisbane Festival last year.

One of the other recent examples of continuing to implement the original aspiration to work with artists is the commissioning and presentation during the Festival of a new play by Janis Balodis, called *Double Take*, which explores the extensive use of video in live performance. But the Brink model is likely to be the crucial one. Here is a group with an approach to art-making that measures up in many ways with the aspirations of the Centre and we get together as a partnership.

ML What sort of selection system will you have?

RW It's likely that more and more of those projects will be tied to either strategic directions or to actual teaching programs. Both the Australia Council and the Australian Research Council can see the prospects of these sorts of partnerships and collaborations.

ML Does that also tie in with the commercial aims of the Centre, as stated in the mission? That's a bit of a push from the funding bodies too.

RW The reason that was so strongly stated in the mission was the realisation that, particularly in the 'fringe' performing arts in the 80s, a generation of new work wasn't allowed to thrive. The translation of creative works into electronic media, either film and video or multimedia, was strongly in my mind. It has much more potential than we've yet realised.

ML Do you view commercial prospects as a consequence of the development of the Centre and associated degrees or courses, or are you linking those prospects directly to the Centre's activities?

RW Both. I think that a mission aim was to engender in the street (and student) population a sense of the need for that entrepreneurial thinking, as well as the Centre becoming involved in its own entrepreneurial functions in order to generate funding. The policy context, both in the arts and in universities, in a sense is now pushing in exactly the same direction as in the mission statement.

ML Are you concerned about a technological mindset taking over other sorts of outcomes? It's a concern expressed about the Australia Council.

RW Our work will indicate our approaches as long as we continue to talk about the arts as a special domain which has its own knowledge base and requires experts within that field to determine value. The visual and performing arts in Australia have been professionalised with the formalisation of preparation and training, and I see what I'm involved in here as part of this. In a generation's time I would hope that the sorts of crossovers that now seem fraught...well, they'll probably be fraught in a different way!

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OTHER CITIES AND REGIONAL AREAS TO FOLLOW

Music technology: synchronistic studies

Di Weekes reports on Music Technology training in the partner schools of Adelaide's Helpmann Academy

So what exactly is music technology? Recently appointed Manager of Adelaide's Music Technology Centre, Kym Wilson, explains that it's a generic phrase covering a multitude of sins, but he's quick to give an example. "In the mid 80s, a professional recording studio would have cost you half a million dollars. You needed space for a 24 track reel-to-reel master tape player, a large mixing desk, panels and panels of effects modules, and then some. Today, \$10,000 buys a computer and all the software you require for recording direct to hard drive, digital mastering/editing and CD production, for domestic or professional use." But digital audio engineering is only one aspect, only the tip of the iceberg.

When it comes to musicians and technology, there are always the sharps (musically educated), the flats (who eventually give up) and the naturals (self-taught). Of those who are formally trained and firmly ensconced in long term or freelance employment, many will not know one end of a computer from the other. Any mention of sound waves or sine curves will usually unleash bad memories of boring classes in acoustics. Guru-trained instrumentalists who submitted to the eight-hours-a-day-practice routine simply didn't have the time and weren't interested. Besides, it was all too hard and too expensive. Meanwhile, self-styled musos with little or no formal training have usually availed themselves of an increasing variety of hardware and software, from the latest synthesisers or PA systems to the most user-friendly sequencing packages. So much so that now, when they front up to

audition for TAFE's new Certificate 4 in Music Technology, they can whip out a high quality DAT tape or a "limited edition" CD of their performances or compositions, or both. The trouble is, they are often musically illiterate. They admit it: within the performing arts industry, they're facing a brick wall.

The Flinders Street School of Music in Adelaide has always been progressive and recently became the first TAFE institution in the country to offer degrees. A proactive, vocationally oriented philosophy accurately accounts for new degree courses in Accompanying, Orchestral Studies, Conducting, Composition, Music Teaching and Performance, while at the other end of the musical scale glaring gaps are being filled by the introduction of a modest curriculum in Music Technology. While universities struggle for funds and grapple with submissions aimed to pacify both the academics (research) and the administrators (expensive new post-graduate courses), TAFE busies itself at a grass roots level, mindful of the exponential growth in educational bureaucracy, potential target markets and the national qualifications framework.

Adelaide's Helpmann Academy is the political umbrella that gently shelters all schools and faculties providing *bona fide* training in the performing arts. Already this year it has distributed over \$20,000 in individual grants and scholarships for students of music, theatre and the visual arts; but more to the point, it helps boost morale by initiating joint performances and encouraging the partners to share

resources, facilities, and ideas. Under its auspices there are fertile grounds for inter-institutional co-operation in long-term course design and curriculum development, and a more humane approach to credit transfer. Adelaide composer Peter McIlwain lectures in the core subject Music Technology for both the University of Adelaide and TAFE. He regularly teaches his University students at Flinders Street, where the music computer laboratory sports 20 individual workstations, and takes TAFE students to the Performing Arts Technology Unit (PATU) at Adelaide University, where they have access to state of the art digital technology. This type of arrangement is a significant step towards breaking down barriers, and actually ensures that any potential rivalry between individual institutions is thwarted by the participants' enthusiasm, if not passion, for long-term, structured inquiry into contemporary idioms.

As for curriculum, TAFE now runs a part-time Certificate 3 in Music Technology (180 hours) for those who need basic keyboard and theory skills, aural training, general computing studies and an introduction to computer music and sound physics. The Certificate 4 (930 hours) is more substantial, covering General Studies, Music Studies, Technology Studies and a largely elective area labelled Professional Extension. Where necessary, students may be equipped with the rudiments of music through "bridging studies" from the Certificate 3, taking introductory classes which rely heavily on the digital piano

laboratory, Roland sound modules and a wide variety of software. Once qualified for entrance into the Certificate 4 they are exposed to a variety of contemporary musical experiences including 20th century Music Language Studies with Diana Harris, whose classes have provided the initial stimulation for a whole generation of Adelaide's younger composers. Accelerated learning is fostered, and negotiated projects allow students to savour the atmosphere and expectations of the workplace, whether it be a recording or film studio, broadcasting station, multimedia production unit or theatre.

The course attracts a variety of clients, from ex-rock or pop musicians who have outgrown their adolescent ambitions, to traditionalist music teachers imperilled by their lack of computer skills, or their inefficiency with the use of sequencing or notation packages. For some, a few modules will suffice to fill the gaps and rebuild confidence. Others have already set their sights on continuing to the Diploma level (currently under construction), after which they have options to specialise in composition, electronic music, audio-engineering or multimedia production either within the TAFE sector, at the University or with private providers.

Whereas Music Technology is visited by most undergraduate music courses in one way or another (most often in the music education stream), it usually flourishes at the post-graduate level where its co-existence with other art forms largely depends on the interests and availability of specialist staff. Graduate diplomas are offered in Composition for Film and Television, Electro-Acoustic Music, Digital Arts, Electronic Media, Electronic Arts and so on. But at the post-secondary level what is needed is a smorgasbord, not a special diet, and students enrolling in TAFE courses can usually expect a hearty meal. Those in search of re-accreditation should be replenished in order to readjust their aims and re-direct their efforts, while those seeking future employment in the multi-faceted music industry need an opportunity to taste a variety of vocational options, and to build the stamina required for continuing studies.

Training in Music Technology is expensive, and the level of co-operation between the Music Technology Centre at Flinders Street and Adelaide University's PATU is a healthy sign. PATU boasts a superb recording studio based on the ProTools system, two fully equipped control rooms, large and small recording spaces, and a wealth of advanced software for experimentation and collaborative projects in digital arts. Students have access to Max (programming), Alchemy (sound-sample editing program), AudioSculpt (advanced sampling analysis/re-synthesis tool), and TurboSynth (virtual synthesis), and there is also a facility for the Unix machines to use the power of the University's super computer. Work has recently been done at PATU using ultra-sonic sound sensors to locate the positions of dancers in space in order to control and generate MIDI musical information.

It is a long trek from the language of Bach to the musical styles of the 21st century. What TAFE provides is a WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) curriculum in Music Technology with clear signposts to employment in the year 2000 and optional detours for advanced studies in the digital arts. With multiple entry and exit points along the way, it also signals a warning to students of the need for on-going exploration and creative enterprise. If this is open access, who needs to close any doors?

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Disorientations

Convenor Rachel Fensham reports from the Australasian Drama Studies 1997 conference

If disorientation is a condition of not knowing, then the 1997 Australasian Drama Studies conference at Monash University seemed to constantly confound the limits of the known or knowable. This annual gathering of theatre scholars was organised strongly around the central theme of "intercultural and interdisciplinary work in theatre and performance studies" and the invited guests included a Japanese academic, a New York-based theatre director, an Australian academic and writer and a French theatre semiotician. The conference program also included performances by the company-in-residence, Not Yet It's Difficult, as well as many significant papers and workshops. The overall tone of engagement between theatre academics, practitioners and students bodes well for the future of theatre research in this country.

The 'keynotes' represented powerfully to the conference the paradigms which characterise the intellectual project of contemporary theatre studies. Professor David George's opening address was an elegant synthesis of intercultural theory combined with a strongly personal perspective upon his years of involvement with theatre practices in Asia. Reflecting on his *Tempest in Bali* project undertaken with students from Murdoch University in 1987, George explained the close negotiation of this production with the local villagers. It was not a question of simply reproducing or offering a facsimile of an original, borrowed from an outside culture, for effect within a Western text. The danger, he argued, is to fetishise the

culture and its trappings rather than consider the workings of theatre within different contexts as possible models for a critical engagement with one's own cultural baggage. His reading of Western and Buddhist philosophies suggested that there are alternative means of constructing an epistemology of the performances occurring between cultures. Whilst reminding the audience of the political dangers of appropriation, George concluded by asking, "Why not step off from the secure knowledge of one's own culture?"

The presence of Professor Uchino Tadashi from the University of Tokyo was a crucial disorientation. As a specialist of Japanese and American theatre and cultural history, Professor Uchino reads the west and Japan from the margins of western intellectual discourse as it has developed in Japan. He began by positing Heiner Müller's revolutionary appropriation of the western tradition as a strategic possibility for Japanese intellectuals. Huxley's *Brave New World* was then discussed, in order to comment on and problematise notions of contemporary Japan. The final section of the address stressed the need to re-historicise and contextualise Japanese theatre cultures as a strategy to redress a reactionary "national poetics" of Japan that he perceived to be the dominant ideology. He illustrated permutations of this debate in his presentation of three recent companies of the Japanese New Wave: Hirata Orizawa's hyper real "quiet theatre" and the deconstructive, more critical work of Dumb Type and Dekidan Kataisha. In

discussing Japanese theatre Uchino's paper begged the question "What is Japan?" The sense of disorientation here problematises Japanese theatre culture and therefore becomes a site of resistance for critically engaged artists and scholars in Japan.

On Friday the conference went to the city and to the theatre. At the Malthouse, the conference focus was re-oriented towards practice. Anne Bogart, the director of Saratoga International Theatre Institute, began the day with her address entitled "Six things I know about being an artist at the end of the twentieth century". A collaborator with the Japanese theatre director Tadashi Suzuki, her company shares a training program with his company, but not in order to imitate stylistically or thematically his work. For Bogart's project is to locate herself as a director in the present of her own culture—the United States with its history of puritanism and legality, consumerism and military expansion. The theatre must choose what it is to communicate and for Bogart "interest is everything". Without defining interest—what it is that holds attention—then the theatre fails. Choosing what to look at within a culture or in an actor is an act of violence. The theatre cuts out distractions or other people's interests and insists on looking at what is disturbing about pretence or cultural stereotypes. "Theatre is about faking" she claimed, "and I am interested in the opposition between extreme fake and the things you can't fake. But at the source of your life is this tender, vacillating thing called interest. Interest is sacred." Bogart's talk danced between the minutiae of the rehearsal process and the biggest questions of art within Western capitalism. She spoke of everything from the noises in the street to Gore Vidal to the rows of seats collected for a community theatre in Alaska, ensuring us confidently of how important theatre is or can be. Bogart ended by describing that moment in rehearsals when all is falling apart. From a state of terror, the director walks forward and says "I know!" and before arriving on the floor with the actors, she does.

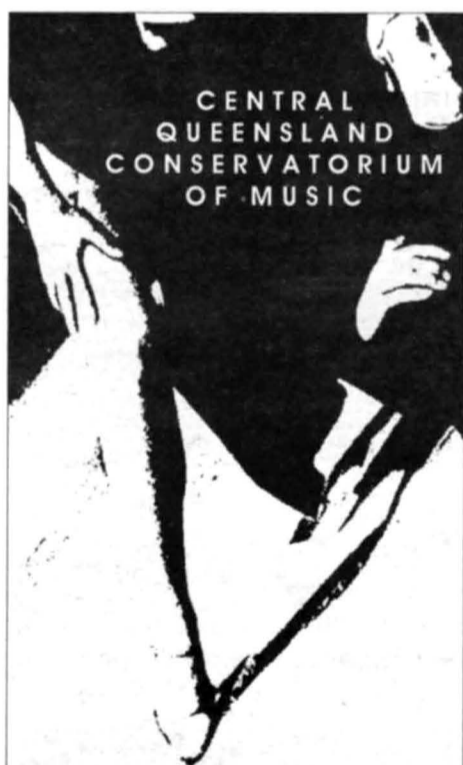
Bogart also ran a workshop on "Viewpoints", a series of exercises which provide actors with a language for constructing the theatrical *mise-en-scene* from its elements such as architecture, repetition, speed etc. Whilst the participants began to move through these tasks on the floor of the rehearsal room, the watching and scribbling crowd of academics were notating the introduction of a new theatrical technique into the workshops of this country. For some theatre practitioners the approach was not unfamiliar, given their exposure to postmodern dance, but it reaffirmed the necessity of providing actors with the tools of a common physical language to make intelligent choices about where and how they participate in

theatrical representation. Bogart joked of the difference between the German approach of arguing over every point before getting up to move and the facile willingness of American actors to just try everything. The German word 'Auseinandersetzung' meaning "to stand apart from" became a kind of mantra for her ideal rehearsal process.

In the closing address, Professor Patrice Pavis from the University of Paris 8 urged a return to history and a return to the text. Occupying the invidious position, in the context of this conference, of being the symbol of white male European thought, his contribution to the question of a theory/practice distinction in theatre studies cautioned against following the latest trend or 'ism'. A pioneer of practical investigation in the scholarly regimes of the French university system, Pavis argued that theory enables us to examine where ideas have come from. We cannot know about the 'other' unless we also know the heritage of rationality in which Marx and Freud and others have theorised the human subject. Whilst the world and theatre itself seems rapidly to embrace a new future, Pavis was quizzically proposing that *plus ça change* the more things stay the same, particularly in the context of late postmodern capitalism.

In the final panel of the conference, Bogart was asked about a dramaturgy of physical theatre and she replied by hitting her head with the palm of her right hand and opening her mouth with a 'duh'. She explained that this was a gesture done by many Americans and that the dramaturgy of a particular scene might require her actors to repeat this several times over whilst performing a line from Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*. Someone in the audience called out that this was an action familiar from Bart Simpson in the popular TV show. "But I've never seen *The Simpsons*", she replied and the audience roared with laughter. It seemed inconceivable that an Australian spectator would be introducing an American theatre director to a gesture that we can only read as American. The final coda to this gap of incredulity occurred when John Romeril passionately described his rewriting of the first city play within our region, by the great innovator of theatrical form, the 17th century Japanese playwright Chikamatsu. When Uchino was asked what he thought of this writer being 'ripped off' by an Australian he replied with an ironic smile, "Go right ahead, I've never heard of him." So disorientation can go from dominant culture to emergent culture and back again, particularly when all the players are willing to listen, to learn and to laugh.

Rachel Fensham was the conference convenor and therefore missed many of the other sessions. The full conference papers will be available later in the year from Monash University



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The resource be with you

The Actors' Centre is celebrating its 10th anniversary: Director Dean Carey speaks with Keith Gallasch

Dean Carey is an exuberant celebrator of the Actors' Centre first and very successful ten years in its spacious, yet intimate 120 year-old church hall setting in Surry Hills, Sydney. But, he's quick to point out, the Centre's history has not been a simple one of catering to beginner actors and extending the capacities of practising professionals. That kind of world, populated with a limited number of actors constantly auditioning (and preparing at the Actors' Centre), is no longer with us. A host of educational institutions across the country, says Dean, are turning out close to a national total of 300 three-year-trained actors a year every year at the very same time that the number of audition places proportionately diminishes. The Centre opened in 1987, but within four years Dean was feeling disillusioned, the Centre wasn't attracting sufficient professional actors. While visiting London and Moscow he witnessed actors constantly going to auditions for an incredibly diverse range of roles and theatrical styles. "If actors here had those opportunities they'd be much more likely to keep themselves in trim, vocally, physically and emotionally. But there are very few auditions for theatre in Sydney". He knew that the Centre's parameters would need to expand to be relevant to the actor: "So then we began to open out our charter. We decided to link people to people, people to services, to get the services they wouldn't get anywhere else.

"We are becoming more a resource centre for people to channel their own talents and creativity, to foster a new project or to further their career. One instance is, we rang Jane Campion a number of years ago and said we'd like you to run a course here. She said I

don't know what I'd teach really. I asked what would be her fantasy course, and she replied that she was reading a book at the moment and could she possibly workshop it. The book was *The Portrait of a Lady* and she did a workshop over three weekends and donated her fee back to the Centre because she'd had a wonderful time. Film directors trying to get their first feature up, people who have got funding, ask to hire a space here and have myself or one of our staff come in to help with improvisations with paid performers. This gives them that little extra push towards what they want to do."

I ask Dean about the Centre's relationship with universities and other tertiary educators, especially given that he was Head of Acting at WAAPA for four years (West Australian Academy of the Arts) and continues to teach part time at NIDA where he has been Associate Head of Acting. "Our vision of the centre expanded even more when we were recently approached by the University of Newcastle to offer a degree course, a Master of Creative of Arts. Students at Newcastle can do part of their training here. It's good for the university because it can't dip into its staff pool to do what we can do. We have master teachers in many fields—mask, commedia, movement, Alexander, Feldenkreis. We can run this degree work within our existing framework. There's also a connection with the AFTVRS (Australian Film Television and Radio School). We offer all the film school students free casting facilities here and free rehearsal venues, where possible, allowing them to do these in the city instead of out at the film school at Macquarie."

Dean is adamant though that, "We're not just here to sell courses. The only

course where people pay for an entire year is The Journey, for 24 hours a week with Deborah Paull, Chrissie Koltai, Tanya Gerstle and myself. We audition 110 or so people a year and take 20. It's the only course like it, looking at one's own personal and creative development, finding each actor's authentic creative urge. Graduates go on to other courses, to three year courses, or a number have gone on to Stella Adler in New York for example. It's an adult to adult course, actors are not referred to as students, they're not there to please us, and there's no major drop-out rate". (Carey expresses his dislike for the acting course that is prefaced by "Look at the person next to you. They probably won't be there in three year's time".)

He distinguishes strongly between the work of the Centre and three-year training courses in universities and elsewhere. "Because of the limited opportunities for actors in Australia we've been very cautious here not to set up a school. We're about facilitating projects, offering our resources, offering one-year courses like The Power of Acting. We don't talk in terms of career, of going out and getting work tomorrow. It's a course in clearing the channels of communication and empathy. Acting skills are life skills. Through the devised work, the actors get to contact their own imaginative resources and at the end we hope they also become more demanding and discerning audience members. They get access to plays in workshops they normally wouldn't experience, they hear from staff what is happening in theatre around Australia. They emerge from their courses here knowing how difficult the artform is and how much respect it deserves."

Despite declaring a different philosophy from other training organisations, Carey says that these institutions respect the Actors' Centre and recommend talented people who don't make it in the annual auditions to consider enrolling in the Actors' Centre. These students don't have to give up three years of their lives and earning capacity to find out whether or not acting is for them. "They can come here three days a week and work the other four. There are a lot of people around who have the talent but they don't get the chance to explore it. They can explore it here at nine to 12 dollars an hour, 90 minutes a week, or ten hours a week, for four or eight week courses, or do a whole year. The few drop-outs simply discover how difficult the craft is and it's good to find out early in an over-committed industry." Carey's appreciation of a difficult situation for artists and institutions is nonetheless good-humoured. "The way things are going *Showcast* will be a 25 volume box set, collector's item in a few years' time." In the meantime the success of his *Masterclass—Audition Manual Volume II* soon takes him to the US where he'll visit and tutor in a range of training institutions.

For more on the state of tertiary arts education see Annmarie Chandler on the Vanstonisation of film education (*OnScreen* page 20), Dean Chan on the National Graduates Show at PICA on page 41, and Annmarie Lopez's interview with Stephen Muecke at UTS on page 29.

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OnScreen

film, media and techno-arts

Feature

From her to eternity

Adrian Martin is taken with Olivier Assayas' *Irma Vep*

A friend was recently comparing two generations of French filmmakers, two generations that have both come after the famous French New Wave. There's the immediate post New Wave generation, directors like Chantal Akerman, Philippe Garrel, Jean Eustache and others who are scarcely known in this country. They tend to be uncompromising, austere filmmakers, minimalist in their style, quite experimental, often severe in their approach and choice of subject matter. And then there's a newer generation of flashier directors, filmmakers who are into modern American cinema, rock video and the more kinetic, visceral kinds of experimental cinema. Leos Carax is part of the next generation, and so is Olivier Assayas.

My friend suggested that the films of Akerman or Garrel move like a piece of classical, concert music, but the films of Assayas move like a rock song—a good rock song by Bob Dylan or John Cale or The Fall. What an appropriate thought this is for a filmmaker whose films jump to life (like Carax's or Tarantino's) whenever music is married to image, animating that image and energising it. And what beautiful music there is in Assayas' *Irma Vep*, from Luna's cover of Serge Gainsbourg's pop classic "Bonnie and Clyde" to the harsher, more grating sounds of Sonic Youth, via lilting Afro guitar riffs.

The title refers to a delirious serial made in the silent era, *The Vampires* by Louis Feuillade. That film stars an incredible vamp of the time, Musidora—not just a vamp in the colloquial sense but literally, in this part, a vampire. Her character name, Irma Vep, is an anagram for vampire. Assayas' film starts from a wild, crazy, impossible idea: what if somebody wanted to remake *The Vampires* today, for a modern world, a modern audience? So what *Irma Vep* shows is that attempt—which looks pretty doomed from the word go. A New Wave era director long past his glory days (played by the incomparable Jean-Pierre Léaud) gets the production up and running on the basis of a brilliant stroke of casting. As Léaud wonders, in his muttering, rambling, half-incoherent English-language musings: who is, who could be, the Irma Vep of today? His idea is to use the real Hong Kong action-fantasy star Maggie Cheung (*The Heroic Trio*, *Centre Stage*, *Days of Being Wild*).

Assayas' film starts with Cheung arriving at a chaotically busy production office. Nobody fawns over her or looks after her; indeed, her sudden presence is faintly annoying to all these manic people trying to put in place some piece of a film shoot schedule. Immediately we're plunged into a world where everything's going wrong, in which everyone is a satellite flying past each other or colliding into each other. It's hard not to think immediately of so many other films about filmmaking—like Truffaut's *Day For Night* or even the American comedy *Living in Oblivion*. *Irma Vep* is a kind of comedy too, and some of its gags and flights of fancy are truly hilarious and inspired. But it's also an unnerving film, at times a chilling one. It's poetic and unreal: events and images and sounds have a strange floating quality, a weird logic, as if we've passed through Lewis Carroll's looking glass into a very odd world.

Irma Vep is a very full and entrancing, euphoric film. It offers a whole world of surface textures spread out over the screen; one of those films that (in my experience) takes you 'inside' or, perhaps more precisely, plasters you, moves you all over the pictorial surface. Assayas is one of the most self-consciously painterly of contemporary filmmakers—everything he puts on the screen is washes and smudges, spirals and passageways for the restless spectatorial eye, tending towards a kind of lyrical, impressionist pixillation: the dancing lights on the water during a fast moped ride, flashes of a body's movement illuminated high-beam in the rain.

Irma Vep is a film that brings together so much—all the wildly diverse kinds of films that Assayas likes. It brings together Francis Coppola-style blockbuster spectacle and energy with some of the most extreme experiments of the filmic *avant-garde*, and that combination is shocking and exciting. In particular, it's a film with a strong feeling for some marvellous, inspiring, composite dream of the 1960s—some divine myth of that time. There are intense echoes of the French New Wave, of the artistic and philosophical and political movements Lettrism and Situationism, and the militant, collectively-produced cinema of Chris Marker. There's the ghost of Serge Gainsbourg, and the trace of George Franju's great film *Judex*, which was already, in 1963, a remake of a Feuillade serial. There are iconic actors of the 60s, rebel heroes and free spirits, now looking and moving and talking rather differently: Léaud, Lou Castel, Bulle Ogier.

This is a film that confounds the usual ways of reviewing movies. It doesn't really have a theme in the traditional, literary sense. It has a subject rather than a theme, some kind of nominal centre around which everything else spins and swirls. In many ways the film is a Cubist mosaic built around the central figure of Cheung. But even she is a sort of double character, shrouded in enigma. Assayas gives us a project of exploration, an investigation into Cheung and into the character she has to play.

The soul of the movie is its fix on creation, on the creative process, no matter how

chaotic, how self-destructive, how comically absurd it gets; Assayas says it's a film about diverse people trying to make this subject, this character or figure or centre of Irma Vep, mean something to them. They have to take it, take her, inside themselves somehow, give birth to this creature. For Cheung herself, this means becoming Irma one night off the set and staging her own daring robbery adventure (although, as some commentators have noted, this whole scene may be a dream or fantasy). For poor Léaud, it means trying to find a new way to see and show this divine, vamp-like creature—although, when he runs out of inspiration, he tells the costume designer just to dress her like Michelle Pfeiffer's Catwoman in *Batman Returns*, so she walks around in figure-squeezing latex from head to toe for most of the movie. For the director who eventually replaces Léaud after his crack-up, this process of creation means trying to find an actress who can replace Maggie Cheung—another impossible task.

In a discussion of Tarkovsky's *Mirror* in a recent issue of *Sight and Sound*, Assayas explains that his movies are about gazes, multiple gazes, gazes in circulation that mark out—but never quite construct or fill—some central point, some nominal subject. But that subject is fugitive, it escapes, even though it's surrounded tightly, in that criss-crossing web of glances and desires and narrations. So Maggie, or Irma, is constructed at the busy



Maggie Cheung as Irma Vep

intersection of all the constructions made of 'her', all the grabs and games and psychic, desiring investments that people try to put on to her; this is where the comedy and the terror of this movie really make themselves felt. For instance that costume designer (Natalie Richard) fancies Maggie to be lesbian, and makes many hair-raising moves to seduce her. There's a bullish interviewer from a French TV movie show who uses Cheung's presence simply to channel his own philistine anti-art cinema diatribes. When things start breaking down on the set, there's an actor who takes over the directing of the film for a moment, barking furiously at Maggie during a private rehearsal, treating her like a marionette. Assayas captures with an acid brilliance the feel of a real film shoot: all the incredibly prodigious rituals of back-biting, gossip, allegiances formed and dissolved and reformed.

Assayas is also a master at capturing the structure and texture of little life-stories hooking into and out of each other. His special gift as a film artist is the intros and outros he gives each character. These tend to be abrupt—people come in breathless, in the middle of some crossfire, and they eventually disappear without any ceremony of farewell. There is a whole nightmarishly comic sequence devoted to Léaud and his massive nervous breakdown in the middle of the night. Maggie is whisked to his house, shown his sanctum; Léaud raves, then he's pumped full of medication and passes out; Maggie is whisked out again into the street; and all through this, strange characters are emptying and filling the house at an alarming rhythm. Assayas (like Abel Ferrara, John Cassavetes and Maurice Pialat) is a poet of the type of film in which the scene is already in full motion when we are thrust into it, a scene which is never allowed to reach its normal point of completion or exhaustion. As in the films of Andre Téchiné or David Cronenberg, lives and stories proceed through chance encounters, collisions, jump-starts, digressions and deviations that take everybody dangerously, thrillingly far from home base.

Finally, the euphoria of the film comes from a strange, all-pervasive feeling of loss. The dream of the 1960s is dead and gone, and now everyone is floundering, whizzing around vainly in circles. Assayas accepts a certain light, giddy, speedy emptiness or superficiality as the essential condition of our uneasy postmodern world. But his film is not just nostalgic or cynical or despairing. Because creativity, the creative process, really matters passionately to Assayas. Ours is a culture where, as Léaud remarks in droll despair, there are only 'images of images', copies and remakes without any real sense or rhyme or reason. But there is still a longing, some desire, which can activate those lost images in this, our perpetually lost world.

Irma Vep screened at the Melbourne International Film Festival, July 30-31, and at the Brisbane International Film Festival, August 2

Essay

Winter thoughts of a Raincoat

Noel King muses on repertory and independent cinema in Sydney

You could be forgiven for wondering of late what distinguishes mainstream, independent and repertory cinema exhibition practices.

Hitchcock's *Vertigo* is on at the Pitt St cinemas, *Taxi Driver* has been re-released to "celebrate" its 21st birthday and Tarantino (via Miramax and his distribution arm, Rolling Thunder, named after the 1977 John Flynn film) is able to distribute four 'old' movies a year.

In the past the Hollywood majors displayed a spectacular indifference to any notion of film as historical-cultural document, and showed little interest in film preservation and archiving. But things have changed over the last decade. Martin Scorsese has been able to enlist the clout of Spielberg and Lucas to the cause of film preservation and the majors have twigged to the fact that a significant market awaits repackaged re-releases. Under the guise of an interest in things historical and archival, new audiences can be assembled at the same time as former audiences can be re-recruited to a viewing of the 'classic' film in question.

So given that independence is now a niche marketing aspect of the production-distribution policies of the majors rather than an artistic space pure and apart, and given that classic films are receiving mainstream re-release, what is the current state of play with repertory and independent cinema in Sydney, the city that houses the Australian Film, Television and Radio School and the Australian Film Commission?

As they used to say in *F Troop*, "Old Chief not so good".

Melbourne, always the more cinephilic of the two largest-populated Australian cities, boasts a lively film society scene, receives the entire Cinemathèque program, and has a range of cinemas such as the Astor, the Carlton Movie House, the Lumiere, the Nova, the Classic, the Track (now going the way of the Nova), the Longford and the Kino.

Sydney has the Valhalla and the Chauvel (both linked). Interesting things are planned for the Museum of Contemporary Art, beginning in 2000; the Mandolin has closed after its brief return to life; and The Third Eye Cinema closed a few days after the interviews were done for this story. The *Sydney Morning Herald* (July 19, 1997) reported that Jacqueline Brodie-Hanns was leaving her Devonshire Street locale owing to "problems concerning the lease" and would be starting up in The Movie Room Cinema in Darlinghurst.

So let's see how Sydney's sadly few social spaces of independent and repertory cinema understand the contribution they hope to make to their city's film culture.

★★★

The Third Eye Cinema, located in Devonshire St in an increasingly gentrified section of Surry Hills, seated 200 people. It was run by 26 year-old Brodie-Hanns, a Melbournite who studied film at La Trobe University, worked in theatre in an amateur and professional capacity, and managed a couple of small businesses before moving to Sydney last December.

As we sat down to a coffee in the foyer of her cinema she explained that she hoped "to expand people's exposure to and understanding of cinema and cinematic issues. I have a commitment to new short films and to experimental film but I think it's most important to show what's come before. To me, repertory is important for the way it acknowledges the past and the role that what has happened previously has on what happens today and tomorrow".

She favours genre and national cinema as a way to organise screenings. Her favourite filmmaker is Preston Sturges and before the closure of The Third Eye she had been planning screenings to celebrate "100 years of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*". This would have led into "a mini horror festival, across three days, kicking off with Val Lewton", whose role as producer-director of such films as *Cat People*, *Curse of the Cat People*, *I Walked With a Zombie*, and *The Bodysnatchers*, she admires.

She wants to link film viewing and film knowledge: "I want to create an environment where people can come and see film and learn about film. I'm learning all the time, certainly on an exhibition level, and also as I increase my exposure to film. Often I'll introduce a film or talk to the audience after it".

As we were talking, a man came into the foyer and asked whether more screenings of Pasolini's *Salo* were planned. This prompted a nice tale of taking over the cinema only to discover that the film had been attracting the dirty raincoat brigade (hey, they're an audience too) as well as various people "who had come on a dare, and who walked out in anger and disgust". Worried that their experience of this film might become their experience of her cinema as a distinctive social space, she moved quickly to set up a forum in which *Salo* could be placed in its cultural, social and political context before screening. To this end she arranged film critics, academics, and people familiar with film censorship issues to talk about the film. After submitting her viewers to this small piece of pedagogical fascism, "the results were amazing. Whereas there used to be almost an 80% walkout there was now almost none".

Brodie-Hanns is surprised at the gap between film production activity in Sydney ("there's an amazing number of short films made here") and any focused discussion of film history ("I don't see how you can have a healthy film production scene without that other aspect"). She insists that repertory cinema has to go "beyond trendy, sexy re-issues like *The Big Sleep*, the 'bankable classics' as they're called, to bring forward other small gems and little wonders". She would like to see much more repertory cinema on offer in Sydney. "The more there is, the easier the job becomes. I don't think there can be enough repertory cinema. I think the MCA proposal is fantastic; they're in a great position to lead the way."

★★★

I know you're wondering where the raincoat brigade has gone to escape public instruction in matters of Italian film and historical context. Let's say they've headed on down to the Rocks to check out the MCA.

Brodie-Hanns's reference to the MCA alludes to their Capital Appeal which now has \$10 million in pledged support from private and corporate sources for a Stage 2 development. Conversation with David Watson revealed that the NSW Government has made available a northern site (currently a carpark and a building at 132 George St). After an international interviewing process which shortlisted two Australian and five overseas candidates, the impressive young Japanese architect Kazuyo Sejima has been appointed to envisage the new design. The Spanish architectural publication *El Croquis* has devoted a special issue to Sejima's work, and George Miller (who sat on the committee) said her work displayed "technical rigour and an ability to enchant".

Concept designs are due at the end of 1997 for construction to start in mid-1998, with completion expected in late 1999. Earlier this year the State government also formally handed over control of the two top floors of the MCA building (previously occupied by Tourism NSW who have moved elsewhere in the Rocks). The MCA is in the process of refurbishing these floors, which will become operative as a new space in 1998. The refurbishment includes an additional floor of gallery space, an 80-seat cinema to facilitate modest screening programs and educational events, and to operate as a "preview cinema". Since this includes access to a balcony overlooking the Sydney Opera House it should serve as a seductive function-reception space. MCA members and *bona fide* researchers will have access to a Visual Resources Centre (library, computers, viewing facilities).

★★★

The Raincoat has now left the Rocks, headed towards Paddington Town Hall to ask Alex Meskovic what's going on at/with the Chauvel.

Alex has a lot of opinions, as you'd expect from someone who's been involved in cinema exhibition in Sydney for 25 years. He started in 1972 in Surry Hills, running a Film Society out of the Kirk Gallery, moved on to the Mandolin in 1984 and the Chauvel in 1995.

He sees the Chauvel as emphasising cinemathèque-style films and makes selections from the Melbourne produced-curated Cinemathèque program, supplementing it with a mix of what he regards as the best of new commercial cinema, short films and Australian features (a recent success saw *Dead Heart* find a very appreciative audience).

The Chauvel is committed to running retrospectives which provide an historical overview of cinema, often importing the best-possible quality prints. The current screening of a selection of BFI restored prints falls into this category and later this year the Chauvel will screen a previously un-released, uncut version of Nicolas Roeg's *Walkabout* (1970).

Our conversation turns to the forthcoming proliferation of new screens in Sydney: more than 40 planned, involving 12 at the restored Grace Bros building, two more at Newtown while the old porno Hub cinema becomes three 'clean' screens, two more slotted for Glebe, 16 for Bondi Junction, four now operating at the Randwick Ritz, four slotted for the Verona and so on. Alex expresses great scepticism: "The audience cake is carved up in so many pieces, all over the place, that it has become very hard to make money out of film exhibition". He sees this explosion of new screens "putting pressure on independents to be able to survive". He also doubts whether there is a market to support the proposed MCA Cinemathèque venture and would prefer the MCA to function as an equivalent of London's Museum of the Moving Image, devoting itself more to screenings of silent/early cinema.

★★★

By now the Raincoat has moved out onto the balcony of the Chauvel, sipping a beer and looking across the Paddington skyline. After speaking to several people, he has a sense of what's going down rep-indie cinema-wise in Sydney town. He gets to thinking; the ageing, diminishing population of Adelaide will soon receive a 30 screen complex, presumably to allow surviving locals to have a participatory cinema experience by watching *Cocoon*, while in Sydney cine-illiteracy is assured by the paucity of repertory cinema.

Obviously it's a Melbourne conspiracy to keep Sydneysiders on the cinephilic outer.

What is it, just a few short weeks since the deaths of Mr Cool, Robert Mitchum, and Mr Drawl, Jimmy Stewart? In London, the BBC and Channel 4 would run mini-festivals, in Paris a bunch of repertory cinemas would run seasons on each actor. Maybe then we could notice that Stewart, best remembered for being Mr Probity in Capra films, or the nice-guy who never got out of Bedford Falls in *It's a Wonderful Life* (a film that failed on initial release and now surpasses Ford's *The Searchers* as the most quoted film in the New Hollywood) also played crazed characters in 1950s Anthony Mann westerns, having cut a ground-breaking deal for profit participation.

And we could watch Mitchum in *Out of the Past* listen to deceitful Jane Greer revealing "I'm bad, I'm dangerous, I shot Kirk Douglas, I stole \$40,000", before drawing her down onto the beach, saying "Baby, I don't care". Or we could watch his cameo in Scorsese's re-make of *Cape Fear* and see him blow those hyperbolic new method guys off the screen by drawling (yes he could do it too), "Well, excuse me all over the place".

Nostalgia's kicking in; time to move on, for the Raincoat (who also reads Robert Frost) has miles to go before it sleeps.

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National treasure goes to Melbourne's Cinemedia

Tina Kaufmann reports on developments in the crisis over the NLA's Film and Video Lending Service

As disquiet over its future occupied many within the screen community this past year, the Film and Video Lending Service of the National Library of Australia was belatedly recognised as a national treasure, which not only provided resources for most film and media courses, but also programming for many of the specialist and retrospective screenings throughout Australia. Its potential loss was described by screen critic and commentator Adrian Martin as "a tragic, irreparable blow to Australia's film culture".

At last, following a year of meetings, debate, and negotiation, the FVLS has found a new home and a new, enthusiastic operator. The NLA has reached an agreement with Victoria's newly combined film body, Cinemedia, which they believe guarantees the immediate future and accessibility of the collection. In fact, forward bookings are already considerably higher than experienced by the NLA; probably a result of recognition by many in the community of the value and importance of the collection, and the gradual reduction in use which partly contributed to the crisis.

Many regular users of the FVLS still have concerns, however, especially those involved with the tertiary teaching of film. Dr Lesley Stern, from the School of Theatre and Film Studies at the University of NSW, voiced her particular reservations: will the new arrangement guarantee both the acquisition of new prints, and the preservation of existing prints? "We use film prints wherever possible, and we use the collection extensively, although in a way it's been increasingly hard," she explains. "Film is different. I've got nothing against using video, and much of the time it's invaluable, but to see a film for the first time, on film, on the big screen, in the dark, is a different and unique experience, and one that our students must continue to have access to."

Film study is the area she is most concerned about. "It's absolutely vital that access to the FVLS is continual," she emphasises. "You just can't do this sort of scholarship, this teaching and research work, without access to that resource, without that resource being free, and really, without that resource being national."

Cinemedia, the recently formalised body which now incorporates the State Film Centre of Victoria and Film Victoria, opened its doors in July to borrowers Australia wide who wish to access what it describes as Australia's largest public lending collection of films and videos, the first step on its way to being the primary location for education, research and access to the moving image. The films and videos now available are made up of three collections: Cinemedia's own Access Collection, the French Embassy Film Collection (some of the best French features and documentaries, together with academic and cultural films), and the jewel in the crown, the NLA's Film and Video Lending Service (made up of the Screen Studies Collection and the General Collection).

Earlier this year those who had responded strongly to the threat to Australia's most

important film collection decided reluctantly that they must support as the only practicable solution the proposal that Cinemedia be the chosen national operator for the FVLS. NLA Director-General Warren Horton argued that this was in the best interests of the film and video community and the best solution in a time of strategic change. He stressed that its implementation should not only ensure the immediate maintenance of the service to users, but also support the long term interests of film culture in Australia.

Indications that the National Library was seriously considering reducing the FVLS to maintenance-only status, with no acquisition program or budget, raced around the film and video community early last year. That the NLA was also putting out feelers to find an organisation interested in taking over the collection, preferably without its budget support, was voiced at meetings called to address the issue. A barrage of letters and faxes alerted the NLA to widespread community concern, which included the strongly held view that the collection was a unique and vital national resource that must be preserved and must continue to function as a library, with the key elements of access, affordability and ongoing acquisition.

At December meetings to inform the community, Warren Horton explained that as the NLA does not recognise film as a "core" activity (seeing its main responsibility to Australian print and electronic resources), it had held discussions with organisations with a fundamental commitment to film over a more sensible and functional arrangement for the FVLS. These negotiations led to Cinemedia's proposal to store and maintain the two collections, continue the development of the Screen Studies Collection (currently over six thousand titles, supplementing a widely representative sample of popular classic and contemporary features and short films with *avant-garde* and experimental work, a fine selection of documentaries, and an impressive cross section of silent cinema) as a living, growing entity, and operate the lending service, thus answering most of the community's demands. The issue that the FVLS remain national would be addressed by the NLA retaining ownership of the FVLS as a national resource, and maintaining overall policy involvement and control. Warren Horton insists that the NLA has a long term commitment to the collection, made concrete by the contract with Cinemedia, and that a more vigorous constituency will emerge as a result of the move. "The NLA has outsourced other activities, and they have become stronger through those changes."

Cinemedia, with its own extensive lending service within Victoria, was really the only organisation able to take over and operate the FVLS on a national and ongoing basis, the NLA argued. John Smithies, Acting Deputy Director of Cinemedia, explained that Cinemedia has established a curatorial approach to acquisitions for its own collection, and has reinstated film as the primary collecting medium. "We're going back to buying and preserving film, and we've established advisory committees to assist with acquisition. For the Cinemedia collection the committee is Adrian Martin, Annette Blonski, Ken Berryman and Allan Finney, with Cinemedia board member (and AFTRS head) Rod Bishop; meetings coincide with board meetings when Rod is in Melbourne, and we're aiming at a collection of world cinema." Current holdings are being cleaned, repaired and re-catalogued, while an internet-based booking service has been developed, and trials of broadband cable delivery of video are being conducted.

The Cinemedia Access Collection will be moving on August 25 to 222 Park Street, South Melbourne (between the Australian Film Institute and the National Film and Sound Archive): these premises have better access, are two or three times larger than currently needed, with better facilities and modern, air-conditioned storage. The FVLS will be provided with an active collection management service, internet access to its catalogue, and maintenance for the two collections, the catalogue database, and specified items of equipment. The NLA will pay Cinemedia a sum of \$100,000 per year for acquisitions to the Screen Studies collection, and a monthly sum for the operation of the lending service. Two new positions, a collection manager and an acquisitions officer, are currently being advertised.

New titles for the Screen Studies collection will be acquired under a joint collection development policy; the advisory committee includes Dr Jodie Brooks from University of NSW's School of Theatre and Film Studies, John Turner from the Australian Confederation of Film Societies, Andrew Pike from Ronin Films, John Smithies, and an NLA representative, and they will be having their first meeting probably late September. "I hope all the members come primed with ideas and issues for discussion, including how to develop an acquisition policy for the Screen Studies Collection that will be different from and complementary to that for Cinemedia's own collection. We value this collection, we want it to keep growing, and to ensure that it remains separate and accessible," John Smithies says.

Smithies understands the community's unease about change, but hopes that he has addressed it; to worries that charges could increase and delivery times be longer he insists that Cinemedia is determined to keep costs down and maintain an efficient delivery service. He points out that plans for Cinemedia's own collection to be circulated on a national basis could soon improve the service with a greater turnover. (There will be a joining fee for access to the Cinemedia collection, as there already is for Victorian users.) Anxiety about Cinemedia not being a national body is answered with the argument that no comparable national agency was able to step in; "Cinemedia is determined to establish national credentials," he insists.

The Screen Studies Collection acquisition budget of \$100,000 is a substantial reduction from previous years, and John Smithies doesn't consider it sufficient, promising ongoing discussions with the NLA. Warwick Cathro, NLA Assistant Director General, explains that it's in line with other NLA cuts, and the budget should sustain viable growth. A number of other issues, still to be addressed, include representation of national borrowers on advisory panels, the possibility of panels in other regional centres, the situation of de-accessioning, and whether the collections would compete for acquisitions: these are on the agenda for further discussion between the two organisations.

For 50 years films—and more recently videos—have been gathered to assemble a wonderful collection that has served Australian screen culture well; a wide community of concerned users—teachers and students, researchers and members of many audiences—will be hoping that this new arrangement will ensure the growth and continued health of the FVLS.



SINEvents
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Sydney Intermedia Network Inc (SIN)

Domain Theatre, level 1, The Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW)
sunday 24 august 2.30pm
in association with AGNSW/Australian Perspectives 1997: Between Art and Nature
a sound art performance of sublime nuance by

Social Interiors
Rik Rue, Shane Fahey and Julian Knowles with Peter Oldham
Spatial Circumference
micro sonic/visual extrusions from rainforest habitats

saturday 4 october 2pm
ART RAGe
artworks for television by leading Australian artists
including Linda Dement, John Gillies, Fiona Hall, Jon McCormack,
Susan Norrie, Julie Rrap, originally designed for ABC TV's *Rage*

saturday 1 november 2pm
Metalux
experimental/scratch films and video art from Western Australia

Chauvel Cinema, cnr Oxford St and Oatley Rd Paddington
wednesday 17 september 6.30pm
in association with Carnivale 97

Transvideo
new video art and documentary from Brazil, Chile and Argentina

Sydney Intermedia Network Inc (SIN)
director alessio cavallaro resource manager sarah waterson
tel 02 9264 7225 fax 02 9264 5823
sinsite@ozemail.com.au
http://www.ozemail.com.au/~sinsite

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ART NATURE

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The big squeeze

Annamarie Chandler on the Vanstonisation of tertiary film education

Filmmaking has always been difficult to teach and maintain within course structures in tertiary environments. This is why there are very few courses, outside the Australian Film, Television and Radio School, which actually teach film as a medium. Mostly they teach its surrogate forms in video and the more recent moving image work associated with multimedia studies. The AFTRS national resources guide identifies only 11 organisations nationally, from some 64 (tertiary, private and community), teaching 16mm and/or Super 8 film production.

While courses in the theoretical subjects associated with Screen Education (now usually posited in Cultural Studies disciplines in the Humanities) are relatively easy to mount if you can attract good staff, the actual production side is far more problematic to offer to undergraduate or graduate students. It involves a substantial commitment to resources including academic staff, technical support staff and a variety of expensive equipment, especially if you are aiming at professional levels of education. But the most significant costs for film production are associated with budgets for external services such as laboratory processing and prints, the main reason many institutions opt for video instead.

Understanding the effects of the Vanstone education policies on media education requires a knowledge of the situation before the Coalition took office. All universities are federally funded for undergraduate course places allocated within Australia and before the Vanstone up-front fees policies arrived, all places to Australian undergraduates were a federal responsibility.

Commonwealth funding is based on a "relative formula" supplied by DEETYA (Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs) for the relative costs of an arts program through to a science program with the latter receiving the most government income for a place. Thus all subjects are weighted according to these classifications and the universities receive and allocate funding internally to their faculties based on their own educational profiles.

It is worth noting here that DEETYA has never considered arts-based activities such as filmmaking as warranting anything higher than the general arts-based funding required for 'chalk and talk' subjects. Thus neither Labor nor Liberal governments recognised tertiary surrounding media production professions outside their funding for the national AFTRS. Most universities compensate for this by adding loadings at their own cost. Some are prepared to do this because the subjects are very popular, attracting students with extremely high Tertiary Entrance Scores (TERs).

Consequently, the recent Vanstone policies have not been a direct threat to these courses but merely continue the internal pressures already on them regarding viability. One of the cries from colleagues that all film production staff are very used to hearing whenever there is a budget squeeze (which is regularly), is that "we must stop teaching film"—probably because all they can imagine are Hollywood-scale budgets for film projects. However the way universities fund and deliver subjects, this would be a no more significant cost saving than cutting any media production activity with a related drop in demand and prestige for the educational body.

The largest uncontained costs (ie stock and processing) are already being borne by students at final project levels, who have choices of either film or video-making depending on their ability to raise finances. And the subjects are always selective so that only a small band of overall arts students have access to scarce 16 mm film equipment, which if industry standard, can outlast any piece of electronic equipment—the University of Technology Sydney still works with Ari BL's over 20 years old that produce magnificent 16mm images on the big screen, and have maintained limited Super 8 stock for the resurgence in this high quality film medium.

The Coalition's cutbacks to the sector are making it very difficult for all universities to sustain their quality of teaching and infrastructure, though film is no more threatened than any other subject area. The largest threat is the internal "mythos" surrounding filmmaking often adopted by more envious colleagues who can only see its superficial popularity amongst the student body and have notions of extravagant associated expenditure. Strategically, this means that those who teach the subjects have to be as tenacious as the film industry itself in preserving their areas and production-managing their subjects within the changing monetary and educational constraints of the university sector. I suspect many good film courses in Australia have lost ground to more generalist

media production thrusts through this sort of pressure alone. Some faculties do not like the necessarily selective nature of the subjects either and argue on equity grounds that a common medium like video is more appropriate for reaching a larger group of students. These people often have little understanding of how graduate opportunities in the film production area per se relate to direct film experience or a small national industry, or how it might be possible to structure flexible media courses that accommodate a number of outcomes and student choices.

The Coalition's cutbacks reduce operating grants to all universities by 1 per cent in 1997, a further 3 per cent in 1998, and another 1 per cent in 1999. This means there is pressure on all institutions to make up the shortfall from other financial sources. The policies regarding the introduction of "full fee paying undergraduates" present probably the most ominous challenge to film courses. However, there could also be a debate over whether extremely high TERs (different states in Australia have different names for the high school entrance score), are also fair indicators for a requirement for tertiary education in this professional area. While they bring a certain intellectual prestige to the subjects at scores of 95-97 out of 100 for entry, they also cut out many good students who have high filmmaking aptitude and commitment to the area. Some universities therefore maintain a 50-50 split for entry based on the TER and a Non Recent School Leaver (NRSL) category based on a questionnaire surveying background and experience. This means however that if you don't score a high TER you have to wait at least two years for candidature after completing your HSC. The mix of students has always proved successful as many undergraduates straight out of high school soon drop their illusions about a glamorous career path when they meet experienced people and realise that a degree can mean little within this field to anyone but themselves, whereas a combination of determination and creative purpose means everything. On the other hand, a solid and reflective intellectual framework for media production is also becoming popular with experienced media people studying at post graduate level.

The introduction of full fee paying local undergraduates is currently being debated around the country with a number of the more established and prestigious universities deciding to introduce them. They have been earmarked for popular courses where students just miss out on entry through a slightly lower TER than required and capped at 10 per cent of overall undergraduate places in a course. There will be obvious pressure from uninformed sectors of the university hierarchies—who just see demand and dollars—for courses that teach film to take this kind of student. The full fee however means full cost recovery and in an arts-based area that teaches film production, taking into account costs for teaching, technical support staff and infrastructure, this would represent something like \$45,000 for an undergraduate degree. Commonwealth funded undergraduates currently pay around \$9,900 for a similar degree under the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS). Students who choose to work in film however are also making their own contributions for stock, processing and prints on top of these fees which can range from a few hundred dollars to over \$20,000 depending on the project. It will be interesting to see how many local students will be prepared to pay full fees for access to a 16mm camera and a screen education. In many ways they might be better off using such funds (if they have access to them) to make a film or a number of low budget shorts and create their own track record.

The dangers to film education of a combination of the Vanstone full fee paying policy and the mythos within institutions surrounding such courses and their demand, is that universities may see it as a way of funding these programs generally without many government places or their own internal subsidising of infrastructure. This could happen if the current quotas change to allow more full fee places in these areas. This will require those dedicated to their areas to yet again mount cultural and economic arguments about the whole sector and the role and overall cost effectiveness of tertiary film education within the national media production arena. The fact that the AFTRS no longer offers undergraduate awards is another strong reason to maintain them elsewhere within tertiary education.

Annamarie Chandler teaches film and video production at the University of Technology in Sydney.

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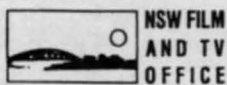
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Future unhealthy

At the Sydney Film Festival, Gillian Leahy considers the fate of Australian documentary filmmaking

An impressive slate of Australian documentaries screened at this year's Sydney Film Festival (SFF). In the Dendy and EAC (Ethnic Affairs Commission) Awards, five documentaries screened including Anna Kannava's remarkable *The Butler*, produced by John Cruthers. In the main program a further eight screened, six of those feature length, and Trevor Graham and Denise Haslam's *Mabo—Life of an Island Man* received an emotional standing ovation and was voted best documentary by the festival audience.

Both these films combined material shot on the new medium, Digital Video (DV) as well as 16mm film. Documentaries at this year's festival showcased a whole range of shooting formats from domestic VHS video to 35mm film and almost everything in between, including combinations of shooting mediums and gauges.

Films were similarly varied in budget and in the production values they were able to bring to the screen. Here the range was from, on the high end, films like *Grizzly*, the bear film about not finding a bear, to, on the low end, a one-man-crew film I very much liked, Cyrus Frisch's *I Shall Honour your Life*, a film from the Netherlands, shot on what looks like VHS blown up to 35mm, about the death of the filmmaker's friend and teacher, film critic, Hans Saaltink.

These two issues of production technology and size of budget dominated discussion at the SFF forum *Documentary In Australia—what does the future hold?* which took place in the State Two Cinema on 19 June. David Noakes of the Australian Film Finance Corporation (AFFC) chairing the session, led off by saying that although Australian documentary had had a good showing at the festival, the health of the documentary industry was not secure. The industry produces about 40 projects a year between the three commissioning bodies, Film Australia, the ABC and SBS. There had been a reduction of funding to the sector of about 25 percent brought about by budget cuts to the various documentary funding and production bodies. This had had the combined effect of reducing both the number of documentaries being made and the size of their budgets. Every aspect was being cut. DV projects were gaining favour because they allowed one person crews, and wages to directors and producers had been reduced. This has seen a change in subject matter and approach, with the quotient of verité films increasing and a drop in documentary series.

Sharon Connolly, executive producer from Film Australia (FA), commented that the trend to lower budgets, and concomitantly DV production, had reduced diversity in the documentary area. She expressed the opinion that the DV films, at their worst, produced tabloidism and at their best, original material. Later in the session, Marcus Gillezeau rightly pointed out that the discussion was tending to mix up issues of style, format and quality.

Connolly's main focus was the cuts recommended in the Gonski report which would seriously threaten FA's role as the traditional home of Australian documentary. The changes suggested include the privatising (selling off) of the very valuable film archive, along with the National Interest Program (NIP) and the film facility itself, the building at Lindfield. The NIP produces approximately 20 docos a year for a total budget of \$6.4 million. Film Australia, she said, had no objection to becoming a commissioning body. Already 70 per cent of programs are initiated outside, but total privatisation would mean that it would become difficult to meet the cultural objectives of the NIP. She said it is

hard to see how private companies could mount the important, but largely parochially relevant programs that FA can, such as the current Federation series.

Further discussion in the session pointed to FA's special ability to provide experienced producing skills to less experienced directors and their ability through their marketing arm and overseas contacts, to place the documentaries they produced into overseas markets. The latest federal budget has given the NIP a further two years of life, and given Film Australia itself another year while a 'scoping' study, which will look at the feasibility of privatisation, is completed.

Filmmakers Pat Fiske and Michael Cordell talked about the way current cutbacks are making an already tough industry tougher. Filmmakers are now subsidising the industry. Fiske's solution is to offset lean periods with other forms of related film employment, and she points to the level of stress on one person crew DV films (such as her *Following the Fenceline*) where the recovery rate after finishing a project is long, and where the lack of a crew leads to a less collaborative shoot without useful and reassuring input. Cordell with his business partner, documentary maker, Chris Hilton, tries to establish ways of working which minimise the troughs by sharing skills, trying always to have one project shooting with another in development, and the ability between them to go for a bank overdraft if a project comes up where shooting needs to start before finance comes through.

Cordell observed that the only doco makers who can stand on their own feet financially are nature filmmakers, and that without the government funding bodies, (the Australian Film Commission, the Australian Film Finance Corporation and Film Australia) and the government TV stations (the ABC and SBS) no culturally relevant documentaries would be made at all.

Representing the TV players were Tom Zubrycki from SBS and Jeff Barnes, who has replaced Michael Rubbo at the ABC. Barnes gave a rundown on the slots available on ABC for documentary, lamented the possible effects of the budget cuts and tried to dissipate the paranoia that the ABC was, or ever had, only been interested in verité style programs. Zubrycki talked about how a small and flexible unit like SBS Independent was able to make decisions quickly. Their last round saw ten films being made, eight on budgets of \$200,000 and two on budgets of \$250,000. They would have two new rounds soon, one in August and one in January and were also looking at some half-hour films with budgets of \$60,000-\$90,000, mostly DV projects. Zubrycki felt a situation was emerging where there were two classes of documentary makers being created; one more experienced lot who generally can command reasonable budgets and another younger or less experienced group who have to scrimp and save a lot to be able to make their films. A group of producers is needed to take the second lot into the first.

While the documentary industry basically remains vital and strong, there are early warning signs of serious disease. If Film Australia is privatised, and budget monies available to the sector continue to fall, and concomitantly, the ability of both independent producers and the documentary production bodies to provide assistance to less experienced filmmakers is reduced, the industry faces a very uncertain future. The current cuts have already produced serious difficulty and reduced diversity of style. Currently it seems very daunting to try and mount an expensive documentary project, such as one that needs a larger than normal-sized crew, or a lot of travel, or time, or research, or archival material. And if too many of our experienced documentary makers burn out and seek greener climbs, the industry will be much the poorer.

Documentary makers who wish to lobby on behalf of the sector should contact the Australian Screen Directors Association's Documentary Subcommittee on 02 9555 7045.

Gillian Leahy lectures in film and video production at the University of Technology, Sydney and is currently making an Accord documentary for SBS, Our Park, a study of her local park over a year of its life.

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a stage X project
AUG

THE HOSTAGE OF FORTUNE
elizabeth navaratil
SEPT

SHUSHI
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OCT

BIDENJARREB PINJARRA
the pinjarra project
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New frontiers

Robyn Evans previews the 1997 International Documentary Conference

Preparations for the Fifth Annual International Documentary Conference are well under way in Brisbane, as Australia's documentary filmmakers gear up for their major professional gathering. The biennial conference, which began in South Australia in 1987, is an internationally recognised event which attracts around 500 delegates from Australia and overseas.

The four day conference has earned a reputation for offering lively debates on some of the ethical, social and political issues associated with documentary filmmaking. Incorporating a program of screenings, it's a celebration of the documentary form as well as a professional forum.

This year's event is being staged by QDox, the Queensland Documentary Association, and in recognition of the changing climate for filmmakers and the world they document, this year's theme is "New Frontiers". The conference will address the threats and freedoms facing documentary filmmakers as we approach the millennium. Conference director Melanie Guiney believes that Australia is a key player in non-fiction film production, and that this year's event will provide the industry with the necessary tools to maintain that position: "The past year has been very difficult for the industry, but I believe the conference will generate real optimism and confidence about what lies ahead. So much hard

work's been done by filmmakers and government agencies in establishing productive relationships within the international marketplace, and it's now paying off in real terms. Australian documentaries are highly regarded overseas, and opportunities are definitely there for the right projects".

A key element in the conference's objective to make documentary filmmakers 'market-wise' is the immensely popular Documart. Here, filmmakers pitch their projects before an audience including an impressive cast of international and local broadcasters, financiers and sales agents. The pitches give valuable feedback on the projects pitched and information on what, as buyers, they are looking for.

Documart returns this year by popular demand, and QDox already has an impressive list of guests who will be part of the market contingent, including Nick Fraser ('Fine Cut', BBC), Andrew Brann (Channel Four), Sophie Chalou (Canal Plus, France), Chris Haws (Discovery Channel Europe), Paul Sowerbutts (ITEL), Christine Von Preyss (Telecast International, Germany), Dominica Siu King-Long (Radio Television, Hong Kong), Mitchell Block (Direct Cinema, USA), Kim Dalton (Beyond International), Geoff Barnes (ABC) and Claire Jager (SBSI).

Documart is supported by sessions dealing with market realities in

documentary-making. Other key sessions include a retrospective on the development of *cinema verité*, featuring screenings of classic films rarely seen in this country.

The retrospective will be attended by some of *cinema verité's* leading exponents including two-time Academy Award winner Barbara Kopple (*Harlan County USA* and *American Dream*), Britain's BAFTA Award winner Molly Dineen (*The Ark* and *The Company of Men*), and Duan Jinchuan, winner of the Prix Du Cinema du Reel (Paris) Award, for *16 Barkhor Street South*. The filmmakers will screen and discuss their work.

As part of a focus on investigative documentaries and 'real' TV, John Edginton, one of Britain's foremost investigative documentary filmmakers, will present his recent film *Mumia Abu-Jamal: A Case for Reasonable Doubt*. The film was the subject of controversy in the United States recently when the Philadelphia Police Department endeavoured to have it barred from broadcast on Home Box Office.

Looking to the future with a focus on new technologies, Martin Freeth, currently Head of the BBC's Multimedia Centre, will showcase two interactive CD-ROM projects produced recently in association with a major documentary television series. The interactive programs, one on Northern Ireland and one on the life and music of JS Bach,

demonstrate the potential that new technology opens up, and Martin Freeth will discuss the processes required to harness that potential.

The conference will also include discussions on government policy, funding options and broadcasting regulations here and in Britain, specialist sessions focussing on diverse subjects such as natural history, current affairs and art films; indigenous filmmaking from Australia and abroad and work from emerging filmmakers including some of those currently 'racing around the world'. The full conference program won't be released until mid-to-late October but the conference organisers are confident that it will be well received. Melanie Guiney summarises: "It is a four day filmmaker's feast that will cater for anyone who is passionate about producing, watching or learning about documentary. It provides an essential marketplace and venue for industry professionals to network, gather information and view some of the latest documentaries. In the current climate of anxiety over the on-going reviews to the film industry, it couldn't be more timely".

The Fifth International Documentary Conference, November 20-23 in Brisbane. For further information or to obtain a registration form contact QDox on Tel 07 3846 4567 or fax 07 3846 4929

Column

Bit depth

The first in a series of new media columns by Jonathon Delacour

What a strange, demented feeling it gives me when I realize I have spent whole days before this inkstone, with nothing better to do, jotting down at random whatever nonsensical thoughts have entered my head.

Yoshida Kenko c1330

While no-one can claim immunity from nonsensical thoughts—some can be charming and witty, like those of the Buddhist monk Kenko—others are merely stupid. One would be hard pressed to find a better example of wilful stupidity than our government's recent announcement of "principles for a national approach to regulate the content of online services such as the internet".

A joint press release from the Minister for Communications and the Arts, Senator Richard Alston, and Attorney-General, Daryl Williams, proposes a "framework [that] balances the need to address community concerns in relation to content with the need to ensure that regulation does not inhibit industry growth and potential". This ludicrous proposal, which can only have been dreamed up by people who have never had any contact with the internet, envisages that the online service provider (ISP) industry will "develop codes of practice in relation to online content, in consultation with the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA)".

As a result, anyone unhappy about

online content must first complain to the relevant ISP; the ABA then has the authority to investigate unresolved complaints. Conceptually, it is similar to the way in which film, television, radio broadcasts and computer games are currently regulated. A distressed viewer might call a television station to complain about nudity or language in a movie. If they do not receive a satisfactory response (whatever that might mean) from the television station, they can then complain to the ABA which conducts an "inquiry" and, if it finds the material was inappropriate, tells the broadcaster not to do it again. Prosecutions are exceedingly rare.

The system works tolerably well because there is tangible evidence of any "offending material" in the form of reels of film or videotape, audiotapes of radio broadcasts, and floppy disk or CD-ROM games and, because potentially objectionable content has already been filtered out by the censorship system. In the case of the internet, this process can already be effectively mimicked by filtering and parental control software such as CYBERSitter, SurfWatch, Net Nanny, Rated-PG, X-Stop, Cyber Snoop, and Cyber Patrol—just a few of the alternatives which render internet regulation unnecessary, as long as parents are prepared to accept responsibility for limiting their children's access to the net.

But let's assume, adopting the position of the fundamentalist Right, that these software safeguards are only partly effective and that "harmful" material slips through. Only a tiny fraction of internet content is stored on local (ie Australian) servers. What can the ABA do about a complaint concerning "offensive" content on a web server in the US, or Italy, or Japan? What kind of response is the offended web surfer likely to get from a foreign content producer or ISP? Incredulity? Derision?

And so much of the content is ephemeral anyway: chat sessions exist only in real time, web sites appear and disappear, e-mail and Usenet news is stored only temporarily on an ISP's server. Internet content resembles, as much as anything, telephone conversations and facsimile transmissions. In a sense this is the core of the problem: the "regulatory framework" attempts to impose a broadcast metaphor on what are essentially telecommunications carriers. They may as well attempt to control the air Australians breathe or the water we drink.

The whole idea of regulation is so divorced from reality that it is difficult to explain why it is being proposed. Put to one side the government's duplicity in not admitting that regulation is largely unnecessary; perhaps the legislation is a cynical attempt to appease Senator Brian

Harradine, the Lyons Group and other conservative elements in the Liberal party, put forward in the knowledge that it is unworkable and will inevitably fail.

Alternatively, could it be that Australian politicians are profoundly unaware of digital culture and the way it is reshaping our world? That this lack of understanding is not restricted to federal politicians becomes depressingly obvious when you observe in NSW the Carr government's tubthumping about internet pornography while they shovel computers into state schools and hook them up to the net without making any real provision for teacher training.

Ultimately, it is not this whacky censorship sideshow that is truly dispiriting. It is that at a time when we need to formulate an imaginative and courageous response to the radical social and economic transformation about to be wrought by the internet, our politicians are jockeying for position like amateurs at a provincial racetrack. Which horse do you bet on when the only starters are confusion, dishonesty, cynicism, stupidity and ignorance?

Jonathon Delacour is a photographer turned interactive storyteller currently working on online projects including an AFC-funded hypertext narrative work for the world wide web and (with Michael Hill) an avatar-based game for a 3D chat space.

Cinesonic

Philip Brophy on Michael Jackson as ghost

In the Straub/Huillet film *Moses and Aaron* (1976) based on Schoenberg's opera, a chorus of dancers perform a somewhat gangly mock-ritual, culminating in their surging forward to the camera, falling into an unseen heap beneath the bottom of the frame. The music score continues, with the camera holding on an empty frame of the Roman arena within which much of the film's action occurs. Ruthlessly and rigorously affixed to the dialectic of their transposition of the Schoenberg text into film, Straub/Huillet's camera-blocking simply falls dead to allow the prime text—the music—precedence and presence. Many similar 'dead' moments recur through the two and half hour film—that is, until one realizes that the scene is far from 'dead'.

The sound is *live*. While staring at the empty arena, we hear a mass of invisible bodies panting and gasping from the energy their bodies spent dancing. The moment is moist, saline, pornographic. It is also a reminder of how, when and where the sounds of the body are allowed to be rendered—in this case exemplified by their privileging of live, continuous location sound recording.

Straub/Huillet are representative of an approach to film sound which has typified the bulk of European sound design for the last 30 years. The resulting aesthetic (in some cases, a politic of form) shapes film soundtracks to indelibly fuse the actual live sound of the on/off-screen action with the energy of the recorded performance in its original spatial location. Without resorting to vague, pseudo-mystical discourse, it must be stated that the simulation of densely textured live sound is extremely difficult to achieve in the post-production environment. Debates still rage across the world today as to the acceptable degree of naturalism and artificiality in film sound. The French, in particular, seem very divided about this still. Yet while they have tended mostly to reject the Hollywood model of excessive post-production—which, ironically, owes much to French *musique concrete*—they nonetheless have given us rich models of how live sound can be employed as a vast reservoir for the dimensional irrigation of cinematic soundscapes (for example, in the work of Jean-Pierre Melville, Jean Luc Godard, Marguerite Duras and Alain Robbe-Grillet).

That sonic moment of exasperation in *Moses and Aaron* rarely surfaces in the cinema. It happens in pomography, naturally enough, where any and all bodily audio-visuality can eroticize the clumsy proceedings. It happens in loquacious, brutish films by Sidney Lumet, Robert Aldrich, Arthur Penn, Robert Altman, John Cassavettes and Abel Ferrara, where the throat, chest and voice of actors are struck like drums to perform with a heightened sono-physical presence. And it happens most of all in the video clips of Michael Jackson. In *Thriller* (1983), the protracted dance sequence overflows with the sound of bodies: gasping, spitting, heaving as their animated corpses (and yes, that's all the screen body is no matter how you dress it up) are energized by the music. The sound of the body is always celebrated by Jackson—not only in his self-multiplication and self-granulation into a myriad of snap-crackle-and-vocal-pops for his songs, but also in the overlaid sound effects for nearly all his video clips: the foot stomping of *Thriller*, the sexual humping of *The Way You Make Me Feel* (1986), the kung-fu chopping of *Bad* (1987), the primal screaming of *Black Or White* (1992).

Ghosts (1997) recently aired on national television with the pomp and circumstance which accompany all

Michael Jackson 'premieres'. As the hype and special effects hoo-hah resides, I am reminded of how little truly contemporary apparitions of radical sound design exist in that oozing pool of audio-visual potential we call the cinema. *Ghosts* stands as a unashamedly freakish pillar of bodily difference and sonic distinction. Like the uncompromising work of Straub/Huillet, it ruptures the dull felt blanket which muffles film sound, giving rise to aural experiences and tactile imaginings.

But before discussing the sound design of *Ghosts*, let's be clear about a few things to do with 'the cinema'. In its admittedly strained attempt to 'be cinema', Michael Jackson's video clips transcend cinema. They do not fall short in the pomo pit of pathetic allusions of quotation and appropriation; nor do they deconstruct/reconstruct historical film texts. In an epoch of cinema held to ransom by 19th century music and 18th century novels, Michael Jackson's pseudo-cinema is more real than real. It pushes past experimentalism, beyond *a-cinema*, and into a realm of reinvented cinema. Forget the skin of the eye, its fetishized optics and attendant photochemical grain. Listen to the colour of skin and the grain of the body.

Ghosts opens with a surfeit of cinematic clichés typical of the rock video vision, recreating the warm yet chilling world of a spooky old movie on late night television. But instead of a crackly old TV turning violins into buzzsaws, the orchestral recording is scintillating, panoramic, majestic. Listening to it in full stereo playback, one notices that this kind of mix is rarely, if at all, allowed in film music mixes. The spatialisation is hyper-detailed: every instrument holds its own focal point, creating a sense of ornate spatialisation that film convention would deem too distracting for a lumbering narrative. The instruments dance across the stereo field so much so that one experiences space more than sound. Such an aesthetic is born from the recording and producing of music, wherein music becomes sound in the act of recording. In film, music—formally, aesthetically, technically—is mostly regarded as an unmediated source, as if what you hear is 'pure music'. This has historically dictated that a blurred naturalism governs its presence and placement, as if we are at the turn of the century sitting in front of an orchestral pit of semi-muted live musicians in a dampened theatre. *Ghosts* creates a sharply defined spectral environment of sound within which musicality is a by-product of it—incorporation in the soundtrack. Here—as beautifully claimed by Japan's Pizzicato Five—music is organized by sound.

This in itself would mark *Ghosts* at the vanguard of film sound—but there is more (most of which is beyond the scope of this brief article). This 'spectral environment' is part of a spatial narrative which unfolds as the video clip dovetails sequences, numbers, set-pieces and effects into each other. We start outside the ghostly mansion, with orchestral gestures sonically flitting about us like animated cobwebs and flickering shadows. A series of thunder cracks (the rupturing of the ether sphere) and door slams (the transgression of architecture) erupt from the soundtrack in complex figuration. Each event is a monolithic ground-shaking, space-, shape-changing phoneme, signalling an erotic transgression of forbidden realms. Upon entering the mansion, the orchestral detailing is swept up by a swirling network of shifting breaths. The space is not simply 'live': it is *alive*, for we are now inside the body of Michael Jackson. It is weird, it is strange, and I like it.

Ghosts is a clear message about transgression. Michael Jackson transgresses what we call 'race' and 'gender'; now we are inside his world ("Who's the freak now?"), and our

homey, hokey, uptight sensibilities transgress the ethereal, metamorphic nature of his home turf. Michael Jackson's sense of his own being—something which most of us will only ever ridicule rather than understand its fundamental otherness—has consistently determined the sounds and images of himself which he mysteriously conjures forth and methodically sculpts. The ornate spatialization of the orchestra thus aptly reflects what could conceivably be the interior of his body. Inside, we are in a newly-defined world of sound and vision. Things behave aurally in ways unacceptable in our constricted world of sanctioned physical form. Building on his previous tactic of overlaying sound effects, every move Michael Jackson makes—a point of the finger, a twist of the neck, a dart of the eye—is marked by a momentous sonic event. He conducts all that inhabit his terrain; he performs by aurally animating that terrain purely through his movement therein; and he generally *unnaturalizes* the audio-visual make-up of his depicted world. As the dancers (themselves signs of the rich and fetid roots that stem back to New Orleans Jazz and the explosion of Afro-American culture throughout the new land of America) move from earth-bound steps to mid-air flights to Escher-like gravity-defying movements, their footsteps reverberate with a glorious artificiality that confirms their post-bodily state.

Because Michael Jackson is first and foremost a musician, his world—like *Moses and Aaron's* cinematic text—obeys musical logic and aural form. (It is important to note that all other forms of narratology are either irrelevant, inconsequential or incidental, and no matter how many novels you read, a literary perspective will render you illiterate in front of this soundscape.) Listening to *History* (1995), one can hear

the excessive ornamentation that has consistently governed Jackson's music, no matter whether he is working with Quincy Jones, Baby Ford or Teddy Riley. The funk of Jackson's arrangements is Gothic, Frankensteinian, lurid, technological. It follows the 'baroque bayou' stylings historically defined by arrangers like Barry White and Isaac Hayes and contemporaneously embraced by producers like Prince. In place of the muscular, pumped thickness of hip hop (low ground swells, deep booms, fattened slaps and grinding rhythms), Jackson has aligned himself with the slicker, streamlined post-funk of New Jack Swing. Its brittle, crystalline nature allows for hyper-detailing along a conveyor-belt which creates an interlocking grid of digitally-edited rhythms whose complexity is far in advance of rarefied computer music and a precursor to the often obvious editing of Drum & Bass.

The succession of songs in *Ghosts* skates across shiny, eclectic, post-funked platforms. Each is heterogeneously stitched together in a fractal patchwork light years away from classical, romantic and modern form—because in funk, everything is held in place by falling apart. It is the aesthetic of the collapse and the pleasure of the breakage (as opposed to the tyranny of being 'tight' so championed by white culture), both of which can be heard in Michael Jackson's music, seen in his persona, and experienced in the sound design of his video clips. He fractures space as gleefully as he recomposes his own face; he excerpts sound as violently as he destroys his own body. In the being of Michael Jackson, a more absolute meld of sound and vision does not exist. He has left our world where plastic surgery is frowned upon, race must be black or white, music is required to be pure, and video clips are excluded from the cinema. How fitting that he now tags himself as a ghost.

SBS ACCORD DOCUMENTARIES

SBS Independent invites Australian Independent documentary makers to propose projects for consideration as part of its 1997-1998 SBS/FFC Documentary Accord.

The proposals should be for programs targeted to the prime time hour-long documentary slots in the SBS schedule. We are particularly looking for documentaries which are culturally relevant, have a strong story and a coherent point of view, and engage either on or off-screen with the Charter of SBS.

This financial year we are seeking up to 10 documentaries under the SBS/FFC Documentary Accord, of which a maximum of 5 will be selected in this 'round'. SBS will offer the successful applicants a cash pre-sale (for three runs over five years).

The offer from SBS qualifies the productions for consideration by the FFC for funding.

Proposals for consideration in this 'round' must be received by Friday 17 October 1997. After this date, proposals may be offered to SBS Independent at any time in the year for consideration and the other 5 pre-sales will be offered from this process.

For our guidelines and further information please contact our production co-ordinators.

Amanda Howitt
Tel 02) 94303931

or

Sylvia Wilczynski
Tel 02) 94303915

SBS Independent Fax No: 02) 94303865



AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1997

A CITY WIDE VISUAL ARTS EVENT
BETWEEN ART & NATURE

PERSPECTA 97

AUSTRALIAN
PERSPECTA 1997

BETWEEN
ART & NATURE

Commencing in August 1997 museums, galleries and universities across Sydney will present Australian Perspecta 1997: Between Art & Nature—a visual arts event that considers how 'nature' is regarded in the 1990s. Australian Perspecta 1997 involves the work of over 100 artists from throughout Australia.

Eighteen organisations will jointly present Australian Perspecta 1997 as a city-wide arts festival of exhibitions, conferences, performances and radio broadcasts. Each organisation has initiated its own program in a collaborative process unprecedented in the history of contemporary visual arts events in Sydney.

- THE ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES
- ABC RADIO THE LISTENING ROOM & RADIO EYE
- AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR PHOTOGRAPHY
- BOOMALLI ABORIGINAL ARTISTS CO-OPERATIVE
- CAMPBELLTOWN CITY BICENTENNIAL ART GALLERY
- CASULA POWERHOUSE ARTS CENTRE
- CONTEMPORARY SOUND ARTS
- IVAN DOUGHERTY GALLERY
- THE NATIONAL TRUST S.H. ERVIN GALLERY
- MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
- MUSEUM OF SYDNEY
- NEW MEDIA FORUM
- THE PERFORMANCE SPACE
- ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS SYDNEY
- SYDNEY INTERMEDIA NETWORK
- THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY URBAN DESIGN PROGRAM & SYDNEY COLLEGE FOR THE ARTS
- THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS & THE FACULTY OF LIFE SCIENCES
- UTS GALLERY, UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SYDNEY

CONFERENCES & EVENTS

A+N=D #1: Blind dates with art and nature (Indigenous Infrastructures)
For dates and locations, please contact the "art+nature=design" dateline at the Urban Design Program of Sydney University ph: 9351 4576

A+N=D #2: Art + nature = design?
Tuesday August 26, 6pm
The University of Sydney, Professorial Boardroom, Main Quadrangle Building

Intersections 97: art/science/ecology/environment
Saturday 16 August, 9am-6pm
The University of New South Wales College of Fine Arts and The Faculty of Life Sciences
Information ph: 9385 0623

New Media Forum: Electronic Nature
Paula Dawson, Fran Dyson, Nola Farman, Robyn Stacey
Chair: Zoe Sofoulis
Sunday 10 August, 2-5pm
The Art Gallery of New South Wales Theatre, Level 4

Social Interiors: Spatial Circumference
plus solo performances by the group members
Rik Rue, Shane Fahey and Julian Knowles
presented by Sydney Intermedia Network
Sunday 24 August, 2.30pm
The Art Gallery of New South Wales
Cost: \$12/\$9 conc

SOUNDcheck.two: Terra Acoustica
Presented by Contemporary Sound Arts
Martin Harrison, Alan Lamb, Virginia Madsen
Sunday 17 August, 2pm
The Art Gallery of New South Wales

SOUND ARTS

ABC Radio The Listening Room
4 August-15 September
Mondays 9pm
ABC Classic FM
Radio Eye
3 August-14 September
Sundays 8.20pm
Radio National

The Art Gallery of New South Wales
The Listening Room, Radio Eye & The Art Gallery of New South Wales present
SOUND FRAMES: A Guide to the Artfulness of Nature
An acoustiguide tour of the Gallery's 19th century Australian collection



This project has been assisted by the Australia Council, the Federal Government's arts funding and advisory body.

TA

Phillip Jackson
Cameron Mitchell
Bishop's

EXHIBITIONS

THE ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Web Sites
Arnhem Land Weavers, Lauren Berkowitz, Simryn Gill, Fiona Hall, Steven Holland
2 August-14 September

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

The Wave
Harry Nankin
8-30 August

CAMPBELLTOWN CITY BICENTENNIAL ART GALLERY

Where Yesterday may be Tomorrow
Joan Brassil
9 August-14 September

CASULA POWERHOUSE ARTS CENTRE

Fibro
Marian Aboud, Kyle Ashpole, Cecily Briggs, Stephen Cramb, Michael Dagostino, Caroline Ho-Bich-Tuyen Dang, Laraine Deer, Mitchell English, David Griggs, Norma Hall, Mark Killroy, Bruce Latimer, Jennifer Leahy, Erna Lilje, Magaret Morgan, Ian Provest, Tony Schwensen, Ted Sinclair, Therese Sweeney, Joel Tarling, David Thomas, Arthur Trindall, Beulah van Rensburg, Regina Walter, Justene Williams
20 August-14 September

IVAN DOUGHERTY GALLERY

Between Art & Nature
Robyn Backen, Joan Grounds and Sherre DeLys, Simeon Nelson
31 July-30 August

NATIONAL TRUST S.H. ERVIN GALLERY

Temple of Earth Memories
Stuart Elliott, Michelle H Elliott, Leah King-Smith, Janet Laurence, Deborah Russell, Hossein Valamanesh, Philip Wolfhagen, Judith Wright
2 August-7 September

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Natural Selection
Elizabeth Gower, Lyndal Jones, Vera Möller, Patricia Piccinini, Ruth Watson, Louise Weaver
1 August-8 September

MUSEUM OF SYDNEY

Harbourings: Remaking Sydney's Industrial Landscapes
Collaborators: Richard LePlastrier, Roderick Simpson, Sam Marshall, Peter Emmett, Gary Warner, Tim Gruchy, Kathleen Tonkin, Michelle Andringa, Liz Cotter, Anne Graham, Richard Goodwin
1 August-15 September

THE PERFORMANCE SPACE

Screaming Green
i. Perpetual Motion Machine
Mark Joseph
13-30 August
The Performance Space Gallery

ii. Feeeping Creatures

Rodney Berry
13-30 August
The Performance Space Gallery

iii. Koala?

Julie-Anne Long and the Wilderness Society
Koalas in sites around Sydney
13-30 August

iv. Listening to Clara, Ethel & Ada

Sue Pedley
1 August-6 September
Wednesday-Saturday 12-6pm
106-112 Erskineville Rd, Erskineville

ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS, SYDNEY

Eco of Faraday Wood
Anita Glesta
1 August-14 September
7am-5.30pm
located below the herb garden

Ground Zero

Michael Goldberg
1 August-7 September
Daily, 10am-4pm
The Palm House, near the Visitors Centre

REA-PROBE

Rea
presented by Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative
1 August-14 September
7am-5.30pm
located in front of the Tropical Centre

UTS GALLERY UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SYDNEY

Strange Attractors: Secular Altars
Haydn Wilson

The Art Gallery of New South Wales

Art Gallery Rd Sydney 2000
ph 9225 1744 fax 9221 6226
Daily 10am-5pm

Australian Centre for Photography

257 Oxford St Paddington Sydney 2021
ph 9331 6253 fax 9331 6887
Tues-Sat 11am-6pm

Campbelltown City Bicentennial Art Gallery

Cnr Camden & Appin Rds
Campbelltown 2560
ph 046 201 333 fax 046 281 063
Wed-Sat 10am-4pm, Sun 12-4pm

Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre

1 Casula Rd Casula 2170
ph 9824 1121 fax 9821 4273
Daily 10am-4pm

Ivan Dougherty Gallery

Selwyn St Paddington Sydney 2021
ph 9385 0726 fax 9385 0706
Mon-Fri 10am-5pm, Sat 1-5pm

Museum of Contemporary Art

140 George St The Rocks Circular Quay Sydney 2000
ph 9252 4033 fax 9252 4361 r
ecorded info line 24 hr 9241 5892
daily 10am-6pm
adults \$9, concessions \$6, members free

Museum of Sydney

Cnr Bridge & Phillip Sts Sydney 2000
ph 9251 5988 fax 9241 1817
Daily 10am-5pm
adults \$6, conc & children \$4, family \$15

National Trust S.H. Ervin Gallery

Watson Rd Observatory Hill Sydney 2000
ph 9258 0123 fax 9258 0174
Tues-Fri 11am-5pm, Sat & Sun 12-5pm
adults \$5, concessions & children \$3

The Performance Space

199 Cleveland St Redfern Sydney 2016
ph 9698 7235 fax 9699 1503
Wed-Sat 12-8pm

Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney

Mrs Macquaries Rd Sydney 2000
ph 9231 8016 fax 9231 8065
Daily 7am-5.30pm August,
7am-6pm September

The University of New South Wales

College of Fine Arts
Selwyn St Paddington Sydney 2021
ph 9385 0623 fax 9385 0719

The University of Sydney

City Rd Camperdown Sydney 2006
ph 9351 4576 fax 9351 3855

UTS Gallery, University of Technology, Sydney

Level 4, 702 Harris St Ultimo Sydney 2007
ph 9514 1284 fax 9514 1228
Tues-Fri 12-6pm, Sat 12-4pm

Under a Federal sun?

Will the federal government be able to support the arts?

The federal government's support of the arts has been a topic of debate for some time. The current government's approach to the arts is being questioned, with many arguing that the arts are being neglected. The federal government's support of the arts is being questioned, with many arguing that the arts are being neglected. The federal government's support of the arts is being questioned, with many arguing that the arts are being neglected.

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Under a Federal sun?

Mike Leggett asks whatever happened to CMCs

Co-operative Multimedia Centres (CMCs) emerged into the atmosphere at about the same time as the Cfc's were destroying it. The atmosphere surrounding the newly identified 'clever country' at the time contained the heady technology of 'new media' and all things digital—interactive multimedia, the internet and the world wide web. Australia, in the view of the Labor government, had been at the end of the communication line for long enough and needed to be aboard the bandwagon that would deliver global proximity, as well as a new employee hungry industry.

The intervention that Keating and Canberra wanted to make was announced in Creative Nation, that policy document which spoke in October 1994 of "being distinctly Australian" in the face of the "assault from homogenised international mass culture". After the inevitable wrangling, the six Centres that had been proposed were open by mid-1996. What impact have they had? What has been the quality of the services provided? What plans do they have to survive a non-interventionist, market-place government?

The mission for the Centres was to "offer education, training and professional services, access to state-of-the-art equipment and facilities, access to leading-edge research and development, and assistance with the handling of issues such as intellectual property and product testing and evaluation". To greater or lesser degree each of the locations have and are delivering in each of these areas, but with differing degrees of emphasis—"complementarity" was the word used by Professor Guy Petherbridge, CEO for Starlit CMC and spokesperson for the Association of CMCs, to describe how the strengths of each enterprise are shared between all. It seems that it is early days for such an ideal to become evident, like many of the projects listed by each CMC.

Web sites are an obvious point of contact with the Cooperatives, some of which are non-profit, and the QANTM site (www.qantm.com.au) explains in the clearest way their business model summarised as the "brokerage of skills and related services for the interactive multimedia industry".

QANTM is now operational in Darwin and Brisbane with 20 staff employed in four areas: Youthworks has trained over 200 young people in basic internet skills. Indigenet has developed approximately 15 major projects and with the leadership of Chris 'Bandirra' Lee will achieve placing digital networks parallel to traditional ones. Eventually, some access to Indigenous culture will be given to the wider global community. Australian Silicon Studio Training Centre (ASSTC) has received over 200 scholarship applications for 3D animation scholarships and the first 10 students have completed. QANTM Edge has five major development projects in the multimedia arena, all staffed by local contractors or individuals. CEO Olaf Moon admits that "research and development is a minor part of our activities, apart from research into five copyright projects". Queensland government sponsorship is for two years and the Federal Governments will continue for a total of three. "At the end of this time, we expect to be self sufficient".

QANTM is one of two Queensland CMCs. Starlit (www.starlit.com.au)

focuses on the tooling needs of educationalists and trainers, and instructional design, utilising the accumulated national experience of 'distance learning'. In a bid to challenge the US heavies of on-line courses, the new academic year will see Swinburne University launch 56 courses, Griffith Uni just behind, all distilled from Australia's unique pedagogical expertise.

"Western Australia is now poised to become a Mecca for digital artists throughout the Asia Pacific". The team at Imago in Perth (www.imago.com.au) identify their work with the art and cultural sector as their main achievement. One project with the Film and Television Institute established during July is DAS (The Imago/FTI Digital Arts Studio), a facility specifically designed to allow access for screen culture artists to modern digital production facilities. With financial and technical support from Arts WA, the Australian Film Commission and the Australia Council, the production facilities include interactive multimedia, digital sound, 3D modelling and animation, digital video and web authoring. The essential and primary purpose of DAS is to provide a facility where artists can access computer equipment for experimentation, production and training, and become a hub for critical arts activity.

CEO Mike Grant observes that "at this early stage there has not been a lot of cross-over between the technological researchers and artists". Another facility, the Imago Sun Research Centre, is also open and equipped with high-end workstations. "A number of leading local artists are already designing projects to work on utilising the resources and expertise of the centre", says Grant. Imago also works with PICA in the implementation of a bi-annual funding program which provides small amounts of money to artists for research and development. In addition Imago covers programs addressing education and training, industry development, content development, and research coordination.

Ngapartji (www.ngapartji.com.au) launched onto coffee saturated Rundle Street, Adelaide in August 1996 with a state of the art multimedia centre containing studios, seminar and exhibition spaces, and a spectacular pavement cafe—up to a 1000 people every week have a hands-on experience with interactive multimedia, predominantly on-line. Training is either informal from trusty cafe staff or from high level trainers.

Carolyn Guerin, Ngapartji's manager of applied research explains that the centre assists with "a range of on-line activities with real life elements such as the Virtual Writers in Residence Pilot Project (funded with the Australia Council), and Ngapartji Interactivity and Narrative Research Group ("Rosebud") which, besides holding monthly seminars, has a web site with papers consolidating the group's work and, soon, a research database. We have also sponsored and promoted the work of artists including Linda Marie Walker—exposure to new work is key to the centre. With so many mainstream industry people participating in activities at the centre, exposure to art-based work is inspiring and often commented on—the last Australian Multimedia Enterprises board meeting was held here during Jon McCormack's *Turbulence*

exhibition. Most of the board members were blown away by it—you could see their minds ticking over like mad".

Ngapartji Nodes will bring other Adelaide organisations on-line—Tandanya Aboriginal Centre is the first—self-managing the kind of computers available in the Ngapartji cafe. Nodes is about on-line activity and has included virtual community components—interactive communications capabilities rather than your usual brochure ware.

In Sydney, Access Australia (www.cmcaccess.com.au) and its unwieldy consortium including Telstra, NSW Department of School Education, NSW TAFE Commission and five metropolitan and regional universities, have just appointed its third CEO in two years, Rim Keris, who comes from a hardware marketing and business background. He will need to bring substance to a program which includes Propagate, a key national project allied with the European Commission, on multimedia copyright.

At the other end of the financial scale also in Sydney, MetroTV (www.home.aone.net.au/metro/) launched Stage One of a New Media Laboratory in November 1996 then last month received State Government funding to set up Stage Two—this includes ten high-end Apple Macintosh 9600 computers on an ethernet network with high speed internet access. Since January, in conjunction with other screen culture organisations, a range of digital courses have been run at Metro.

In Melbourne, it is the screen culture sector again setting the pace in giving access to digital media facilities. With financial backing from the state-run Multimedia Victoria, Open Channel (www.openchannel.org.au) will augment its digital video editing facilities with four 3D animation suites and a dozen high-end PowerMacs.

In the smart end of town, eMerge (www.emerge.edu.au) is about to pilot a project with cultural institutions and individual artists to establish a Virtual Cultural Centre, "a complete experience rather than a collection, going live in 1998", according to CEO Terese van Maanen—surely an opportunity for vibrant links with Melbourne talent? On the web, the iSite resource directory for the national industry will list personnel and clients. A range of other projects will address pedagogical and curriculum concerns at all three educational levels. Links with San Francisco and the 'Malaysian corridor' are also advanced.

Many, including Colin Mercer at the Griffith Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy, wonder about the marginalisation that the more creative communities are being forced into by the majority CMCs pursuing industry and training objectives. "Interactive multimedia offers a chance to break down a whole series of barriers between genres, disciplines and artforms. Convergence of mind-sets, not just technologies, is the issue," according to Mercer, "with the ability to think laterally and more creatively".

Professor Petherbridge feels that it is the industry support area rather than the cultural area that will continue subsidy to the nascent multimedia industry, "because it provides a message to industry and the public at large that this is a very important part of public policy...that if we slip in the next year, we've really slipped".

Happy navigating

Caitriona Murtagh at Brisbane's eMEDIA 97

High and low tech, static and dynamic, permanent and transient, eMedia 97 embraced a paradigm of multimedia as the fusion of diverse artistic practices with emphasis on interaction and participation. Conceived by the Queensland Multimedia Arts Centre as a vehicle to allow Queensland artists to develop, realise and distribute multimedia art, the festival's hybrid of performance, photography, sculpture, internet and rave culture created an arena for vigorous engagement between art, technology and audience.

Sculpture and photography combined with CD-ROM installation in the *240 Volt* group show at Metro Arts, to envelop the viewer in a perpetually evolving mesh of structures, images and sounds. A (seemingly) random sonic loop of grunting, pissing, laughter, coughing and teeth brushing accompanied Mark Parslow and Stuart Kirby's *In the Wolerverine's Web*. Its dissonant tones bled into the space around Nicole Voevodin's mystery cabinets, *Cash Corpus #3*, and James Lamar-Peterson's animal sculptures fabricated from obsolete circuitry. Simultaneously menacing, cute and annoying, the soundscape was, intermittently, peppered with gunfire from Lucy Francis's wicked reworking of the grassy knoll: *Jackie O*. Clicking on a screen-sized image of the first lady, the viewer provides a catalyst for the assassination (and Jackie's pupils ricochet satisfyingly around her eye sockets in tempo with the shots). Gunshot reverberated throughout the gallery, over the delicate seaside ice-cream van chimes that attended Benjamin Elliot's vacation theme interactive photography. The intricate aural and visual environment fluctuated constantly as viewers navigated sculpture and interacted with installations.

Elaborating on the possibilities of audience participation in a mixed media event, *Gigga Bash (Global Overload)* produced by Jeremy Hynes of MomEnTurn Multimedia, featured the interior of the Hub Cafe covered with 450 metres of foil by Cyber Nautilus Performance Group. Members of the audience were wrapped into the environment with foil—living sculptures at 16 work stations linked to the internet, searching for visually stimulating material to project to the remaining spectators. Simultaneously, the event was filmed, remixed with audience-generated images from the net, distorted with other footage and extruded back onto a nine screen TV wall which was itself in turn filmed and re-projected, condensing the media into a ultra concentrated compound of film, production, cyberspace and audience collaboration.

Metal framed novajet prints in *Close as Life* at Secumb Space, the Plastic Energy dance party with visuals by Troy Innocent, music by Ollie Olsen and Cyber-femme Griller Girls exhibition, further expanded the diversity of the festival, providing additional opportunities for engagement and interaction with a variety of technologies and practices. Workshops in multimedia authoring and the internet, lectures from Dorian Dowse on the implications multimedia holds for fine art, Troy Innocent on the possibilities of artificial life and video conferencing from New York with internet artists discussing issues facing web designers in the US and Australia, meant that eMedia avoided becoming a superficial feast of images and sound, achieving instead, a forum for erudite discussion of and energetic experimentation with multimedia.

eMedia97 QMAC; Metro Arts; QUT; Qld Museum; Hub Cafe; Secumb Space; Out!; Quantm; Brisbane May 23-June 6

Caitriona Murtagh is a freelance writer based in Brisbane

Report

Attaining information fitness

Andrew Garton reports on museums and Austria's Ars Electronica Centre

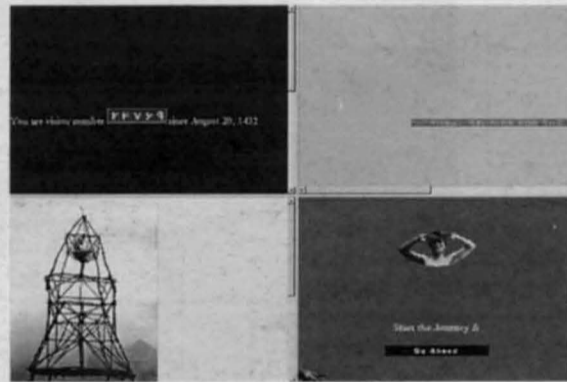
Catalogued, packaged and displayed, looking through glass at our history. Corridors of locked cabinets within which are stored a phantasmagoria of human inquiry; screens we dare not touch, through which we can only gaze. Down every corridor of this mighty building, on either side, butterflies of every imaginable colour; shells the size of emus; skulls of men, women and children who knew well the primal dark; skeletons of beasts of unimaginable proportions—all protected within controlled atmospheres where humidity measuring devices murmur quietly amidst the shuffling feet of visitors. A sarcophagus of speculation and intrigue down through which we wander, in awe, in dreams, inside the Museum.

For many of us, this was the kind of museum we grew up with, one where history was untouchable, but presented with a sense of showmanship. The museum was filled with drama: frozen battles, hunts and representations of historical moments stimulated the imagination much like a waxworks museum on steroids. But these are museums of the past. They may one day be on show themselves within a Museum of Museums, but such a place would no doubt be virtual, to be explored, perhaps more interactively, via another display case of sorts, the computer screen.

In Melbourne, we are losing the last remnant of our once magnificent Museum, its Planetarium. A few moments in the Planetarium, seated in one of its cozy chairs and you were transported into the heavens. No VR goggles, no 3D glasses. An early 1960s Japanese-made projector with multiple lenses, a domed ceiling for a screen and reclining seats

was all it took. But it's going, perhaps to be replaced by something akin to the infamous CAVE, a walk-through virtual environment driven by two powerful ONYX computers, a suite of video projectors and an armory of 3D glasses. Sounds great doesn't it!

Visitors to the launch of the Ars Electronica Centre, Austria's Museum of the Future, first saw the CAVE in September 1996. Ars Electronica is host not only to the CAVE, but is a screen-based display and interactive environment of research and inquiry. The Museum has grown out of the spectacle into an "intelligent environment".



Manuel Schilcher, VVV—A Journey as an Exile, Prix Ars Electronica, website category, 1996

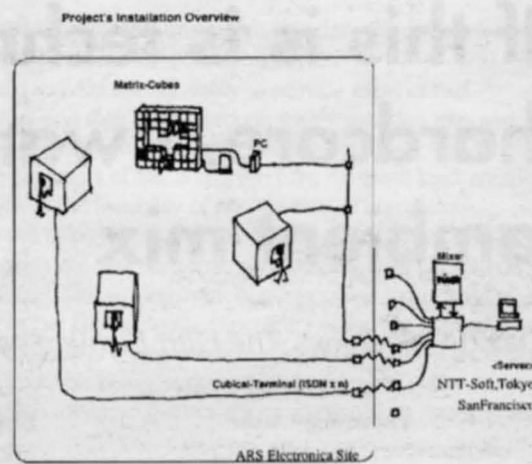
Ars Electronica describes itself as a "knowledge machine" with a mission to help visitors attain information "fitness". A kind of mental gymnasium where science, art and business are seen to be working together in an "interdisciplinary interface between technology, culture and society". More a museum of concepts, ideas and the commercial development of them. In fact, changing the notion of museum as historical archive to an open laboratory.

Keeping its foot literally in the new media door, Ars Electronica has founded and continues to host international forums from which it draws its conceptual framework. This year, from September 8–13, Ars Electronica mediates its annual festival and symposium. This year's theme, titled "Fleshfactor: Informationsmaschine Mensch", is the *Mensch*, the human being. Festival Directors Gerfried Stocker and Christine Schöpf are creating an investigative environment around their short, but potent, manifesto for Fleshfactor:

In light of the latest findings, developments and achievements in the fields of genetic engineering, neuro-science and networked intelligence, the conceptual complex now under investigation will include the status of the individual in networked artificial systems, the human body as the ultimate original, and the strategies for orientation and inter-relation of the diametric opposites, man and machine, in the reciprocal, necessary processes of adaption and assimilation.

Participants in *Fleshfactor* will include Donna Haraway, Neal Stephenson, Steve Mann and Stelarc. The net version of the symposium has been active for several months, consolidating the key issues and subject matter that will be explored throughout the duration of the festival.

Each year, in collaboration with the Upper Austrian Studio of Austrian Radio, Ars Electronica invites artists



Masaki Fujihata, Global Interior Project, Prix Ars Electronica, interactive category, 1996

the world over to contribute new works to the Prix Ars Electronica. This year, four out of the 900 entries won a total of \$135,000.

Many of us hold Ars Electronica in great esteem. It is a place where innovation, the edge of new media arts, has both a home and centre for research and discourse. That it is, but on the ground, it's also a business and a very young communicator. It has created expectations of itself through its manifesto, its vision—much of which it is still learning to accommodate, let alone live up to. That said, Ars Electronica is most certainly of the 'brave new world'. It displays both courage and a commitment to experimentation that we have yet to see in any equivalent institution in Australia. We have Scienceworks and its successful Cyberzone exhibit, but it is a long way from the technology and cultural incubator that is Ars Electronica.

Ars Electronica Centre,
<http://www.aec.at/>

Ars Electronica Festival,
<http://www.aec.at/fleshfactor/>

Prix Ars Electronica, <http://prixars.orf.at/>

Review

Animated highlights

John McConchie on the New Adelaide Film Awards

The problems of compiling short films into festivals and/or anthologised events may not be legendary, but they should be. Clare Stewart—no stranger to the insoluble puzzle box enigmas of curation which, in the short film arena, pose conundrums on a scale faced by characters in Greek tragedy—looked at issues dogging St Kilda in *RealTime 19*. I've addressed such issues before, although my own experience tends to side with the besieged artistic director lumbered with a thankless job. Should I say that New Adelaide Films is simply unencumbered by such issues? Well, it is. Simply a survey of the last 12 months of production with a prize system tacked on, competency seems to be the only entry requirement and screenings have all the frivolity generated by cast, crew, friends and family in attendance. Entrants are generally young, first-timers welcome. Apart from a handful of serious players the whole exercise reeks of unresolved adolescence indulging in serial killers and gangsters, rather than genuine teen spirit.

The exceptions stand out. Rob de Kok's *Two Minutes with Tegan* couldn't be charged with false advertising. It is precise in capturing the puerile inanity of adolescence wasting away in classrooms, using a single shot at that. It is also the best example of a number of one joke wonders that dominated the narrative films. Tegan herself is sublime: gorgeous and very silly, all in one line. Adrian Francis captured a perfect

adolescent moment in an old man recalling a teen sexual encounter with another boy in *Afternoons*. It's simple, unflinching and quite beautiful. Rob Simpson's *Who* shows a flair for narrative by remodelling a hoary cliché—a man, his wife and her lover. A couple of deft twists pushed a familiar scenario out of kilter, the lover out the window and the cuckold to his aid. Heidi Bone's undisguised amateur animated renderings for *Mantis* where "boy meets girl eats boy" is also succinct, while Heather Croall's *Herds of Cows*, the prize-winning documentary about Volvo drivers, has gone on to national notoriety. Her approach, like most listed above, is an object lesson in engaging more jaded viewers like myself. In competition with two other docs—Jure Turcinov's earnest oral history of a member of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, *Boys with a Habit*, and Stephen Webb's irrelevant look at body piercing, *Ouch...That Hurt*, try—Croall's film avoids trying to land a supposedly outrageous topic by dressing it in sincerity. Volvo drivers are clearly more perverse than cross-dressers and penile implantees. Croall knows it and knows how to show it. I believe Volvo has complained.

The heavy hitters in the event included productions funded through the SA Film Corporation and a couple of independently funded works from tertiary graduates. Alex Frayne's satiric take on

contemporary art criticism just misses the mark. *The Art of Tabloid* indicates that Frayne knows his topic and has expertise in a sophisticated film grammar. But the narrative itself doesn't resonate, it can't find the means to shock the subject's monster into life. But Frayne's in good company while other films struggle for the right tropes to plumb the depths of their ideas. Nicola Mills' *A Good Game* recommends becoming a whiz at pool to provoke shameful envy in the boyfriend who dumps you. Mills is earnest in promoting self-respect for young women, and outlines her heroine's recovery like a twelve step program with condom mutilation as stage three. Her target audience, well versed in Spice Girl bravado and Rikki Lake morality plays, would need to see a hell of an eight ball game to get fired up here. James Kalisch endorses married couples taking time out from the suburban homestead in *The Last Weekend of the Month* for a bit more cross-dressing at the local gay bar and cruising the local beat, a mini Mardi-gras with family values. It is curiously devoid of any carnivalesque sensibility, perhaps because the film can't negotiate between the sheer normality of people seeking diversity in their lives and the lure of the forbidden. The film hinges on a pact between husband and wife to indulge their otherwise unfulfilled requirements, yet lacks a sense of transgression to make sense of their arrangement.

The animations on offer provided highlights. Matt Innes' *Phreakin'* took best experimental with a live stop-frame job that libidinally melds hen-pecked husband, mechanical dog and a spot of spanking. It's wicked rather than dark or disturbing, as is Most Outstanding Film winner, *Heartbreak Motel*. Greg Holfeld's classically inspired cell animation shows a flair for cartoon caricature and black humour in a tale about a motel for suicides. Talk about the ultimate checkout. Holfeld plays it safe, drawing more on classic Warner Bros routines—you know, explosives and falling anvils—than the cannibalistic darkness which characterises previous output from Adelaide. It falls to Imogen Thomas to distil that touch of trauma to *Departure*, winner of Best Narrative. Thomas likes an oblique approach to narrative, which she understands well enough to make her own departures work. These are solid efforts, and will no doubt be seen interstate or, judging by past local efforts, overseas.

New Adelaide Films. Awards: Most Outstanding Film, Best Animation: Greg Holfeld, *Heartbreak Motel*; Best Narrative Drama: Imogen Thomas, *Departure*; Best Documentary: Heather Croall, *Herds of Cows*; Best Experimental: Matt Innes, *Phreakin'*; Encouragement Awards: Darrellyn Gunzberg, *A Short Film About Snoring and Shane Fulwood*, *Dead of Night*. Mercury Cinema, July 9-10

Review

If this is is techno-hardcore, I want the ambient mix

David Cox enjoys *The Fifth Element*, with reservations

Layer upon layer

Luc Besson's *The Fifth Element* seems to be made on location. The French call it 'Future Prox'—near future. It's a place very much a part of the popular French imagination, illustrated by the country's passion for comics such as *Rank Xerox* and Mobius' legendary *Metal Hurlant* (Heavy Metal) magazine. Mobius' style, much referred to in the work of Ridley Scott (*Alien*, *Blade Runner*) is more often than not toned down in its baroque complexity—countless layers of elevated streets to cities, unfathomable scale of buildings and technology, multi-layered cities teeming with people like ants.

Not so in *The Fifth Element*. Digital effects have enabled the producers to pull out all the stops in this unbelievably dense film which investigates the themes of good versus evil and a battle of cosmic proportions for possession of four stones representing the elements—fire, earth, water and wind. The fifth element turns out to be life, represented by the film's central 'La Femme Nikita' style cyberbabe. The film has its tongue placed firmly in its cheek, which is a blessing because playing this film straight would never have worked. In parts, the camp appears a bit forced and is in the same league as *Batman Returns*—aggressive, sudden, right in yer face and digitally enhanced. Having the usually superb Gary Oldman do a fake Southern drawl was definitely a bad move.



The Fifth Element

Mixmaster flash

What I enjoy most about the film is its design sensibility. There is a very Eurocentric aesthetic of joyful and meticulous embrace of old and new—that particularly late-20th century postmodern design feel first investigated in *Max Headroom—20 minutes into the Future* (one of William Gibson's favourite films) and *Blade Runner*. It's the idea of deliberately confusing historical periods and making different design principles forcefully, madly coexist. For instance, in 1982 the *Blade Runner* look was chic deco/modernist 1940s. *The Fifth Element* looks and sounds like New York. The film's audio department has carefully perfected the eerie sound of NYPD cop car sirens reverberating off buildings—a kind of ubiquitous chirping throughout the city. Digital sound playback systems position sound in 3D cinema 'real estate' to reproduce the sonic ambience of contemporary, familiar places, like NYC 1997.

Virtuous reality

Computers enable filmmakers to visually create anything imaginable.

Effects such as natural lighting, texture mapping and 3D design enable anything at all to be made and animated. Cities are absolutely no problem. They appear as big blocks covered with fine detail. Cars can be made to float and fly—in fact, it is probably easier to show a car flying in a computer than it is to show it convincingly rolling along the ground. And *The Fifth Element* immerses us—drowns us—in a city which has sped up to a rate which baffles us as much as 1990s New York would baffle our great grandparents. Camera moves can be mimicked with breathtaking accuracy, and the camera motion of real cameras filming real events can be used to guide virtual cameras in exactly the same way.

Digital cinema is rapidly becoming a commonplace thing. The beachhead digital effects 'Siliwood' (Silicon Valley meets Hollywood) films like *Terminator 2*, *Jurassic Park*, *True Lies* etc, have laid the ground for films like *The Fifth Element*, which draw fully on the technical and aesthetic precedents of earlier cyberpunk cinema as cultural reference points. *Blade Runner* is definitely the cultural hub around which this film swings.

Stop shooting, I'm getting into this!

I wished the film had stopped being a chase movie long enough to ponder its fascinating world; sometimes the ride should stop so one can enjoy the

view. Having set the scene, the film forces the viewer to speed through it (I'd be interested to know if the script changed much during the production and what role storyboards played). If *The Fifth Element* is techno hardcore, I want the ambient mix. But check it out And be sure to laugh at its often very stupid jokes in order to better enjoy the spectacle of a future which is all too familiar: our very own postmodern accelerated full-on techno-hardcore urban digital speedfreak Xstatic western capitalist media-driven cybercity of right here, right now.

The Fifth Element, directed by Luc Besson, art direction by Mobius, Columbia Pictures 1997, released nationally.

David Cox is a digital media artist and filmmaker based in Melbourne. e-mail: paradox@toysatellite.com.au

Review

The Inside of Houses Bronwyn Coupe Interactive CD-ROM Venue: e-media, Melbourne

e-media, a new gallery space dedicated to the display of computer-based art, kicked off in June with the presentation of Bronwyn Coupe's interactive CD-ROM *The Inside of Houses*. A thoughtful and whimsical work, *The Inside of Houses* offers the user a guided



Bronwyn Coupe, *The Inside of Houses*

tour through the memories of the author's family. Each family member was asked to contribute their recollection of the floor-plan of a house inhabited by the family years before. The user is invited to navigate their way through each floor-plan, drawing out hidden sounds and video footage in the process. The vast difference in the floor plans produced by each member—and the sounds and images they invoke—is then used as a device to prompt the user into contemplating the way in which, to use

Coupe's words, "notions of size, distance, direction and connection are influenced by each person's personal mythology".

The work cleverly draws attention to both the computer's status as a memory machine and its ability to archive and cross-reference. It does claim to allow the audience their chance to add to the work with drawings and stories about a place they have lived in, but I wasn't able to get it to do this. That aside, *The Inside of Houses* runs well and provides the user with an enjoyable experience.

An initiative of the Centre for Contemporary Photography and Experimenta, e-media is a welcome addition to the electronic art scene. Look out for future programs featuring Sally Pryor's *Postcard from Tunis* and Megan Heywood's *I am a Singer*.

Lisa Gye

e-media is open Wednesday to Friday 11-5 and Saturday 2-5 at the Centre for Contemporary Photography, 205 Johnston Street, Fitzroy 3065

Newsreel

WA's First Digital Arts Studio

The Imago/Film and Television Institute Digital Arts Studio in Fremantle is now officially open, serving to ensure that Western Australia is competitive in multimedia and new media artistic and industrial practice.

Monthly seminars and training courses will be run at the Studio, equipping digital practitioners with the skills they need to develop and master the new technology for use in film and video, internet and world wide web content, and other screen culture applications. The Digital Arts Studio not only offers state-of-the-art equipment and facilities but also an environment in which artists can share knowledge and ideas. From computer beginners to experienced practitioners, the studio will accommodate anyone who is interested in multimedia for creative expression.

For more information call Rick Mason on Tel 08 9235 6535 or e-mail: mason@imago.com.au.

Copyright for Visual Artists

Introduction to copyright and contracts for multimedia & electronic delivery seminars for people working in the visual arts including: sculptors, painters, craft workers, photographers, graphic designers. Sydney: August 13, Media & Entertainment Arts Alliance, 245 Chalmers Street Redfern. Brisbane: September 11, Metro Arts, 109 Edward Street, Brisbane.

For more information call The Australian Copyright Council Tel 02 9318 1788; e-mail: cpright@copyright.org.au; www: http://www.copyright.org.au

<Stuff Art>

The Australian Film Commission has announced a new initiative to fund multimedia projects for an online interactive showcase of new digital media arts from around Australia. The initiative will provide an exhibition outlet for interactive online media arts and foster the creation of new works.

Applications are sought from new media artists who are up to the challenge of creating great projects which work on the web. Works must be smaller than 1.4 Megabytes, be non-linear, and must not use audio, video or other forms of real time data streaming. The project deadline is March 18 1998.

For an entry form contact the AFC. Sydney: Tel 02 9321 6444, e-mail: mmminfo@afc.gov.au; Melbourne: Tel 03 9279 3400, e-mail: afcmelb@mpx.com.au.

New Media Distribution Consultancy

The Australian Film Commission is due to publish a report aimed at finding strategies for the distribution of new media works. *Marketing, Distribution and Exhibition of Interactive Media* will be published in August, and will be authored by Rachel Dixon. For more information contact Kate Ingham, Industry and Cultural Development Branch, AFC, Tel 02 932 6444; e-mail: icd@afc.gov.au.

Screen Based Digital Exhibition Directory

The Australian Network for Art and Technology, in collaboration with Sydney Intermedia Network and the Media Resource Centre, Adelaide, is currently developing a website directory dedicated to the presentation of Australian screen-based art on the web. The site will function as a database directory with links to web sites. For further information contact ANAT, Tel 08 8231 9037; e-mail: anat@camtech.net.au

The Amnesty International Bombard Short Film Festival

The Bombard Short Film Festival is an opportunity for short filmmakers in Queensland to exhibit their work and explore the concept of human rights. The production must be no longer than 15 minutes and must have some relevance to the idea of the need for human rights. Entries are eligible for every genre—from drama or doco to digital work—and will be screened on December 8 & 9. For further information please call Amnesty International in Brisbane, Tel 07 3222 0221

New Media Laboratories: Production and Studio Equipment Support

The Australian Film Commission has purchased 14 high-end multimedia production computers from Apple for allocation within screen resource organisations around Australia. The computers have been supplied for artists' use at: Perth, Film and Television Institute; Adelaide, the Media Resource Centre; Sydney, Metro Television; Melbourne, Open Channel; Brisbane, State of the Art.

The AFC has also provided digital video projectors to the above organisations as well as Sydney Intermedia Network and Experimenta Media Arts in Melbourne.

Changing narratives, transforming worlds

Annemarie Lopez talks to Stephen Muecke, author of *No Road (bitumen all the way)* about writing and teaching

I would ask if you are actually interested in being a writer or if you want to write. Is it the image of the self as writer that interests you or do you love language?

This is the question that author and creative writing teacher Stephen Muecke asks intending writers for his course at Sydney's University of Technology. He is fascinated by language. His words have an ephemeral quality, welling up from a deep underground spring and evaporating in contact with the air. Softly spoken, his voice is carefully modulated; occasionally there is a flicker of irony, a brightening of the eyes, a glimmer of enthusiasm. His manner reminds you of his favourite subject, the aesthetics of disappearance.

Muecke writes in his head, wandering around the house, stacking the dishwasher. He will start thinking about anecdotes and ideas, collecting them, amassing fragments, sentences. When he sits down to write he works quickly but sporadically. He is the author of the recently released *No Road (bitumen all the way)*, a book of interlocking fragmentary essays. It is Tantric text, where the epiphany is constantly postponed. One of the fragments will peter out, another will appear. *No Road* unravels the notion of progress. It has been described as a memoir, but not a memoir, a travelogue, but not a travelogue. Maybe a love story? Ghosts hover about the book, memories, ideas congregate and disperse as mysteriously as ants.

Muecke is intrigued with forms of writing that slip between the cracks of conventional genres. Call it fictocriticism, call it faction. Make up your own term. Words have to be carefully considered, meticulously placed and even then they might only mean something in that sentence, at that moment, before they reinvent themselves without any respect for their creator.

He sees an important connection between his teaching and writing. His background is in cultural theory and linguistics. After the publication of his *Reading the Country* he was employed as a writing teacher at UTS. "At the time I didn't know about fiction writing. I began to learn about fictocriticism and to work with this idea as a way—if I was to teach the course—of responding to the need of being a practicing professional writer." What does it mean in Australia, to be a practicing, professional writer? "Poverty," Muecke offers a little sombrely. "Only the first eleven actually make a living out of it. The lesser mortals have to supplement their writing with other occupations." What distinguishes those lesser mortals in a class of writing students? How do you recognise the ones with the right stuff? "They can already write, they have a facility with the medium straight away, they're not groping for an idea or the form to put it in. They are usually slightly older students who have been writing for a while. Students like Gillian Mears were talented but not yet professional. She needed some encouragement to send off her pieces."

The list of UTS writing graduates is impressive: Gillian Mears, Beth Yahp, George Papallinas, Niki Gemmel, Bernard Cohen, Beth Spencer, Jennifer Smith, Sabrina Achilles, Margie Cronan to name a few. There is also the Doctorate of

Creative Arts in which some very established Australian writers enrol. "Someone like John Scott wanted to deal with theory, to reflect on his own writing process." Muecke does not believe that the work of students from creative writing courses differs greatly from those who have developed outside them. "It accelerates your progress, that's all. You get where you were going to get, faster. It doesn't give you more talent." Doing the course imposes the discipline because it sets deadlines, but Muecke insists, "there isn't a UTS style, it isn't like the old world artistic salons or academies". How do you teach creative writing? "Mostly you exercise editorial judgment, you also orchestrate the judgements of all those in the workshop. That is sometimes the trickiest thing.

"The politics of that can be thorny. You get into a lot of aesthetic and political debates." Justine Etlar, another graduate of UTS, complained of politically

pleasurable for you'. Economy, is also important, rewrite everything three times, throw things out." It's just like Grandma's rule of style: when in doubt, take something off.

Muecke believes that writing has a transformative power. Narratives channel individual desires into more socially placed ones. "We are all Australians, but the stories we tell about ourselves place us in a context." Changing national directions involve changing stories. "The republican movement is about reinventing stories of national orientation and direction. The Keating government's reorientation of the Australian story put Aboriginal issues centre stage. Aboriginal history started to exist. Pauline Hanson, on the other hand, invokes the desire to return to a white utopia that never was." Muecke believes Australia is an exciting place to be in terms of changing narratives. "We are refiguring desires, creating identities, individual stories are coming up against community, political, national stories."

Muecke's personal taste is for anecdotes, fragmentary narratives that tell a story at the same time as carrying out an argument. Joan Didion and the New Journalists

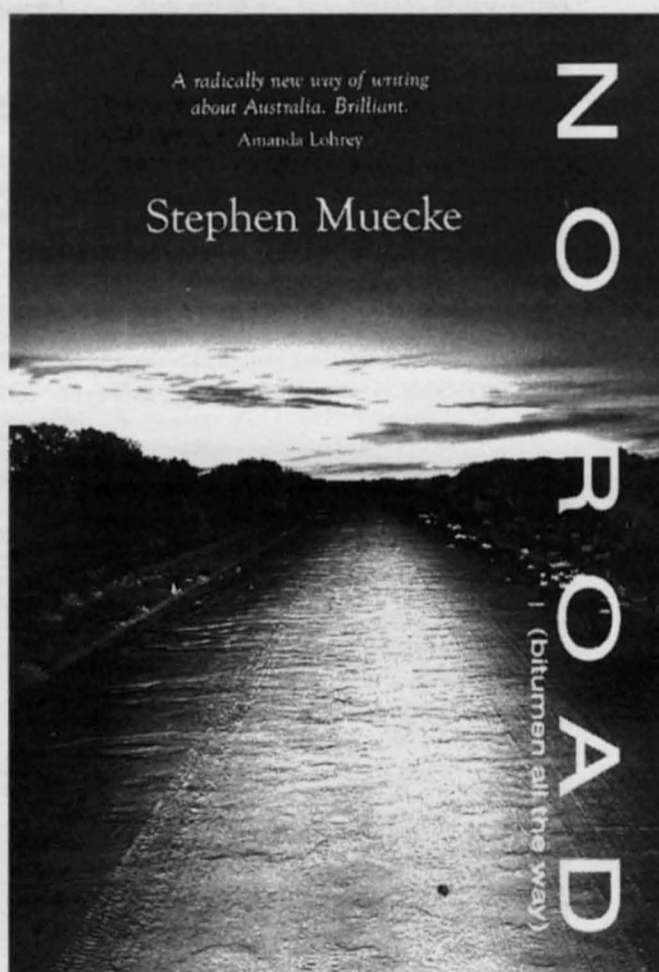
are a source of inspiration, as well as new developments in academic writings such as Avital Ronnel or Jean Baudrillard. New feminist discourses have also influenced him. "They deal with questions of subjectivity and objectivity, the idea that the personal is political."

A concern for the relationship between writing and other media also informs Muecke's teaching and writing. He tries to break down the separation of fiction from popular culture, TV and film. "I am trying to get away from the idea of literature as a realm that deals only with unmediated reality, in the sense of gritty street life. I am interested in the transforming worlds of pop culture—the information revolution as well as what is called 'real life'." His courses hover between rules and invention, depending on the student and the piece of work. "If a student is striving towards the *avant-garde* and failing, we might tell them to pay more attention to their sentence structure. But if it works, we encourage them." Serendipity has played its part in Muecke's own writing. "I didn't choose the form. It emerged from my background and inclination. There were a number of

ideas that I wanted to work through. It was a long process, eight years. Halfway through, the question arose of how to get through it. Culture, politics, human relationships set up complex problems. How to deal with them, not to solve them, that became the question."

New writing courses are proliferating: In NSW, as well as UTS, there's the University of Western Sydney, the University of Wollongong. Writing is being demystified. Competition for good students is intense. Muecke starts to wonder about what happens to them. "Most of them won't be famous novelists. But perhaps there is a development towards a different culture—a culture where we are not simply consumers but interact with literature, media, pop culture, in a productive way. That alone justifies it to me."

Stephen Muecke, No Road (bitumen all the way), Fremantle Arts Centre Press 1997



correct censoring but Muecke doesn't think it is an issue. "You are just as likely to be criticised for a PC as a non-PC piece of writing in the classes. If a piece of writing is well crafted but has a particularly masculinist aesthetic, for example, I might suggest that the market would be *Esquire* or *Playboy*." Muecke tries to point students to their potential readership, to where their writing might be headed.

Students in a UTS writing course are not offered disciplinary studies, they are not served up the literary canon to study and learn from. "There is a scattergun effect of interesting ideas from past to contemporary. There's an emphasis on reading, theorising and, at the same time, putting pen to paper on your own writing. Working with other students is the most stimulating aspect, not so much the lectures. By nature, lectures are not as 'educational', they merely provide a context for discussion. We attempt to foster a spirit of inquiry. A lot of the writers have high hopes. Some succeed out of sheer determination and hard work, others out of luck, by getting into a particular marketing loop."

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Virtual, sonic, filmic and part of the city

Program director Elizabeth Walsh offers Keith Gallasch a sneak preview of Canberra's Festival of Contemporary Arts

Elizabeth Walsh has plans for Canberra. She's the new Program Director for Gorman House's Festival of Contemporary Arts, for the last three years fringe to the now defunct National Festival of Theatre. Elizabeth says, "Now it's time for FOCA to grow up" into a significant festival in its own right. It's not simply a matter of good programming, she argues, but of working out how to engage with Canberra as city, with Canberra institutions as resources and as collaborators, and on the right time scale. Elizabeth is seriously recommending a biennial festival, not only allowing adequate time for good, un-panicky programming, but for fitting into the long term program and management cycles of Canberra institutions and businesses. Implicit in her vision is a recognition of the considerable problems faced by festivals past. Her recommendations are wise and the kind that can result in a festival that is a real part of the city's life and includes significant contributions from Canberra's emerging artists.

Although the festival program won't be announced until September 11, Elizabeth

kindly offers a few details and a broad picture without giving the game away. It's good to see film playing a prominent role with *Reel Art*: 14 sessions over six days featuring international and Australian shorts including Tropfest finalists. A bunch of Hong Kong action shorts is on Elizabeth's special wish list. *Reel Art* builds on the last FOCA, offering Canberrans a rare film bonus, but also innovatively adds *Cinema for Ears*, a program of soundworks with a cinematic feel from Melbourne's Contemporary Music Events, not accompanied by film but experienced in a cinema. There's also a collection of sound works from the likes of Ros Bandt, David Worrall and others being presented in a 'sound dome' over four days. Sound is making its way into festivals internationally, so it's pleasing that FOCA has made a significant commitment to it, both aurally and spatially, and the listenings will be free. Before leaving film, Elizabeth notes that some screenings will be devoted to dancers working in the medium with contributions from Rosalind Crisp and from the Microdance series.

The dance and visual art programs are evidence of Elizabeth's drawing on Canberra institutions, in the case of dance through collaboration with the recently formed Australian Choreographic Centre. Her interest is particularly in emerging choreographers, especially from Canberra, but the festival will also, she hints, present works from Adelaide and Tasmania. In the visual arts, FOCA will display the work of 10 recent Art School graduates in the Canberra Art Space, as well as show site specific works and collaborate with the Contemporary Art Fair. In performance, selected works will flow on from the Cultural Olympiad's Festival of Dreaming along with shows from some Canberran under 25s as well as established groups.

The festival's centre will be the "glamorous, even outrageous" Departure Lounge, a site for relaxation, good eating, talk, improvised electronic music and a FOCA internet base with guest artists contributing on-line. As Elizabeth says in summing up, "This festival will be virtual, sonic, filmic and part of the city". It's a collaborative venture, and she hopes that

the city's institutions, like the Film and Sound Archive, the Australian Centre for Arts and Technology, the Choreographic Centre and others better known, will become partners of the festival. Citing the possibility of a work by artists on the intriguing meanings offered by Canberra's street names, Elizabeth looks forward too to works by artists that will engage, in future festivals, directly with the city. Her vision is a good one, a possible solution to the daunting challenge of mounting and sustaining festivals in the nation's capital. And she's wisely squeezed the festival into a compact, attractive, speedy and celebratory 11 days from weekend to weekend.

Elizabeth Walsh, Program Director of the Festival of Contemporary Arts, based at Gorman House, is a former producer with the Sydney Festival, former director of the Footscray Community Arts Centre, and producer with the Flying Fruit Fly Circus.

Festival of Contemporary Arts, Gorman House, Canberra, October 9-19. Enquiries: Tel 06 249 7377

Sharing the noise, internationally

RT previews Sidetrack's ever-expanding Contemporary Performance Week with guests Gennadi Bogdanov, Lisa Nelson, Joey Ruigrok Van der Werven

It's probably the mix of old hands and newcomers it attracts each year that accounts for the particular buzz of Contemporary Performance Week. The Sidetrack company are convivial hosts and the venue with its intimate theatre with deck and lawns open to Sydney's September weather, is always accommodating. As well as acting as an important training ground, CPW is a gathering point for an expanding community of practitioners, some of whom have been working the territory for ten years or more. With its program of performances from new and experienced practitioners, practical workshops and formal and informal discussion sessions, the event offers a rare opportunity for artists, students and audiences to meet—to share the creative noise.

This is the eighth CPW. Each year, it gets bigger and better and this year's program while not finalised, is already tempting. The workshop program includes some of Australia's foremost performance makers and some notable international guests.

Virtuosic performance poet, vocal artist and member of The Machine for Making Sense, Amanda Stewart offers a writing workshop beginning with short pieces contributed by participants which might take the form of a written script, a tape, a poem, a score or a context for improvisation. Over three days, the workshop will look at the demands of different performance contexts, structuring, editing and scoring performance as well as distribution, new means of writing and conceiving texts and looking at new media possibilities for work.

Melbourne-based vocalist, composer and performer Carolyn Connors, who appears to sing with her whole body, will run a five-day workshop that aims to engender a deeper, experiential relationship with one's own voice. Techniques explored will include focussed listening, warm-ups and

vocal techniques of harmonic and multiphonic singing.

Performer and visual artist Alan Schacher (Gravity Feed) will take participants through a five and a half day workshop in creating a work for a specific site, something he's admirably achieved several times with ice, fire and rooftops at recent CPWs with the help of sound maestro Rik Rue. Participants will examine their initial responses to a site and then work on the development of their ideas in relation to a proposed project or concept. Hopefully not too late into the project, physiotherapist Francine St. George will conduct a three-hour session on performance fitness and injury prevention.

International guests include Gennadi Bogdanov, co-founder of the Moscow School of Theatrical Biomechanics with a ten day workshop for actors, directors and students in the teaching techniques of VS Meyerhold. Gennadi has worked as actor, choreographer, stuntman and director of stage movement and combat for the past 25 years throughout Russia and Europe. His workshop will include preparatory training for fundamental skills, exploration of stage movement, biomechanical studies and exercises in scenic composition.

A major influence on dance development in and beyond the USA, Lisa Nelson is a choreographer, improvisational performer and videographer who has over many years been exploring the role of the senses in relation to performance and movement. Responding spontaneously to single image 'scores', participants will be challenged to break habitual patterns and investigate the movement patterns of the senses. Says Lisa Nelson, "With these scores, we'll play with the desire to compose experience, to make visions visible, to develop a sense of ensemble and to transform dances into theatre".

Joey Ruigrok Van der Werven was for many years the head technician with the celebrated Netherlands based Dogtroep, a

company of inventors from fields as varied as sculpture and architecture. In this five day workshop for performers, theatre technicians, musicians, sculptors and props makers, participants will build contraptions, props, devices, gadgets and instruments and work with ways of integrating them into live performance. Technical people will be encouraged to perform; performers will make their own contraptions.

Workshops are open to artists from all disciplines. Given the calibre of Australian and international artists offering training, it will certainly be a good idea to book in early, to become part of the creative buzz.

Speaking of talk, formal discussion at CPW has always played an important if minor role. It looks set to take on larger significance in 1997. Forums this year will focus on the nexus between tradition and experiment including sessions on training

regimes and critical responses with one forum taking the form of a dinner table conversation between William McClure, Russell Dumas and guests.

The performance program offers new works from a strong line-up of groups and individual artists including: Gravity Feed, Catherine Fargher, Claire Hague, Clare Grant, Amanda Stewart, Martin Del Amo, Mémé Thorne, Rik Rue, Ari Ehrlich, Deborah Leiser, Denis Beaubois, Etcetera, Extra Bimbo, Frumpus, Gay Gaynor, Joel Markham, Kristen Boys, Nikki Bridger and Colleen Cross, Lou Harwood, Mark Rogers, Markus Kuchenbuch and Ed Schots, Rose Ertler, Sue Broadway, Toy Death, Tuula Roppola, Alicia Talbot and Jo Kerrigan.

The full CPW8 program will be released on August 18.

Enquiries: Sidetrack Tel 9560 1255



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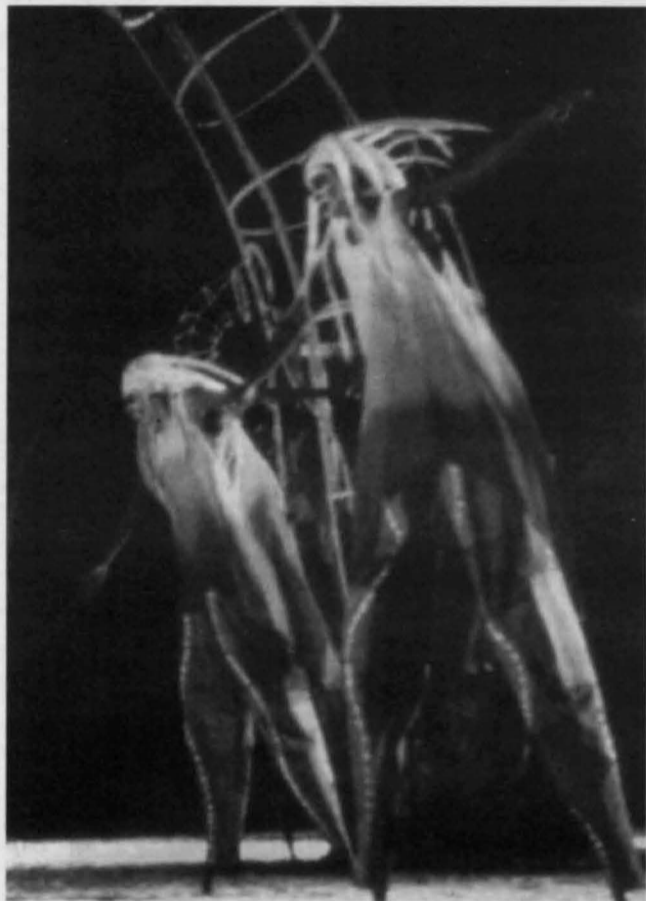
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Timely dreaming

A celebration of community and achievement:
the Festival of the Dreaming

When the Marrugeku Company presented *MIMI: a Kunwinjku Creation Story* in Arnhem Land last year, word has it that even the sky held its breath. This remarkable collaboration between Stalker, the Kunwinjku people of western Arnhem Land and a number of Indigenous artists incorporating stilt walking, acrobatics, dance, light, fire, smoke and Indigenous music is one of a number of contemporary performance works in the Festival of the Dreaming, the first of the Olympic Games Arts Festivals, opening September 14.



Marrugeku Company, *MIMI: a Kunwinjku Creation Story*

In *Wimmin's Business*, Rachel House performs *Nga Pou Wahine* by Briar Grace-Smith with musical composition by Himiona Grace; interdisciplinary artist and a leading figure in Native performing arts in Canada, Margo Kane presents *Moonlodge*; in *More Than Feathers and Beads*, Native American, Murielle Borst performs a tragi-comic routine about the lives of Native women; Deborah Mailman recreates her powerful monologue *The Seven Stages of Grieving*; Leah Purcell, who trained as a boxer and a singer, bolts through the harsh culture of country Queensland in *Box the Pony* based on a real life scenario and written by Scott Rankin; Ningali Lawford is back with her remarkable stand-up performance *Ningali* and Deborah Cheetham manages to interweave a few operatic arias into *White Baptist Abba Fan* accompanied by the Short Black Quartet.

The plays on offer are similarly broad in scope: *Bindenjarreb Pinjarra* is about truth and justice the Australian way. Using satire, improvised performance and a strong physicality this work premiered in Perth and is a collaboration between nyoongahs Kelton Pell and Trevor Parfitt and whitefellas Geoff Kelso and Phil Thomson. Meanwhile, Bradley Byquar, Anthony Gordon and Max Cullen perform *Ngundaleleh godotgai* (*Waiting for Godot*) in the Banjalung language with English surtitles. Julie Janson's historical odyssey of the Aboriginal bushranger Mary Anne Ward, *Black Mary*, which premiered at PACT Youth Theatre, is given an epic new production by Angela Chaplin at Belvoir Street Theatre's vast Carriage Works venue. Noel Tovey blends Elizabethan,

Aboriginal and contemporary theatre styles and an all-Indigenous cast in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with dreaming designs inspired by the works of Bronwyn Bancroft, computer animation by Julie Martin and musical composition by Sarah de Jong. Unashamedly feelgood is Melbourne Workers Theatre collaboration with Brisbane's Kooemba Jdarra on Roger Bennett's *Up The Ladder*, an affectionate evocation of the 1950s sideshow boxing matches. NIDA students will present *Nathanial Storm*, a new musical by

Anthony Crowley, directed by Adam Cook, musical direction by Ian McDonald.

The street theatre program includes Malu Wildu, a new Indigenous music ensemble performing original song based on the Dreaming stories of the Torres Strait and Flinders Ranges. Also on the streets are Tiwi Island Dancers, Janggara Dancers from Dubbo, Koori clowns Oogadee Boogadees, and *Kakadoowabs*, a new work from four Koori artists produced by Tony Strachan of Chrome.

The festival opens on September 14 with a smoking ceremony staged on the site originally known at Tyubow-Gale (Bennelong Point), featuring large numbers of dancers, singers and 30 didjeridu players directed by Stephen Page.

There's a strong focus on dance-music works in the festival. For one night only there's *Edge of the*

Sacred, a collaboration between the Aboriginal and Islander Dance Company choreographed by Raymond Blanco and with Edo de Waart conducting the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in Peter Sculthorpe's *Earth Cry, Kakadu and From Uluru*. And on the same evening an all too rare opportunity to hear the haunting opera *Black River* by Andrew and Julianne Schultz with Maroochy Barambah performing in a semi-staged performance with the Sydney Alpha Ensemble; the performance is conducted by Roland Peelman and directed by John Wregg.

Bangarra Dance Theatre dust off the ochre to explore water worlds in *Fish* choreographed by Stephen Page with music by David Page. Didjeridu player Matthew Doyle, choreographer Aku Kadogo and percussionist Tony Lewis give modern voice to a Creation story in *Wirid-Jiribin: The Lyrebird* performed by Matthew Doyle in the Tharawal language.

International guests include the predominantly Maori and Pacific Island all-male contemporary dance company Black Grace who were first seen and much enjoyed at Dance Week at The Performance Space last year. They return with the premiere of *Fia Ola*. Silamiut, Greenland's only professional theatre performs *Arsarnerit*, a dance-theatre work about the northern lights; and also visiting are the ChangMu Dance Company from Korea. There'll be free performances in First Fleet Park by The Mornington Island Dancers (NT); Doonoch Dancers (NSW south coast); Yawalyu Women of Lajamanu (central desert); Tiromoana (Samoa); Ngati Rangiwewehi (Aotearoa); Naroo (Bwgcorman people, north Queensland) and Papua New Guinea's Performing

Arts Troupe.

Visual arts by Indigenous artists will be showing at all major institutions including an exhibition about Indigenous Australian music and dance at the Powerhouse Museum; the Art Gallery of NSW hosts *Ngawarra* in which artists from Yuendumu create a low-relief sand painting over five days in contact with their peers by satellite; at the Ivan Dougherty Gallery, twelve artists ask, "What is Aboriginal Art?"; At Boomalli, Rea uses mirrors to engage viewers in her interpretations of the Aboriginal body in *Eyell'mmablakpiece*; fourteen Indigenous artists 'live in' and work together at Casula Powerhouse; multimedia artist Destiny Deacon is in-residence for three weeks at The Performance Space Gallery working with local school children on the installation *Inya Dreams* (website <http://www.culture.com.au/scan/tps>). At the Australian Centre for Photography a retrospective of works by the late Kevin Gilbert and photographer Eleanor Williams; at the Hogarth Gallery, Clinton Nain gives three short performances of *I Can't Sleep at Night* to accompany his installation *Pitched Black: Twenty Five Years* celebrating the history of activism among Indigenous peoples.

The *Baramada Rock* concert hosted by Jimmy Little, David Page and Leah Purcell features Yothu Yindhi, Christine Anu, Kulcha, Aim 4 More, Laura Vinson from Canada, Moana and the Moahunters from Aotearoa and special guests Dam Native and Southside of Bombay.

The Paperbark literature program brings together Indigenous writers Herb Wharton, Anita Heiss, Archie Weller, Romaine Moreton and Alexis Wright with international guests Keri Hulme and Briar Grace-Smith in readings, storytelling and forums at the State Library of NSW.

The Pikchas is a week long festival of films screening at the Dendy Cinema, Martin Place and the Museum of Sydney—"no roped off areas here, mate". Highlights include *Mabo—Life of an Island Man* (1997); *The Coolbaroo Club* (1996), *Jedda* (1955); the *Sand to Celluloid* series (1995-96); *Backroads* (1977) and in the bar, a continuous reel of provocative archival footage. As well as the Australian program there are films from Canada, Aotearoa and Germany. *Makem Talk* involves local and guest filmmakers in discussion and debate.

The considerable appeal of the visual arts and film programs aside, for *RealTime* fans of contemporary performance, theatre and dance the festival holds special appeal in the productions of *MIMI*, *Fish*, *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, *Ningali*, *Bidenjarreb Pinjarra*, *Fia Ola*, *Arsarnerit*, *ngundaleh godotgai*, *Black Mary*, *Up the Ladder* and *wimmin's business*.

The Festival of Dreaming is an astonishing celebration of the achievements of contemporary Indigenous artists in theatre, performance, dance, film and the visual arts. Rhoda Roberts' programming achievement is considerable. That she draws extensively on the achievements of recent years, shows just how much great work is available, some of it already nationally and internationally travelled. The addition of new works and international Indigenous guests, makes The Festival of the Dreaming potentially one of those events that festivals so rarely are these days, a genuine celebration rooted in a coherent yet remarkably diverse Indigenous culture staged with a sense of the present, of achievement and with an optimism especially needed at a dark political moment. RT

The Festival of the Dreaming; Artistic Director, Rhoda Roberts, Sydney, September 14-October 6. Booking information: FirstCall 02 9320 9133

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Add-on spirit

Andy Arthurs listens for soul at the Brisbane Biennial Festival of Music

There was much to stimulate in the Brisbane Biennial which was made more poignant by it probably being the last. This doesn't mean it hasn't been a success. Many "down South" have commented to me that with events like the Biennial, Brisbane is looking more interesting these days. You can't quantify that kind of reputation. Hopefully the newly created *Composers' Week* will not be washed away with the rest.

However, I was amused to see the slogan used for the Brisbane Biennial festival was "Expect the Unexpected". Whilst this could be true in the case of some items, it seemed incongruous advertising a concert of Schubert and Brahms quintets under such a banner. It could have read "You get what you get", and that was roughly how it was. The theme was no theme; the festival was no festival. The only real festivity happened at the Solstice Festival at the end of the Biennial. Here was a feeling of celebration, of unity with some spiritual dimension. Perhaps the Biennial should have been part of the Solstice Festival. That at least would have made more sense. It appears to have consciously remained separate from the community and is all the poorer for it.

I experienced 14 performances, mostly at the more experimental end of the spectrum, starting with *Jazz 97*—a whole day devoted to jazz on three concurrent stages within the Travelodge Hotel. This usually cold venue buzzed with music, though I'd never realised before just what a male occupation Australian jazz is, with 10 acts, all groups of males except for two instrumentalists and three vocalists. This was a recurrent theme of the festival. The "jazz" highlight for me:

Trilok Gurtu gave us his soul through an imaginative cross-cultural blend of Western and Indian percussion and drums mixed with digital delays, loops and harmonisers. It highlighted one of the dilemmas of today's music from industrialised countries. It is considered in the main either as art or entertainment, but rarely as a part of the spirit of everyday existence; an add-on to our lives rather than the core.

This predicament was evident in the Australian Art Orchestra, where, apart from the inspirational music and performing of trumpeter Palle Mikkelborg and a work by the percussionist (no names given in the program except for the stars), much of the rest hovered near pastiche and parody, though superbly played. In particular, Paul Grabowsky's *Piaf* skilfully, but self-consciously wove in *La Vie en Rose*. It is often the curse of versatile, gifted musicians to somehow leave themselves out of the music.

The North was a reflective monologue from photographer William Yang, a man with Chinese-Australian heritage, accompanied sensitively by the distinctive music of Colin Offord. Linsey Pollak, like Colin Offord, makes his own instruments. Posing as roadie Kevin, in *Knocking on Kevin's Door*, he demonstrated the full scope of his talents using a range of stage crew items—mike stand, roadie's keys and Gaffa tape—as the basis for many novel instruments. Together with digital loops and MIDI triggers, Pollak teased out some musical universals into an inspiring show.

The Southbank Auditorium was the venue for many of the experimental events. Whilst letting in a fair amount of noise

from traffic outside, the sound within is bright and definite. Visually it is a dreary place with stark concrete being all pervasive. This was the venue for Pipeline, Elision and Perihelion, amongst others. I'm sure I would have warmed more to these performances in a better environment. From Pipeline (led by Simone de Haan on one of three trombones), Raffaello Marcellino's *The Armed Man* and Richard Vella's *Tango Sleaze* and *Let's Swing* worked best, allowing an excellent bunch of mostly young musicians to shine (all males again). Because of the illness of guest soprano Margaret Schindler, Perihelion assembled an alternate program at short notice—special mention should be made of Gerard Brophy's *gloVe*. Enter the new complexity—Elision's *Pacifica*. To me it is a return to a music of the 60s without the gimmicks to help it along. I was left cold, with the exception of Akira Nishimura's *River of Karuna II* which brought some soul into the evening.

Pedro Estevan, at the Queensland Conservatorium Theatre, was a unique jewel of introspective improvisation, moving from solo vibes to bass drum to piano, and ending with a quirky little poem. I left gently elated. Synergy were, as always, virtuosic and entertaining, generous with their distinguished guests Trilok Gurtu, Mike Knock and Palle Mikkelborg, allowing them time and space to develop their enviable musicality.

On the world music scene I saw Telek from Papua New Guinea with David Bridie and other PNG and Australian musicians. Beginning well, the music wandered stylistically leaving me ultimately unsatisfied. Cesaria Evoria, from Cape Verde, on the other hand, gave us a deeply joyous and soulful evening. I would have welcomed more instrumentals from her highly unified band.

Back to The Conservatorium Theatre for *Fire Water Paper* a multimedia memorial to the Vietnam War composed by Elliot Goldenthal in 1995. Stylistically it wandered from Britten's *War Requiem* to Mahler, but was nevertheless an extremely powerful piece. If I remember no other music from this festival I shall certainly not forget this.

The other multimedia piece I attended was *Perks* by composer/virtuoso violinist, Jon Rose. This time we're talking computer interactivity. The performance was a game of badminton with MIDI triggered racquets, with many layers of information. I wanted to like this, but ultimately the cop-out word would have to be "interesting". Linsey Pollack's *Kevin* worked better for me as technologically interactive.

And so back to the *Solstice* event which wrapped up the festival—a massive fire show and drone-based world music segued from music group to music group; interactivity without a computer. Now that's multimedia! And it emphasises the full circle we have turned. Today with the aid of computer technology we are attempting to stitch the separate art forms back together to arrive where we started. Perhaps in this era the idea of a solely music festival is outmoded. Let's hope the revamped Brisbane Festival can be as daring, but hopefully with more soul.

The 4th Brisbane Biennial Festival, May 23-June 9

Andy Arthurs is the new Head of Music at the Academy of the Arts, Queensland University of Technology, after five years at the Queensland Conservatorium as Coordinator of Music Technology and Multimedia. He has recently composed the music for a new work by Dance North.

A capella apotheosis

David Russell at Brisbane Biennale guests Chanticleer's Sydney concert

Beauty is an utterly subjective concept. Even so, one comes across it rarely. However, had you been at the Sydney Town Hall on May 29, you may well have agreed with the many voices during interval and at the end of the performance, talking about beauty and of its presence embodied by the performers on that stage. Chanticleer, the *a cappella* group based in San Francisco, gave its first and only Sydney performance on that evening, preceding their appearances at the final Brisbane Music Biennial.

Many in the audience were well versed in the *a cappella* idiom; a quick look around and one saw many of the Sydney identities in this form: Tony Backhouse (Cafe at the Gates of Salvation), The Song Company, conductors and choristers

from Sydney's major sacred and secular choirs.

Knowledgeable as this audience was, they were in for a surprise, for this performance was of a standard that went beyond what ensembles have presented to Sydney audiences both musically and theatrically. Their visual impact was immediate: 12 tuxedo-ed men confidently addressing their audience. This was a confidence born of and confirmed by vocal control, versatility and commitment present in every piece whether a Palestrina motet, African-American spirituals, Taiwanese folk song or contemporary American compositions.

One of the most exciting components of the group is its use of counter-tenors

who sing both alto and soprano lines enabling a silky blend between the upper and lower voices not found where ensembles use females or boys. This blend reached its apotheosis in the singing of Poulenc's *Quatre petite prières de saint François d'Assise* at the end of the first half and in the complex arrangement of the American folk song *Shannandoh*, sung from memory, in the second half.

It seemed to some that this seamless sound bordered at times on blandness but such a criticism is churlish: a seeking for fault. Could this have been the best *a cappella* performance that Sydney has ever experienced? My answer is an unqualified yes.

It is strange, given the rise of a *cappella* music over the past two decades (and significantly in Sydney), that this ensemble is not well known here. The fact that major arts groups such as Musica Viva are still bound up in the

Euro-centric view and fear taking a 'risk' on 'unknowns' may be one reason (though one wonders what arts bodies such as these are for, if not to bring new and musically challenging groups to the public's attention).

Nevertheless after this concert, Chanticleer's undeserved obscurity will have been rectified thanks to the vision of the Brisbane Biennial and of The Song Company who co-sponsored Chanticleer's Sydney performance.

When they return, and return they will, do not hesitate to buy the tickets, at any price. That is if you place any value on beauty.

Chanticleer, Sydney Town Hall, May 29

David V Russell is a free-lance counter-tenor based in Sydney who has worked as a soloist, ensemble singer and conductor with several major vocal groups and choirs throughout Australia.

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On your toes

RT previews the very first Australian Youth Dance Festival

Casting an eye over the program for the Australian Youth Dance Festival in Darwin in September-October, it looks like the young artists and community dance workers expected from around Australia will be kept on their toes. Early morning warmups in drumming and capoeira begin at 8am followed by discussions on daily themes (Partnerships, Culture & Dance, Collaboration and Initiation, Dance at the Edge and the big one—The Future), sessions beginning with keynote addresses from some notable speakers, opening out to panel discussions with audience participation.

Those not taking part in the discussion can choose from a variety of workshops—teaching methodologies for Primary and Secondary students; workshops with young professional artists; making dance with members of Ludus Dance Company who are visiting from the UK; or take classes in specific aspects of technique (Pilates, contemporary, ballet, tap, capoeira) and then catch video showings.

It's anticipated that relationships established at the festival may produce some collaborative works and this possibility has been factored into the program with some 'free' time allocated after lunch to work together with focus groups or to create pieces with mentors and facilitators. There's the potential for showing works completed or in progress in the afternoon. Got a minute? Access the internet or attend a workshop with Kristy Shaddock, Clare Dyson and Susan Ditter on how to make a web page. Sponsors QANTM Multimedia have provided hardware and training. If you can't get to Darwin, daily proceedings will be accessible on the festival website at <http://sunsite.anu.edu.au/ausdance>.

In the evening, there's a program of performances including works from Expressions Dance Company (Brisbane), Restless Dance Company (Adelaide), Stompin' Youth (Launceston), Boys from the Bush (Albury), Corrugated Iron Youth Theatre and Tagira Aboriginal Arts Academy (Darwin).

The program is still coming together but confirmed festival speakers include: arts administrators Michael FitzGerald (Youth Performing Arts Australia—ASSITEJ International), Danielle Cooper and Jerril Rechter (Youth Performing Arts, Australia Council); artistic directors Mark Gordon (The Choreographic Centre), Genevieve Shaw (Outlet Dance and Outrageous Youth Dance Company) and Sally Chance (Restless Dance Company); dancer-teacher-choreographers Christine Donnelly, Michael Hennessy; and dancer-film-maker Tracie Mitchell. Also on the guest list are a number of dance mentors (Cheryl Stock, Maggi Sietsma).

Ludus Dance Company, a leading British dance company for young people will be special guests of the festival (courtesy of the British Council's newIMAGES program). Based in Lancaster, Ludus tours for 32 weeks a year. The company has a strong reputation for innovative performance and for challenging educational and community programs. Especially interesting for Australian practitioners, is their focus on combinations of cross-cultural dance forms and mixed media (puppets, masks, original music, adventurous costume and stage design).

Much recent youth theatre work in Australia has had strong dance and movement components. It's not surprising that a discrete area called Youth Dance should emerge. As early as 1994, the Australia Council commissioned a report on the area as part of their review of Youth policy. Merrian Styles from the NT office of Ausdance says, "We've organised this event in response to strong demand from our under-25 membership. An advisory panel of young dance practitioners from cities and regions throughout Australia decided that a festival would bring young people together and give us a clearer sense of the directions they want to go".

Australian Youth Dance Festival, Darwin, September 28-October 3. Enquiries: Tel 08 8924 4414 or 06 248 8992

Operation Orfeo returns in performance, conference and workshop

Hotel Pro Forma and Musica Ficta in Sydney and at the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts

Widely regarded as the highlight of Barrie Kosky's 1996 Adelaide Festival, *Operation Orfeo* returns to Australia. The Danish *avant-garde* performance company Hotel Pro Forma will mount this remarkable work in the Concert Hall of the Sydney Opera House on Monday 20 October, immediately followed by a five performance season the same week in the Melbourne State Theatre from Wednesday October 22 to Saturday 25, as part of the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts.

Musica Ficta, the choir in *Operation Orfeo*, will perform concerts conducted by composer Bo Holten in the Barossa Valley, October 16, in Sydney October 18 and in Melbourne on October 26 with a selection of a *cappella* music from Danish musical traditions. As a special tribute to the Danish-Australian connections, Musica Ficta will offer a performance of selected works by Australian composer Percy Grainger, who spent much time in Denmark in the 1920s, and whose arrangements and repertoire were greatly inspired by Danish and other Scandinavian folk melodies.

A conference with Hotel Pro Forma on trends in contemporary music theatre, in collaboration with the Department of Performance Studies (Sydney University) and the Department of Music (University of New South Wales), is being planned for Saturday 18 October.

As part of the conference, preparations are being made for Hotel Pro Forma to offer workshops for performers and theatre artists. The Danish coaches will be: Kirsten Dehlholm (Hotel Pro Forma's artistic director), Jesper Kongshaug (lighting designer), Maja Oravn (scenographer), Bo Holten (conductor and composer), Peter Hanke (conductor and Hotel Pro Forma's managing director), and Claus Lynge (dramaturg). Karsper Holten, eminent Danish artistic director, will come to the conference to present a paper. Watch the press for details.

RT

Ian Reed Foundation Radio Drama

The Ian Reed Foundation was established through a bequest from Ian Reed, an important radio writer in the 1970s, to encourage aspiring and potential writers of radio drama.

In 1997 the Foundation, through ABC Radio, will offer prizes totalling \$15,000 to young writers aged between 15 and 25.

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42 performance works in search of a press quote

Richard James Allen at The Performance Space's Open 97

If nothing else Open 97 was, to use a title from one of the works "a severe insult" to the tranquillity of the audience. Boredom, anger, admiration, laughter, wonder, despair...it was all there. Nobody could have gone into the theatre chamber of The Performance Space (TPS) and emerged unmoved, even if they came out with torn out hair in their hands.

The best works on the program, like *A scene from The Three Sisters* and *Dissonance*, had a true revelatory quality, as if they created a space between theatrical codes and discourses that allowed new emotions and possibilities to resonate. The worst works, whose names I won't highlight, were a total debasement and insult to the form. In between was a sea of theatrical clarity and confusion, performance mediocrity and skill, and occasional moments of wit and genuine talent.

My apologies to those performers whose works I didn't see. For those "42 performance works in search of a press quote":

Comfort Control (TPS corridor): The sound stops me in the corridor for a moment. Have I tripped some alarm, am I being sonically scanned on the gateway of an art trip?

B/M (Transduced): three bodies and their heart beats. We are watching them being alive. Do our hearts synchronise with theirs?

A Severe Insult to the Body: Didn't Chris Ryan do this piece in black high heels a few years ago? Does anybody really wear white underpants from Target? *My Beautiful Laundrette* meets *Butoh Workshop 101* on the set of *Silence of the Lambs*.

The Human Stylus (courtyard): A Chinese woman going in circles on a wheelchair. A transmitter picks up the sound of her foot dragging on the floor. It focuses our minds and yet we fear that she and the flower in her mouth will fall.

Toy Death: Toy guns kill in the dark, toy cars crash in the night. Would the performers had the elegance of their toys.

She: Wednesday Kennedy wishes she were *his* cello. And yet who wouldn't want to be made to sing like that cello? A deep sadness underneath this and the following biting section—abandoned by all but her cancer.

Salome: One of *The Brides of Frankenstein* becomes Lady Macbeth in Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*.

Dissonance: A spiritual tableau. A few more visual elements than we can quite connect held together by the aching sadness of the music. Our eyes are not directed, but our emotions are. It's almost as if the images are distractions for our inquisitive senses, allowing us truly to hear the music. When the piece is over there is loss.

Change of Heart: A flashback to a traumatic episode. A girl in white convulses to the floor. In the end there is rain and Christ-like release. Simple images can still ring true.

A Severe Insult to the Body: (rpt) What excuse is there for this kind of contortion?

Ashfield Millet: A frozen camera steals some moments from two ungainly suburban women gardening. A Chopin waltz has the audience in hysterics. I laugh too, but it's a cruel laughter. It's easy to hit a sitting suburbanite.

Lingua Franca: An exercise in the performance of forgetting. No additions to the sights and sounds of improvised new-form sound performance.

Love: Two men in a sheet, ejaculating red meat.

Western: Would you burn your cowboy with desire? Painful intimacy, grand gestures, mythic themes. A sophisticated theatre of layered media and imagery.

Into Grey: A dialogue of two about-to-be suicides in need of rewriting, recasting and redirecting by Hal Hartley.

Without a Hitch: Strange to see, at TPS the classic story of the Aussie battler emerging several times through Open 97. This incarnation a broadly written and acted almost revue-style comedy. Directed

2B: A relief to witness technical prowess and developed music which, in a similar way to *Dissonance*, was made easier to hear by the opportunity for the eyes to play over Klee-like slide projected figures and the simple pools of warm light for the performers.

Faraway Hills: A beautiful and painful film and live music examination of the endless cycle of human regeneration and destruction.

Twisted: With her gorgeous lyricism and long-limbed acrobatic and aerial skills, Lou Harwood was the absolute star performer of TPS's Open 97.

The Next Evolutionary Step: Witty vignettes of contemporary anxiety that peter out a little anti-dramatically.



Mark Rogers and Tara Jakszewicz in *Western*, directed by Mark Rogers

with a quickness of mind and some nice moments of group dynamics and timing. A standout performance from Emma Beaumont as the truckdriver Dave "on shakers".

Craig and Tony's Open 97 Show: Two men at two tables with two straight faces pack fruit baskets on a musical cue. Then it's time to burn the toast. How funny is the passing of real time?

Once were Warriors: A clumsy but important message to the disorganised and self-serving Left—"We don't have the leisure to fiddle while Rome burns".

Unscheduled Mobile Phone Happening: Answering an unperformed mobile—a true impromptu performance event, hilarious and unexpected.

5 Hundred by 5's: This time the phone isn't ringing. A light performance from a light performer trying to keep her levity and sweetness up in the face of that sinking feeling.

Rum, Bum and Dope: How to murder a potentially interesting story with no technique, no charisma, no structure. Everybody is not a performer just because they can breathe.

Modern Medicine: A quite amusing black-market enema racketeering comedy skit.

Part and Parcel: Spills on the stage and into our emotional dustbins a plate of societal leftovers, the half-used detritus of humanity growing cold. What was it like to be Beckett for the first time?

Gravity Sux!: Evidence that honesty in performance is elusive showed itself in truer performances one night or the other for each performer. Particularly lovely: Ana Maria Dimetrescu's quiet song.

Soak: Choreographically ordinary and imagistically in debt to Ken Russell's *Gothic*, the slide projections onto the bodies (reminiscent of Meryl Tankard's *Nuti*) were nevertheless absolutely stunning.

Leavetaking: Proof that in your 50th year you can still be active, healthy, and maybe even wise. But why the mask at the end?

The Thrilling Three: You've got to be kidding! What is being satirised is far more interesting than the satire. Go home and dig out those old copies of *The Famous Five*.

Sandy: Either terrible "English acting" or a complex, confronting, layered work, questioning what truth is in life and art—the performer as prostitute, prostitute as performer.

I Can be Tall: Light, amusing and entirely predictable audition piece.

The World as Will and Representation: Continued over-emphasis of words and repetitive structure leads to monotony. What exactly are you trying to say and why not just say it?

At Ten to Four My Washing is Finally Finished: Needs serious writing, acting and directing development. The theme of being caught in a time warp is fascinating, but so far much better realised in a *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode where Dr Crusher is caught in an imploding time bubble. Rent the video.

Swap Meet (video): More hopeless Aussie losers dragging their way through a script full of holes and some amusing visual edits towards a fabulous *X Files* finish.

Orpheus: David Williams is a performer of a different calibre from most in Open 97. He takes control of the space with his eyes and voice in a short, punchy piece that seems to owe more to Roland Barthes' surface pleasures than Orpheus' journey into the depths.

Tales of the Guillotine: Seems to have dropped into TPS from another place and time which I guess it has.

Simply Irresistible: Is there any winning the battle against the stereotyping of women in fashion? These two girls dress to the nines in their different sizes and give it a damn good try.

Wobbly: A pleasant acrobatics display that needs to go to the school of Desoxy or Club Swing if it wants to become theatre.

The Sermon of Truth: What does it add to our experience or knowledge to satirise such easy targets? And yet I find myself looking at my own hypocrisies.

Fragile Obsidian: Two dancers in white pulsing towards the audience in front of a semi-abstract film—some lovely moments, but haven't I seen it somewhere before?

A Scene from The Three Sisters: At last a performance work of real maturity, drawing on the best of what has come before and bringing its own particular point of view to the layering of irony and emotion, received form, new form and the construction of form. The fine, but by now predictable subtleties of fourth-wall-Chekhov are cut across by audience-coaxing, singing, in-your-face camp. Suddenly a

woman falls, and then another; they fall and are described falling again and again in oblique theatrical imagism à la Jenny Kemp. Finally: a Nietzschean dialectic of the construction of meaning and the meaning itself as a cynical director wrenches out of a woman a performance of pure pain. Open 97 has seen shuffles towards straight theatre, flourishes of camp, striking images, occasional technical skill, irony everywhere—the overriding trope of being beyond feeling—and some thankfully luscious moments of emotion. *A scene from The Three Sisters* puts them all together with the strange incongruity of real life and the compression of poetry.

Open Season 97, *The Performance Space*, July 9-13; 15-17. All nights reviewed except July 11 & 12

Richard James Allen is Co-Artistic Director of *That Was Fast*, a production company that specialises in cross-media arts invasion of dance, theatre, poetry, film, video, design, music and radio. He is former Co-Artistic Director of *Tasdance*.

Circosis

Shane Rowlands runs hot and cold at the circus

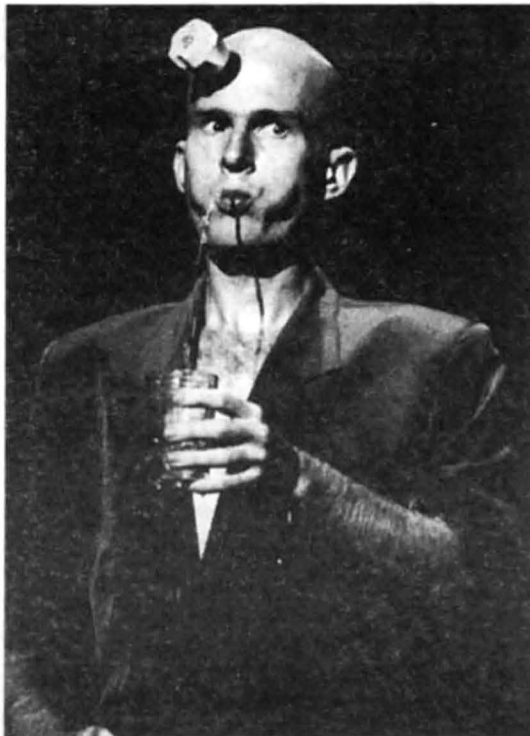
The suffix “-osis” makes a noun of a process or condition, especially in naming diseases and pathological states. *Circosis* was an evening of 16 circus performers in ten acts promising unnerving and edgy circus cabaret. However, the three night season in the Brisbane Fringe Festival functioned more as a showcase for the directions taken by largely Brisbane-based circus performers. Consequently, the acts and overall structure came across as a bit of a stocktake for the purposes of presenting an event for the festival, rather than a rigorous engagement with the more dis-eased possibilities suggested by its banner. This is an example of festival culture providing necessary opportunities for circus theatre often compromising the usually lengthy processes needed to develop an act beyond the presentation of a perfected trick.

The cabaret style and atmosphere was complicated by the physical staging of the event: the intimacy offered by the foyer bar

was diffused by the combination of the Princess Theatre's huge and cavernous stage and the audience's distance from its heights. Thus the audience was privy to a series of dwarfed spectacles: the stage becoming a cabinet, the performers curiosities in a *wunderkammer*. Traditionally, the *wunderkammer* houses a collection of strange and marvellous oddities. In this case, the eccentricity was domesticated by some cutesy, ditsy and clichéd circus personae.

The MC, Matt Wilson, was valiant in attempting to disguise his role as time-filler. Chris Sleight and Antonella Cassella's slapstick adagio routine, while technically impressive, was undermined by its fun-for-all-the-family approach. Tom Greder, as an endearingly naive wood-sprite, performed a manipulation act with an apple, accompanied by Trent Arkley-Smith on cello. Leroy Hart's nicotine addicted clown offered an interesting starting point. Unfortunately, his persona was sacrificed to the rather predictable schlock horror of Dan Mitchell's clowning surgery. Derek Ives' performance of a bucket-wielding maniac was short, sharp and refreshingly dark.

Tightrope walking—often presented as



Anthony Livingstone in *Circosis*

dangerously sexy—became a frumpy flirtation between Eleanor Davies' hayseed on a highwire and the musical double entendre offered by Brett Parker on synthesizer. Space cadet Kareena Oates

launched off with force-field lighting effects and the anthem from *Star Wars* to perform *Close Encounters with Hula Hoops*, one of the few acts to take advantage of the vast stage.

Tony's Imaginary Circus featured a sissy-boy juggling in the wild west and a bodgegy levitation job with fake legs. This notion of circus trick as a hoax (rather than physical feat) was taken to hilarious extremes by Anthony Livingstone, who used a Rubik's Cube as an anal suppository and then proceeded to solve it via a series of stomach contortions and 'bowel movements'. Continuing the theme of insertion—in which the circus body presents itself as orifice rather than an impenetrable surface—the Hoopla Brothers' finale involved a two-high in which the flyer played with a yo-yo attached to his nose-pin insertion, while the bass strummed guitar and sang *All My Loving* à la Johnny Young. Ironically, as most of the *Circosis* acts did not threaten traditional family values, these highly skilled performers started to look like very proficient members of the Young Talent Time Team.

Circosis was staged by Rock 'n' Roll Circus. Shane Rowlands is a writer-performer and poet, writing for live performance, video and the page.

Rifts and reconciliations

Boris Kelly talks with director Don Mamouny about Sidetrack's recent production *Country Love*

BK In *Country Love* the narrative thread stretches from Campagna in the 1950s to Sydney in the 1990s. The metaphor of life as a journey—in this case one of migration—is the formal device used to bind the narrative. With hindsight do you feel that, in dramatic terms, the story suffered as a result of having been devised in the studio as opposed to being built from an extant text?

DM *Country Love* was primarily about reconciliation: the old and the new. It narrates a journey from a pre-modern agrarian world to a postmodern one. These are so different that they can be literally thought of as different worlds. Yet somehow millions of people this century have made that journey. What an extraordinary phenomenon!

Here is a world of earth, of seasons, sweat, superstition, where social roles and life potentials are predetermined at birth and in order to live one must produce. Here is a world of diversity, opportunity, uncertainty, superficiality where the act of production is subordinate to that of consumption. A journey from singularity to multiplicity.

The narrative style of the work is fabulous, the attempt was to get at the incredible absurdity of this journey which is in other ways so commonplace. In this sense *Country Love* was not dramatic, perhaps it was anti-dramatic, certainly in terms of character. The conflict between the people was deliberately muted and distanced so as to emphasise the staging of the 'worlds', the settings of pre- and the postmodern.

The way the story was staged, with its emphasis on sound and visual imagery, was intended to engender a kind of reflective attentiveness in the audience much like the young waitress who we see throughout recollecting Aldo's life. The lyrical atmosphere of the work, which I think was very successful, was a result of the making process. What was ultimately unsatisfying was the lack of completeness at the level of the text. There was a layer of complexity that needed to be there which was under-developed. It's well known that the writer left the project halfway through the making

period. So it's understandable that the text aspect was a less satisfying part of the work.



Adriano Cortese in *Country Love*

superficial inanity that so much human interaction has become today. In terms of character development this is the first work

I have been involved in for a long time where there were characters as such. None of them had any real depth of subjectivity, which was partly intentional and partly to do with the collaboration breakdown in the making period. Ideally the characters of Aldo and the waitress would have been a lot more developed.

BK You have said that *Country Love* is a play about "love, coffee and landscapes". How did you approach the question of landscape in the development of this work and in what ways is the representation of the natural environment relevant to performance, if at all?

DM The nature of nature was a central concern in *Country Love*. In the old world, culture was embedded in 'nature'. The seasons determined the rhythm of life. In the new world, nature is reduced to little more than

an object of consumption. The landscape metaphor operates on a number of strata: physical, cultural, aesthetic. Also the structure of the work as a whole had the feel of landscape painting.

BK How do you react to the comment that contemporary performance has become a generic style? Is it trapped in the discourses of the 80s?

DM This fear of the passé is a bit of a bore really. Contemporary performance is simply a way of describing an attitude to theatre-making. It is certainly not a genre. It's about making new work in ways which

recognise the prevailing and emerging conditions and the possibilities inherent in new technologies which may even include a certain cognisance of theoretical paradigms.

BK The 'pomo' influences which have swept through some quarters of Australian theatre resulted in widespread insecurity amongst writers. Do you think it is time for 'the author' to be exhumed?

DM The author was never properly dead. And in any case authors will continue to be wanted dead or alive. What remains important about this infamous and provocative notion is that it allowed for the recognition of different kinds of authorship and blurred the line between writing and reading. I think it was only those who were most threatened who took it literally. In reality, the theatre has always been written by a number of authors. It's just that some kinds of writing were less valued than others.

BK In some respects the development of work on the floor resembles the choreographic process, yet the results are much less consistent than in dance. Why do you think this is so?

DM I don't know that the results are less consistent than in dance. Certainly, making work is difficult within limited time frames and there is a certain amount of chance involved. We are often at a disadvantage because with a new work we are always having to perform a first draft to a public, which can be excruciatingly painful when you know a work is not quite finished. This is made even more difficult with the demise of ensembles and the pressure of corporatisation. Another difficulty is that the mainstream critics, with a couple of rare exceptions, tend not to be good readers of performance. They are happy for dance works not to be immediately transparent but in other areas, if the work doesn't reflect their favourite theatrical model, forget it. This city alone has produced an extraordinary body of work which has gone largely unnoticed and under-utilised because of the failure of media commentators to give it the discussion it deserves.

Sidetrack, *Country Love*, directed by Don Mamouny, Belvoir St Theatre, June 19-July 13

Seriously and gloriously decadent

Nigel Kellaway and Annette Tesoriero launch The opera Project

We go to opera, we want everything, everything at once—that's licence, it's decadent. Vampirism is desire, it's licence, it's decadent.

Nigel Kellaway

The sensuous totality of opera, the life-consuming desire of the eternal vampire; in The opera Project's The Berlioz: our vampires ourselves, opera and vampirism become mirrors, audience and diva feed each off the other. A new opera company, a new work, a new edge to the expanding popularity of opera. The following statements are from an interview with Nigel Kellaway and excerpts from an opera Project essay about The Berlioz:

NK Opera is one of the last frontiers. It is still uncharted territory, especially in Australia. Contemporary performance has made many inroads into examining the theatrical, but opera has not. Our starting point is not to perform pre-existing opera, but to investigate the operatic, without a living composer, without a set, without narrative-driven music. Most opera is still composer-driven, and then it's director-driven. We are looking at the future of opera with the composer as one of a number of collaborators.

Opera as a concept is culturally determined. It has developed a language of music, libretto and mis en scene as separate, 'closed' texts. Our aim is to 'open' up these traditionally and forcibly 'closed' texts and thereby untangle the fabric that makes up our contemporary notion of opera.

NK No, no, not deconstructive. We're old hands at that. Of course, we will deconstruct, as a matter of course, but not so much the works as the expectations.

Opera, a hybrid of words and music...is morally tainted. Degenerates aren't satisfied with just one artistic medium—they want everything, all at once. they desire opera's ambiguity.

NK We choose vampirism to launch an opera company to make our position absolutely clear.

At its inception opera insisted that the marriage of words and music be a hierarchy

with the text dominating the music. Historically, however, opera has overturned this domination and revealed that words and music are not located as two separate identities but flourish as one within the sensual realm of the listener. The destruction of the supremacy of language makes opera a fit subject for the enthusiasm of sex/gender dissidents. The 19th century critic Count Algarotti describes the musical element of opera as: "...effeminate and disgusting: the music should be the handmaiden to poetry...(but) when the music grows all powerful, words turn about

Before the Wilde trials, vampires were free to languish in overtly homoerotic adoration of their mortal prey. The Wilde trials meant that a certain relaxed affinity between men lost its fluidity. The so-called homosexual was imprisoned in a fixed nature, created as a man alone like Dracula—one hunted and immobilised by the stalwart manliness of normal citizens.

NK This work will explore the historical legacy of opera as 'degenerate' and will draw parallels with the homoerotic history of the vampire.

the dancer, singer, actor and pianist, the body of the audience.

(The work) will build its structure on Hector Berlioz' song cycle Les Nuits D'Ete for mezzo soprano and piano. These are settings for six poems by Theophile Gautier composed in 1834, the epitome of early French romanticism...highly virtuosic songs preoccupied with themes of desire and death, a ravishing, dark work...The 40 minute work will be extended to a full evening for three performers—Annette Tesoriero, Nigel Kellaway and Dean Walsh.



Nigel Kellaway and Dean Walsh in *The Berlioz*

Heidrun Löhr

and recoil upon themselves, a movement repugnant to the natural processes of our speech and passions...Music encourages words to behave like sodomites, overturning the natural sources of pleasure and meaning."

NK Opera is the sung voice and the danced body performing the inexpressible, the dark secrets of the heart.

In Dracula, Bram Stoker created a new vampire, a caricature of Oscar Wilde, whom he despised, a vampire drained of generosity, turned away from friendship. The Wilde trials helped construct an absolute category that isolated the 'homosexual' from 'natural' men and women. Dracula takes definition from a decade shaped by medical experts.

The homoerotic birthright is restored after almost a century of Stoker's homophobic taboos. Anne Rice's vampires are a select and refined club, a fraternity of beauty and death. They do little, but are superb spectators. They are amoral aesthetes, beautifully devoid of social consciousness. For these vampires hedonism is the only reality. Is this the reality of opera? The performing body is 'otherness' in human shape and in witnessing this the audience becomes aware of its own potential elasticity.

NK The primary concern of The opera Project is the 'theatrical' body. These vampires concentrate on the flesh—the voice of the singer and the actor and its relationship with song and text, the body of

NK Who's not to say Nigel's hooked on 19th century opera and its heroines. Yes, it's an obsession. Yes, a purposeful obsession. We're doing a *Tosca* next. Why bother to create a new work about woman as victim when you've already got *Tosca*. *Tosca* also tells us how we construct men on the stage. *The Berlioz* is about men.

Today, the vampire has become a fearsomely androgynous icon: "With its soft flesh barred by hard bone, its red crossed by white, this mouth compels opposites and contrasts into frightening unity, and it asks some disturbing questions, Are we male or female? Do we have penetrators or orifices? And if both, what does that mean? And what about our bodily fluids, the red and the white? What are the relations between blood and semen, milk and blood? The mouth of all vampires, male and female."

Christopher Craft,

"Kiss Me with Those Red lips", 1984

At the end of the 20th century, who are our vampires? To answer this we must define our desires. These desires—as yet unknown and unfulfilled—are necessarily fraught with danger and fear.

The Berlioz: Our Vampires Ourselves, *The opera Project*, performers: Nigel Kellaway, Annette Tesoriero, Dean Walsh; writer: Keith Gallasch; sound designer: Peter Wells; lighting designers: Simon Wise, Nigel Kellaway; The Performance Space, Sydney, Wednesdays to Sundays, September 19-October 5. Bookings: 9319 5091

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Urban projections

Boris Kelly surveys changes at the former Death Defying Theatre with artistic coordinator John Baylis

In a grand gesture of false modesty the greater city of Sydney spreads like an outstretched hand across the ten thousand square kilometres it occupies from Hornsby in the north to Sutherland in the south, Penrith in the west and the great blue Pacific. Beneath the hand, each digit an arterial transport route, lies an archaeology of dreams, schemes, scams and shams each with its own story, its own fifteen minutes. Sydney grew up on a network of bullock tracks and despite the efforts of successive generations of the RTA to improve on bovine logic the bullocks appear to be having the last laugh. This is a city all rush and bubble, all swish and sweat. Stand still for too long in Sydney and someone will try to screw you, one way or the other. It is a city swollen with humanity, money, pollution and hubris; a city with the upbeat of a struck match.

Take a train from Central and travel on the Liverpool line for an hour and you'll hit a place called Casula where the railway station was built to serve the needs of workers at the local power station. These days it's an arts centre. Leave a building vacant in Sydney for more than a week and someone will want to evict the squatters and turn it into an arts centre. But the Casula Powerhouse is an important place for the people of Liverpool not least because it is home to a theatre company that used to be called DDT (Death Defying Theatre). Nowadays it's called Urban Theatre Projects. The new name came with a new artistic coordinator, John Baylis. UTP refuses to play second fiddle to the Big Smoke. Liverpool has smoke of its own and UTP insists it is 'urban' not 'sub urban' in its orientation. The western heartland of UTP is characterised by a high degree of cultural diversity and the company seeks to draw extensively on the richness of that resource in the making of cross-cultural performance projects. UTP is a stripped down outfit whose brief is to do as its name suggests.

John Baylis's artistic background is primarily in contemporary performance, both as creator and performer. He was one of the founders of the Sydney Front (1986-1993) and created with them such works as *The Pornography of Performance*, *Don Juan* and *First and Last Warning*. He organised and participated in the company's two European tours. He has also worked as a freelance creator/dramaturg with companies such as Sidetrack (*Idol*, *Heaven*), Entr'acte (*Ostraka*), Calculated Risks Opera (*Tales of Love*) and others. He had a long association with The Performance Space, being one of its founding artistic coordinators in the early 80s, and its chair in the early 90s. He has also worked with the One Extra Company, Sydney University's Centre for Performance Studies, and most recently at the Australia Council's Theatre Fund as senior theatre program officer.

JB My work to date has been very much associated with experimentation with theatre forms. I think many people, including artists, have come to see this type of work as being at the opposite extreme to community-based work with its emphasis on accessibility and community ownership.

Baylis is the kind of erudite artist who cites Goethe and invokes Baudelaire as readily as an SP bookie quotes the odds. Understandably, he is nervous about his new job at the end of the rail line. But he is also tremendously excited by the prospect of taking up a company with the vintage of UTP, thoroughly grounded in community practice and, in recent years, under the guidance of the formidable troika of Fiona Winning, Gail Kelly and Monica Barone, who have acted as artistic counsel. Administrator Harley Stumm stays on with the company and will provide Baylis with more than just a road map in his coming to terms with Liverpool.



Ian Callen and Terese Casu in *Crop Circles*, Urban Theatre Projects, July-August 1997

Corrie Anconé

JB It was the connection with particular communities that attracted me to Urban Theatre Projects. The freedom to experiment without constraints can become a trap. Working with a community provides a meaningful and responsible context for creation. This doesn't mean the work can be any less innovative. Artists working with communities must still be ready to question their own practice and try continually to press beyond the easy solution, the cliché. And speaking of clichés, it's often thought that innovation and experimentation in artistic practice means that the work must be obscure, difficult or very very serious. For me, it means that the work is surprising, exhilarating and pleasurable.

Speed and Nagle are two parallel streets very close to Liverpool's CBD. The buildings are mostly four-storey residential flats built in the 60s and early 70s, and the streets have a reputation locally as a 'problem' area: drugs, street violence, etc. Speed Street is home to, among others, members of the Kurdish community, refugees from the conflicts in northern Iraq triggered by the Gulf War. Events half-remembered from the evening news some years ago have resulted in Kurdish families living in Liverpool. And of course they are not alone. Australia in general, and western Sydney in particular, has many residents who have fled disruptions in their birthplaces.

For its 1998 program UTP will develop a site-specific work in Speed Street. The work will combine professional performers and local community participants in an investigation of the relationship between the big picture of international geopolitics as represented by the electronic media and the very local manifestation in a place like Speed Street. Baylis will direct the traffic on this one with Derek Kreckler as audio designer, writer Rose Nakad and designer Martha

Jabour. The program also includes *Fa'afafine* which resulted from a 1996 project with the local Polynesian and Maori communities. *Fa'afafine* means literally "like a woman", and is the Samoan term for males who take on the female role, a cultural practice throughout much of Polynesia. No surprise to find Nigel Kellaway directing with Leo Tanoi acting as cultural adviser and John Baylis as dramaturg. *The Great Australian Dream* is a project which will be developed by the company in conjunction with Gadigal Information Service and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community of western Sydney. It will explore some of the sad and savage ironies of the Dream.

These projects are evidence of the UTP trajectory. Sharp, relevant work drawn

from the life experience of Sydney's west and drawing on the collaborative skills of artists with a penchant for pushing the envelope. For John Baylis the move to UTP is part of a general realignment of his approach to performance making. One which is, perhaps, suggestive of an increasing synergy between the discourses and practice of community theatre and contemporary performance.

JB While it may be true that community theatre practice has had to reassess itself, and that it has become more open to formal experimentation, I think contemporary performance is due for a similar reassessment. I have certainly felt this in my own work. In the last year of the Sydney Front's life (1993) I was increasingly dissatisfied with the self-imposed limitations we were working within. Phrases like 'interrogation of form' and 'deconstruction of the performer-spectator relationship' were beginning to make me feel nauseous. Don't get me wrong: I am immensely proud of the Sydney Front's work. It represents the best work I've done, and perhaps the best I'll ever do. I felt strongly however that the company's project had been realised, and only repetition remained. And I was sensing a similar exhaustion in other work, just as the phrase 'contemporary performance' was gaining a wider circulation. Was I witnessing the end of an investigation and the birth of a style? Whatever, I knew I needed to jump sideways. I wanted my artistic work to be more necessary, more embedded in a larger context.

The American writer and historian Richard Sennett makes a convincing case for loosening the urban planner's grip on the development of cities. He argues that the obsession with planning and order robs a place of its anarchic spirit and is, in fact, a form of puritanism intent on utopian notions of the homogeneous 'community'. For Sennett the true grit of a city is in the push and shove which comes from all that humanity having to struggle to survive, to be forced by urgent circumstance to find inventive solutions to sticky problems. A city, of all places, should be a place where citizens are not only active but rule. UTP is the kind of theatre company which can make a meaningful contribution to the growing up of Sydney. It has the potential to become an emblem for the place because it is taking the task of theatre-making into the homes, the streets, the clubs and businesses of its heartland. The aim is not to produce feel-good, multicultural propaganda for the benefit of glossy government publications. As Harley Stumm puts it: "Cultural diversity is not the subject of a show or a street parade but a critical and practical context for making performance, whether it's abstract and metaphysical or from the heart and in your face".

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In the body of the work

Zsuzsanna Soboslay and Tim Moore in rehearsal for the premiere of the movement opera *Awakenings* talk to Keith Gallasch

Well into rehearsal, I ask the conceiver-performer of *Awakenings*, Zsuzsanna Soboslay, is it the envisaged work that is emerging? She explains that the structure is becoming more overt, "a good thing, the outward shape, but I'm waiting for the interior to re-emerge, the inflections in the body that the work began with. They're coming". This waiting happens to most of us to some degree mid-rehearsal process, but food-poisoning in Istanbul over two months ago on the way to LIFT97 in

actions—parts of it slide up and down, it revolves, has at least two levels to work on physically and is both reflective and transparent". The initial inspiration came from a workshop two years ago at the Centre for Performance Studies at Sydney University and from Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening*, the German classic of thwarted and brutalised child-innocence which has inspired Zsuzsanna's *Awakenings*. This is a set then that is expressionist in impulse, a device of

sense of window and horizon", that the capacity of the set to revolve has enhanced the relationship between the performers; the way a door turns helps realise the transformation in one character oscillating between mother and daughter roles, amplifying swings between innocence and knowledge, showing what gets hidden, what disappears.

Complete as the set is in construction and in its life in rehearsal with the performers, it awaits the transformations

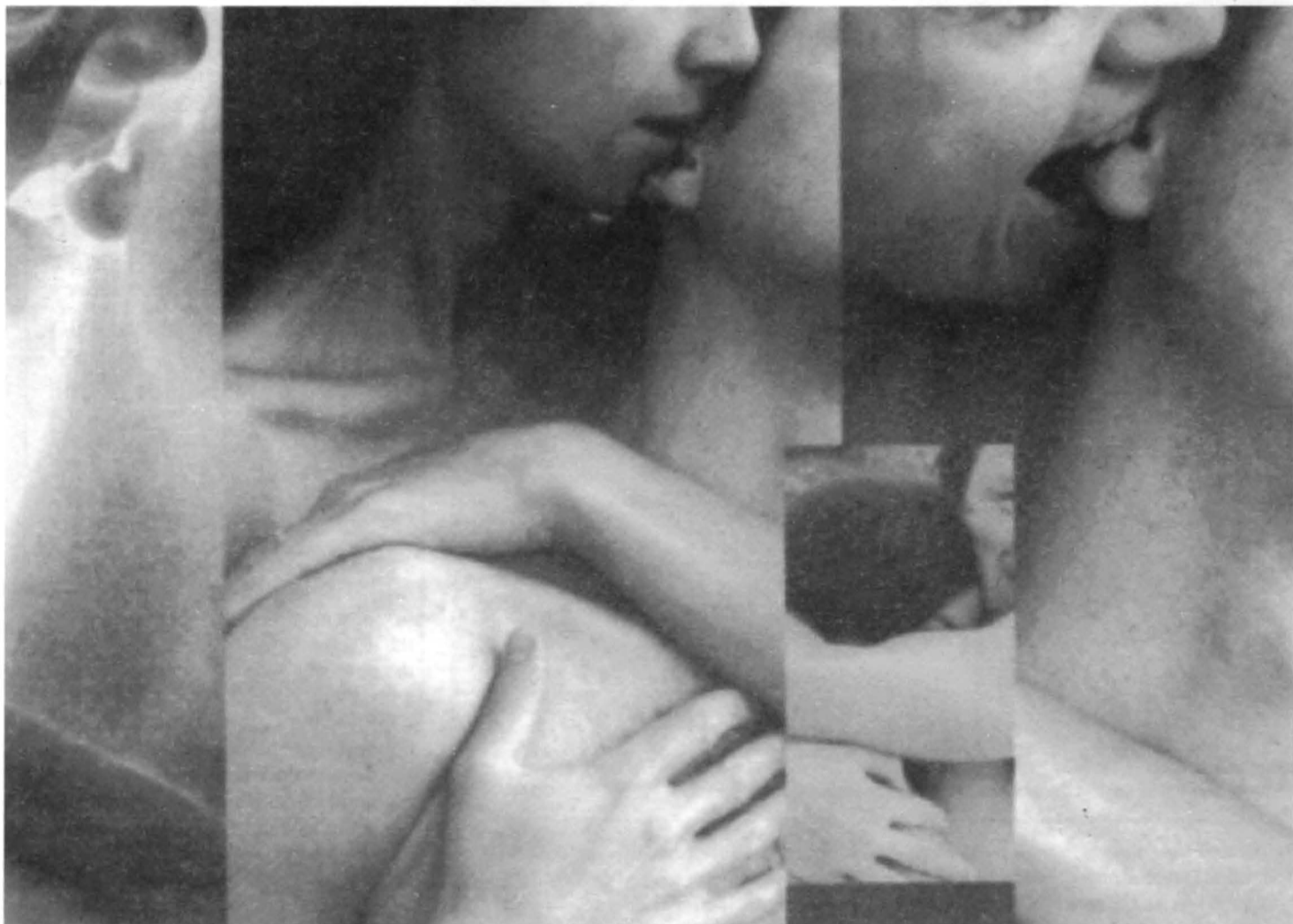
awe. The video imagery will take them further in and back, but with its own dynamic and in relation to what's happening live: "A soft-shoe dance on video", says Zsuzsanna, "doesn't yearn, but the accompanying song does". The challenge of the meeting of live and recorded actions and of creating a soft surface to hold projected images clearly preoccupy the thoughts of *Awakenings*'s creators at this stage of the work's development.

As does the music. "Sound", Zsuzsanna retorts. "We might have started with Schoenberg, but save a brief quotation, his music is not in the show. We don't have big slabs of music from the late 19th century, early 20th (*Spring Awakening* was published in 1892). It's in our bodies, the music is ours, in our movement. We are aware of sources of sound—the pulse of nursery rhymes, marches, beer hall songs; these melodies can block out other, earlier melodies."

The sound score for *Awakenings* is being created by sound artist Rod Berry and is about to enter rehearsal with its own vocabulary for the performers and the set to work and live with. It's a process in which "movement can evolve into sound, sound into movement". "Rod will create sounds around the silences. He won't fill the space. He'll make the blackboard and different parts of the set speak. Sound helps one travel in time, shifts you historically, for example as a performer transforms from youth to crone; sound can demonstrate time as contiguous—the past and present in one moment."

This moment, for Zsuzsanna and Tim, is one such combination of past—the inspiration of Wedekind, the seminal workshop of some two years ago, the recent creation of the set—and present—living in the set, working with projected images and sound, the interior of the work re-emerging and, doubtless, transforming. *Awakenings* is about change: "Change comes from vulnerability. Change comes from desire. Can a culture change when it holds fiercely to its identity and power?"

Awakenings, conceived, written and performed by Zsuzsanna Soboslay, with Benjamin Howes; sound, Rod Berry; images, Peter Oldham, Alan Dorin; set, Tim Moore; lighting, Peter Gossner. The Performance Space, Sydney, August 14-24. Bookings: 9319 5091 or First Call 9320 9000



Zsuzsanna Soboslay and Benjamin Howes, *Awakenings*

Tim Moore

London, has left her asking "Is this my body?" and querying judgments made in response to it in rehearsal. She seems confident nonetheless that the body, and the vision of the show with it, is there.

I ask designer Tim Moore if the set's evolution has been subject to transformations. He explains that the set was ready for the first day of rehearsals so that the performers could live with and learn it, especially given that "it has a life of its own, has four or five

discovery and grim witnessing, a window on a child's world, "a massive window which is also a door". "It's monolithic," says Moore, "but now I've disappeared it a bit, changed the surfaces—you can see it and see into it. Originally it was a staircase on wheels but it's transformed into a room that can become a cage, a space for the performers to discover things, with room to move".

Zsuzsanna comments that the set has provided "landscapes, corridors, circles, a

of light and video projection. The latter, as often, is quite a design challenge, having to find the right surface to project on, where to place the images, and how to make them complementary or counterpoint to the set and the action, not a distraction. This is especially the case, says Zsuzsanna, when the images are about "going inside memory, into the body". Already the scale of the set and its proximity to the audience will amplify their own recollections of innocence and

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The Clark Kent of kinetic intelligence

Karen Pearlman talks with Australian Ballet director Ross Stretton about influences, being Australian, programming, and nurturing choreographers

What can a national ballet company be? It hardly seems fruitful to argue whether one should exist, one does and is not likely to be disbanded barring a violent revolution in culture and government. So, given that a lion's share of resources for dance is poured into a national ballet company, it is very good news that ours is being directed by Ross Stretton.

In fact, after our conversation in July, I am convinced that the Australian Ballet could be on the verge of becoming something great. Ross Stretton strikes me as a sort of a Clark Kent of kinetic intelligence. It remains to be seen whether he will evolve into a dance super hero, but his mild manners are working just fine at the moment for gently introducing some pretty radical ideas, methods and works.

Stretton is serious and thoughtful on the subjects of great choreographers, great dancers and great dance. And he has specific plans for creating them, as well as for opening up the AB's resources to dance as a whole and cutting down on the cross-aesthetic bashing which seems to be the basic mode of discourse in dance in Australia.

With the aim of creating great things, the AB seems to be developing a special relationship with Twyla Tharp. Stretton has just sent six dancers over to New York to workshop a piece with her and to soak up her intelligence and input. One has to wonder here about the possibilities which might have been exploited in this relationship had the new Kennett Dance Company come under the aegis of the Australian Ballet. The dance community seems relieved that the company went to an artist rather than an administrator, but Stretton is both and his interest in running such an enterprise represents radical new thinking about the Australian Ballet in the wider context of dance in Australia.

Ross Stretton's aesthetics and ideas were shaped by his kinetic experiences with choreographers like Twyla Tharp whom he worked with closely as dancer and administrator in New York and continues to work closely with now. He says about Tharp and about Glen Tetley, the other seminal influence he cites, that they share the quality of intelligence. "Great choreographers", Stretton insists, "are intelligent choreographers". Intelligence manifests itself in their ability to "explain the final result" before a work is finished. "Clear understanding of what he was doing" comes first in Stretton's description of what it was about Glen Tetley which affected him so strongly. This was followed by "the power and intelligence behind him" and "a skill for choreography, not just thoughts he put out in the studio, but an understanding of where it was going and an ability to articulate it". This is both a physical and verbal ability to articulate; Stretton says it was what Tetley or Tharp or a handful of others *did* as well as what they said which impacted on him.

Ross Stretton danced in the American Ballet Theatre in the 1980s when Baryshnikov was running the company and expanding its reach and repertory to take in works by Mark Morris, Twyla Tharp and others. This was radical at the time, but is now being taken up by ballet companies around the world. However, when Stretton and Baryshnikov were doing it, they were not picking up works from a menu, they were having them created on their bodies. Stretton, in fact, bristles a bit when I bring up the subject of the shopping list company which gets one 'greatest hit' from each of today's biggest dance hit-makers. He's obviously been accused of taking this approach, and it's not what he has in mind at all. He recognises that dancers will grow most from their direct contact with choreographers, not from having works set on them by assistants (and the same goes for audiences). "My love is for creating new



Ross Stretton

Jim McFarlane

work. I want works made on my dancers, by Australians and by internationals".

So Stretton's New York experience is about to have a big impact on Australian ballet. But it is not a one-way street. Stretton believes that being Australian made a difference in his meteoric rise to a position of artistic influence at the American Ballet Theatre. He made an "instant transition from dancer to administrator" there, when Jane Herrman (then General Manager) asked him to run her artistic department after Baryshnikov left.

What was it she saw in him, to elevate him so rapidly? "Someone who understood the choreographic process and as a dancer had helped choreographers create their work. Someone who knew all of the dancers but didn't have any grudges, vendettas, axes to grind or personal problems with people." (I note a plethora of descriptive words breaking forth from a usually understated use of language. There must have been a lot of opportunities to develop this vocabulary at ABT.) Jane Herrman invested in Stretton "somewhat with an element of trust", but, he says "she saw I knew and believed in dance".

And, Stretton says, being Australian was part of it. It "helped him keep a distance on the backbiting" for one thing. But he also knows that Australian dancers are good. "They are adaptable, eager to please, talented, and non-threatening. No-one ever thought of me as someone who might do what I did—move from dancer to administrator, no-one was ever threatened by me". So, the mild-mannered Clark Kent makes his first strike as Executive Apollo, bringing to the job the full force of a seasoned dancer's creative ability to make the choreographic process flow and help choreographers realise their vision.

Ross Stretton believes that this is a most important ability in his new job, and thinks he got it from working with great artists. At ABT he had "the greatest" coming through his office—designers, choreographers, composers. He misses that and wants to create it here, "to create those collaborations of the greatest".

His relationship to these artists and their creations is active. He understands that choreographers need help. "They can't always just come up with the goods. They need understanding and someone to turn to, not just to be put in a studio and left to flounder—they may have a block, or may need to talk through their work. As a producer I may not know that unless I am working with them on developing the project".

He says that development is about more than just giving choreographers space and dancers. "Choreographers are always on the output". He is hosting a workshop right now to give them input. "A week of talking and *listening* about how concepts of dance can be combined with elements of design and lights. A think tank."

Stretton believes design is one of the big things that is changing in ballet—"Scenery and costumes have changed, space can be carved out by light, there is more room to dance onstage". This workshop which is focussed absolutely on process, not product, will be a week of discussion, moderated by Dr Michelle Potter, between three choreographers, three lighting designers and three set/costume designers.

Ross Stretton sees it as part of his job to reap the "seeds that have been planted to make great Australian choreographers. They need input, not just space, but guidance from people who understand how to choreograph. Someone to cut the earth from under them and make them understand the form."

Lest I whip him into the nearest phone booth before he's ready to unmask Clark Kent as a radical force, he is quick to add, "I want newness, but I'm not getting rid of the past". He will keep up a relationship with the traditional classical repertory. For one thing, it is part of his job to keep the company afloat. But for another thing, he really believes in the "classics" (which are actually mostly "romantics"—ie *Swan Lake*, *Giselle* etc) for their expressive possibilities. As he said in his Green Mill keynote address, "Sometimes in the middle of a performance I would be overwhelmed by a total sense of identification with the character I was dancing—my dance and the dance became one. It always left me completely stunned, in awe of the power of dance".

Great dance, he says, "is from the body", it's what he's drawn by, what he loves. "It is when 14 dancers go to another place—it's what happened last

night in *In The Upper Room*—14 dancers were transported onstage by what they were doing, giving them such pleasure. The dancers' pleasure is what the audience feels—twice as much. The audience's pleasure in dance lies in that excitement, that purity, which can be in any kind of work."

Ross Stretton is motivated and informed by his kinetic experience, his notion of intelligence springs from that source, as does his administrative instinct. In putting together a program he says he "is guided by music" almost, I think, in the way that a dancer's performance in a ballet would be. And he thinks that it is fair enough for a dancer's art to move a choreographer. He believes that the choreographic process works best "when a choreographer finds in a dancer a muse, rather than trying to impose their personal dance on a dancer. If a move is well co-ordinated a good choreographer goes with it, draws it out and develops it". In other words, the best in a dancer will bring out the best in a choreographer.

And Ross Stretton is dancing well now, in his role as Executive Apollo. His co-ordination of a program by Twyla Tharp, Stephen Baynes, and Stephen Page (choreographing *Rite of Spring* at Stretton's suggestion, using Bangarra and AB dancers) is an activist piece of lateral thinking about history and contemporaneity, culture and dance. It could, if it reaches its promise, also be an outstanding example of Apollonian intelligence in dance.

Karen Pearlman is a dancer, choreographer, writer and filmmaker.

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Rapture and rhythm

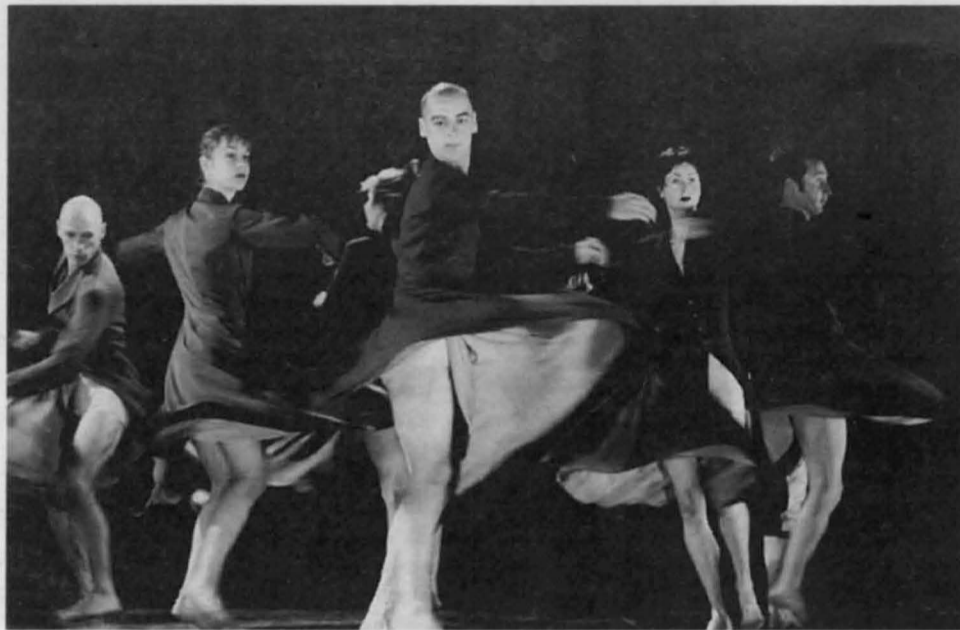
Murray Bramwell on new work from Leigh Warren and Dancers

Quiver, the new program from Leigh Warren and Dancers is continuing evidence of the company's invention and excellence. With last year's return season of *Klinghoffer* and now, the unveiling of two contrasting works, *Shimmer* and *Swerve*, Leigh Warren's signatures are becoming increasingly apparent. His work is disciplined, elegant and has the added intensity which music performed live can bring. With *Klinghoffer*, he borrowed ethereal choruses from John Adams' opera, performed on stage by a score of Corinthian Singers. For *Shimmer* he has used the sparkling playing of the Australian String Quartet and in *Swerve*, the frenetic rhythms of cabaret favourites Pablo Percusso.

Under the scrutiny of Robert Hughes, film-maker Ken Burns and others, the Shaker movement has received renewed attention for its minimalist ingenuity, its diligence and apparently serene other-worldliness. No longer intact—unsurprisingly after ten generations of planned celibacy—the most enduring legacies of the once-thriving and financially successful Shaker communities are their quilts and collectable chairs. And, of course, their eloquent witness to the radiance of belief.

Composer Graham Koehne's String Quartet No.2 "Shaker Dances", celebrating the pastoral virtues of this gentle, quietist sect, provides the score for *Shimmer*. The performers, dancers and musicians, assemble silently on stage, their backs to their audience in frozen tableau. Then, successively, the members of the Australian String Quartet separate from the group, take up their seats downstage prompt-side and begin tuning up. Scraps of tunes can be heard, including a few bars of what sounds like *Simple Gifts*, the religious folk tune used as central motif in Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring*. The cello joins, then the others, as the six dancers begin their demurely exquisite movement.

Leigh Warren's splendidly assured choreography uses the dancers in pairs and gendered threes. There are echoes of square dance tropes as they form parallel lines and dance in profile, moving enticingly close but retaining modest distance. Top lit by Geoff Cobham the dancers move under vertical spots that seem at any time to raise them in some sort of beam-me-up rapture. The effect—enveloped in the warm, vibrant



Leigh Warren and Dancers in *Shimmer*

Grant Nowell

playing of the quartet—is fluid and unaccountably affecting.

Central to the success are Mary Moore's costumes—silky, iron grey frock smocks with yellow-gold linings which button to the navel and then flow across and away from the body with notably erotic ambiguity. Powerfully dramatising the tensions of religious ecstasy, the costumes carry both male and female signification, puritan concealment and then—unbuttoned over the dancers' flesh-toned body

stockings—unexpected sexual abandon.

The movement parallels these dualities. The dancers, in diagonal formation, work in repetitive hoeing and chopping movements, or, hands prayerfully clasped, rotate their elbows in undulating rhythm. Elsewhere, when they raise their arms full stretch, roll along the floor leg over leg, or dance in balletic pairs, they achieve a contrasting sensuality—enhanced by Cobham's buttery lighting, the throaty repetitions of cellist Janis Laurs and Elinor Lea's fluttery pizzicato.

Shimmer is a fine work and must rank among Warren's most accomplished. Carefully conceived, intelligently designed and beautifully performed with solos from

By contrast *Swerve* is a metal-rattling, taiko drumming display of athleticism and grunge style. From behind the curtain we hear the sounds of heavy spinning chrome plates wobbling into silence. Then as the curtain lifts we see Ben Green, Josh Green and Greg Andresen, aka Pablo Percusso, strapping on a variety of hubcaps from Kingswood to Nissan Bluebird and tapdogging up a storm.

The dancers, in skateboard baggies, black vinyl hot pants, leather and leopard skin, enter browsing newspapers as they nonchalantly stack themselves on one another. As the band take up drum kits at the back of the stage the dancers begin to slap each other with the papers setting up repetitions and syncopations. It is reminiscent of *Stomp*, Luke Cresswell's kitchen cupboard of found-sound, but *Swerve* has plenty of its own zing as well.

Lit low from the side of the stage and then washed in heavy scarlets and turquoise, the dancers meld with the rhythms. An angular, exuberant solo from Delia Silvan is followed by a trio of rapping garbage bins then another burst from Rachel Jenson and some breakdance variants from Peter Sheedy and John Leathart.

The "auto"-erotic motifs continue from hubcaps to tyres to traffic as Pablo Percusso take up drumming stations in tilted-back car seats while the dancers let rip in a blaze of foot and sidelights.

Swerve moves into high gear for the fourth section, *Head On*, with thunderous drumming, spliced-in highway screeching and choreography ready to crash through to Cronenberg.

Leigh Warren and Dancers have compiled a program both meditative and high octane. For many the sustained energy of *Swerve* is the high point. However, for all its technique, it is more fizz than substance. But those Shakers doing their shimmer...? Well, that's a road much less travelled.

Quiver Leigh Warren and Dancers, Norwood Town Hall, Adelaide, June 20-28

Complex paths

Eleanor Brickhill responds to new works by Sue Healy for One Extra and Trevor Patrick at Greenmill



Nicole Johnston, Michelle Heaven and Luke Smiles in *Suite Slip'd* Brendan Read

The idea behind Green Mill's 1997 program, *Heritage and Heresy*, is timely. There's a feeling in the air; dancers looking back to see their tracks stretching behind them into the distance. Perhaps they seek proof that they've really gone somewhere. The subject matter of much recent work, at Green Mill and in Sydney, is indeed lived history, and we're shown these tracks, paths of complex endeavour, entwining personal and professional experience, a detailed and private history of growing up and settling in, an embodiment of craft.

and physical relationships are still somewhat open-ended, without the fixity that performance requires. In the first trio, the dancers took the behavioural and stylistic elegance of 17th century French court dance, throwing it (and each other) around the spacious bare studio, with a quick, sweet understatement which belied the fast, slippery complicated precision demanded by the choreography. For someone who knows ballet, a slight tilt of the chin, a glancing *epaulement*, a sudden flutter of hands, all embody a world of

meaning, both then and now, within which the dancers' social and professional lives are played out.

The second half presented a kind of dramatic confrontation: two new dancers, new style, new material. With the addition of set and costumes in performance, I could barely shake the Sharks and the Jets out of my head, as subtle posture became a social currency no less extreme than that of 17th century. Both choreography and dancing in the first section were hard to fault, and while the suggestion of dramatic narrative might have been a persuasive guide, I preferred the more 'abstract' interrogation of dancerly ritual which was becoming visible prior to the complications presented by staging for performance.

Some works at Green Mill seemed to embody a kind of artistic coming of age. Trevor Patrick's solo, *Continental Drift*, was one of these, performed as part of Dancework's presentation of *Leap of Faith*. The weight and pathos of this work catches you by stealth. Small words, phrases, gestures accumulate and pack down, like strata in a land mass. He shifts sideways, black-suited, across the stage, backed by burnt orange screens. He bumps up against shadow, unknown experience, until it recedes. His movement is clean, the text simple but pervasive. He speaks of experience, events which just happen, ways of learning to do and to be; progress through life is measured by an accumulation of such events, which by themselves do not provide actual direction. The shape of his life becomes simply doing what he has done, going where he has gone, "dense episodes of experience"



Trevor Patrick in *Leap of Faith*

Jeff Busby

packing down into a pathway of sorts. When the other side of the stage is reached, the end of the road, he has cleared that space of shadow, and the ground is firm, marking a place of experience, for us as well, between the sacred and the profane.

Suite Slip'd, by Sue Healy, *The One Extra Company*, *The Performance Space*, June-July 1997

Continental Drift, by Trevor Patrick, part of *Dancework's Leap of Faith*, *Green Mill Festival*, June-July 1997

Panic (at) Hatched

Dean Chan surveys works and issues at the National Graduate Show at PICA

In this climate of ongoing funding cuts to the arts and education sectors, the position of visual arts education is increasingly one of moral and political panics. For arts educators, the issue is one of pedagogical and professional accountability. Current tertiary funding scenarios translate into a situation where a dwindling number of staff members are having to don increasingly more hats with ever-widening brims. Being expected to do more for (and with) less seems almost to be a given. Throw into this already delimited equation the task of training artists to commence practice in increasingly regressive and censorial conditions...The time to panic is nigh.

This article is less a summary review and more a meditation on some concerns generated by the *Hatched: Healthway National Graduate Show 1997* and its associated symposium. In this sixth national survey of visual arts graduates from around Australia, the work of 44 graduates have been selected from 13 participating institutions. The notion of artistic and academic panic was central in the symposium. One question posed in the discussions was whether the exhibited graduate works dealt with this topical notion. This question was unfortunately not fully addressed at the symposium; nevertheless its resonances persist. Are the graduates panicking yet? Are they angry about emergent conditions? Are they even aware of the world beyond interiorised dialogues? More distressingly, are their lecturers conversant and equipped to deal with contemporary issues beyond tenured (if lucky) comfort zones? Certainly, the poor attendance at the symposium did not augur well—at least on the part of the local Perth community. If anything, the correlation between art production and its institutional context needs to be addressed in all its topical urgency.

At the *Hatched* exhibition, the heterogeneity of styles and media alone (from oil paintings to multimedia art, from textiles and paper-based works to electronic installations) attests to an indexical range of contemporary art produced by emerging artists. That the assembled works are testimony to prevailing contemporary paradigms of artistic forms, media and presentation is undeniable. There remains however the attendant question of evaluating and interpreting the works, particularly when funding allocations more than ever before require qualification and quantification in terms of performance measurement criteria. The works 'perform' to current idioms and expectations. There are pitfalls, of course,

to consider. The dangers of performing to set cues prescribed by institutional criteria lies in the sanctioning of 'safe' art ensconced within a model of permissible dialogue. While many of the works in the exhibition pay disappointing lip service to articulating cogent commentaries and/or polemics sustained by formally and conceptually resolved works, there are several notable exceptions.



Effigies by Minka Gillian, graduate School of Art, University of Tasmania, Hobart

Shaun Gladwell, a graduate of Sydney College of the Arts, offers in his oil paintings entitled *Anonymous figures; After Gainsborough*, an elegant expression of what is at stake in the enterprise of re-imag(in)ing historical and cultural values. By utilising computer Photoshop to manipulate original images as a preliminary tool for painting, he presents what he calls "a postcolonial squeeze of old images saturated with signifiers of colonial expansion" (*Hatched* catalogue). The imagistic distortions and recodifications enunciate the agenda of contemporary rehistoricising impulses. The interfacing of new and traditional media is underscored in the work as a productive site of creative and intellectual endeavour. Furthermore, it would seem that painting is far from anachronistic since its discursive means and logic may consistently be recoded and updated.

The applications of technology are the subject of interrogation in Edith Cowan University graduate Anastasia Bradley's *Perspectives*. In this installation, the viewer enters an enclosed space in which black acrylic domes associated with hidden security cameras dot the ceiling. The screen

at the end of the space is electronically triggered by the presence of the viewer to continually feature 'live' footage of the 'intruder' until s/he leaves the space. The pervasive sense of being watched may be associated, according to Bradley, with "the ever burgeoning social implications of surveillance within the public domain" (*Hatched* catalogue). Surveillance phenomena attest to a virtual social control.

Monash University, addressed the need for a new (multicultural) educational paradigm that more adequately reflects Australia's emergent hybridised contemporaneity, highlighting the urgency of a pedagogical paradigm that effectively incorporates issues pertaining to location, positionality and difference.

Ann Schilo, Associate Lecturer in Visual Culture at Curtin University of

Jay Younger, Post Graduate Studies Coordinator at Queensland College of Art (QCA), pointed out in the symposium that "while critical practice is becoming increasingly unfashionable, illegitimate and undervalued (ie it just causes trouble and doesn't make money) we also find that in the wake of unleashed fears, the desire to control, repress and censor is on the increase" (*Hatched* catalogue). Younger alluded to the fact that such tensions are culturally produced and enforced, citing censorial socio-political conditions in Queensland. As pointed out in the symposium, this has a parallel in Western Australia, especially since the 1996 Censorship Act. This Act gave rise to the occasion where photographic images of a student's nude children, that were to form the basis of an artwork, have been indicted (and subsequently acquitted) in the law courts as indecent material. When speaking about the work of QCA students, Younger drew attention to the possibility of contestation to and circumnavigation of these censorial tensions. The artistic deregulation of the policed body is emphatically underscored by this possibility.

This argument is not about some romanticised notion of the art school as hatching ground for naive avant-gardism. Rather the contextual specificities of art production and its reception are to be foregrounded. An emergent context of concern relates to cross-cultural issues especially in light of current debates on race. In *Effigies*, Minka Gillian, graduating from the Tasmanian School of Art, makes reference to Pacific Islander and African objects, mobilising a complex discourse about trans-cultural exchange. Are these effigies examples of ethnographic commodification or affirmations of ethnographic identification? The contingencies of cross-cultural interpretative problematics are highlighted.

One of the more pressing agendas within current cross-cultural management and negotiation issues is the need to develop a framework for culturally relevant education. The student demographic is not monocultural. Keynote symposium speaker Fazal Rizvi, Professor of Education at

Technology, cautioned, however, in her paper entitled *Shiver Me Timbers* that the way towards cross-cultural pedagogy may be fraught with potential cultural misunderstandings due to inexperience, unfamiliarity and inadequate training and information. Schilo suggests that, in terms of teaching contemporary Asian art in Australian art schools, for example, the solution may well reside in the establishment of collaborative research groups effectively alliancing students and academics, rather than privileging prescribed authoritative modes of potential cultural mis-delivery.

The challenges of developing new pedagogical paradigms for cross-cultural issues were made apparent during the audience discussion of Ian Mclean's paper on Aboriginal issues. The ensuing discussion showed that the matter of setting up alternate arts educational models sensitive to Indigenous constituencies is not easily resolved. For some, such activities are potentially segregationist in orientation; as chairperson of the discussion panel Julie Dowling acknowledged, there are intricate "teething problems" to work through.

The scarcity of resources in current artistic/academic climates makes it necessary to find creative solutions to complex ethical and practical concerns. But this does not entail compliant acquiescence in the face of funding cuts. To appropriate the nautical metaphor of Schilo's paper, the good ship Arts has to simultaneously stave off vermin from infested waters while striving to reconstruct the ship anew: a formidable task in inclement conditions.

Hatched: Healthway National Graduate Show 1997, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, June 6-July 7; and symposium, June 6-7.

Dean Chan is a performance artist and lecturer in visual art theory at the School of Visual Arts, WA Academy of Performing Arts, Edith Cowan University. He is Joint Coordinator of the Academy based Contemporary Indo Asian Arts Research Unit currently researching cross-cultural pedagogy.



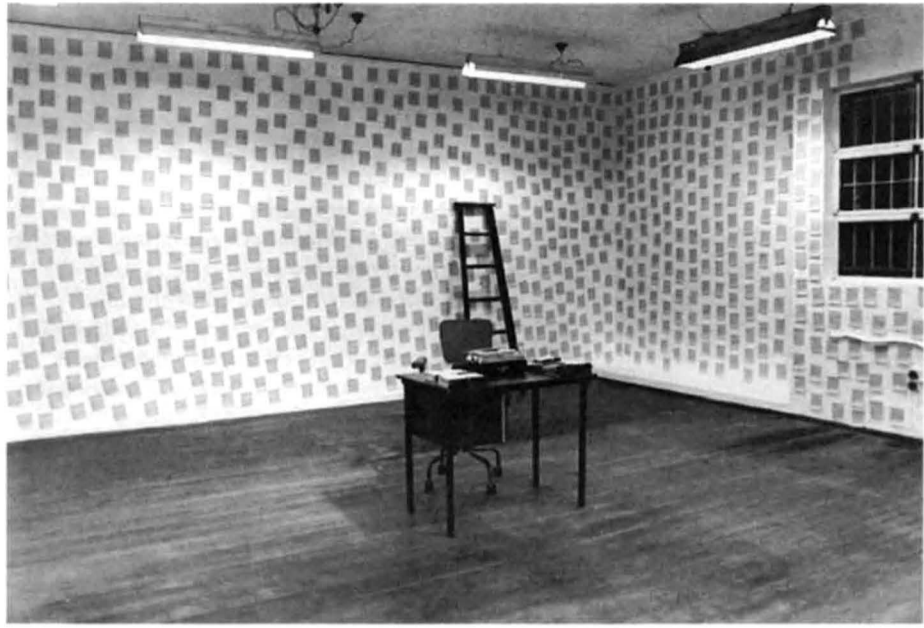
GALLERY

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I'm not quite sure whether Natalie Billing's installation *Record Room* should be described as a self-portrait or an autobiography. It is certainly a work of writing, one that would probably survive quite well in book form, but there's more to it than that. In simple terms, the piece is made up of the staged scene of the writing of a set of recorded memories, each typed out on its own numbered sheet torn from a Tudor Recordall Counter Book. In the centre of the room sit the desk, the chair, the brass gold Olympia typewriter, and the stacks of used, and yet to be used Counter Books. On the walls are the dated and simply titled records. A ladder leans against the wall—not so much a part of the staged scene, as to help viewers read those texts placed high up near the ceiling.

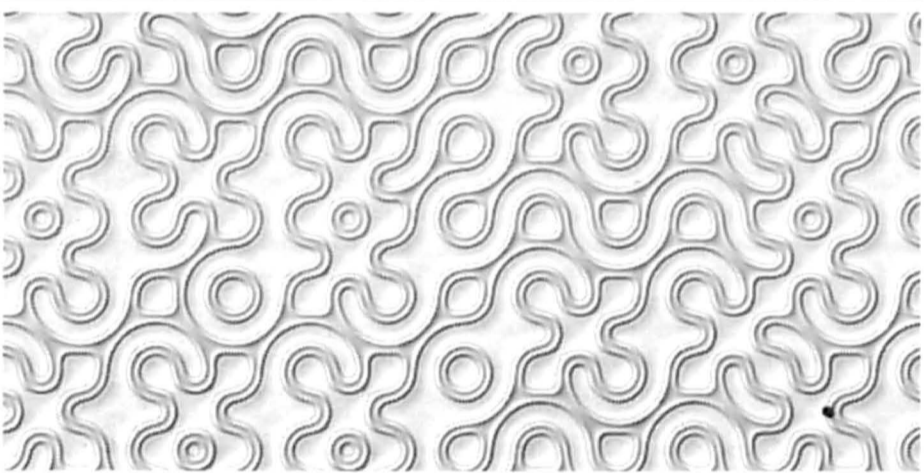
The individual texts are mostly very simple, even banal. They present hundreds of small memories from 1976 (when the narrator was about three) to 1987 (when the narrator first tried on contact lenses). The texts are neither literary, nor is there any sense that these are significant memories. They are incidents, almost all of them starting the same way: "I remember..."

Of course, while we can assume that this is an account of the early life of the artist, there is also nothing to say that this is not a complex invented life we are encountering—with its trips to Brisbane, incidents in the art class, moments trying on a dress or going for a swim at night as a small child. Of course, there are other characters, and something of a sense of place is evoked, but what makes this both a simple realist narrative (despite its form), and a long poem about growing up, is the unevenness of incident and recollection—and the way we fill the gaps in the record.

Peter Anderson



Record Room, Natalie Billing, Soapbox Gallery, Brisbane, July 11-30

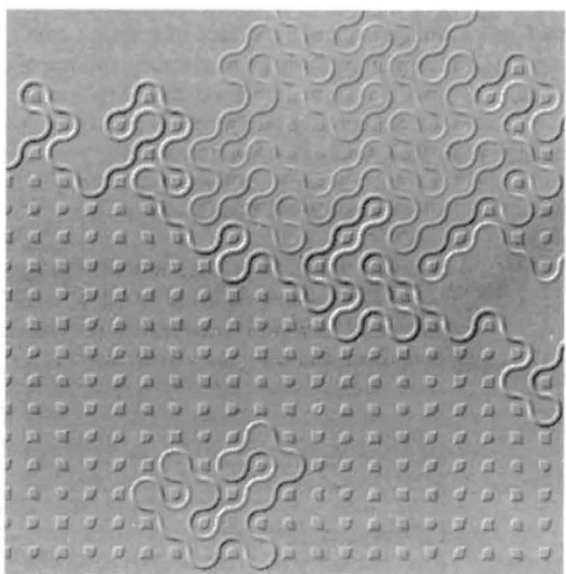


Paul Brown, *Swimming Pool (detail)*, 1997, Iris print, 50 x 75cm

Paul Brown is an artist interested in pattern, permutation and unpredictability. To some extent his work has the look of plaster or pressed metal ceiling patterns, abstract tiled surfaces, the confusing distortions of a swimming pool surface or the ripples left by a receding tide.

But in describing Brown's work in this way, I'm taking the same easy route that might have allowed me to explain an abstract painting by pointing to things in the world, rather than to the intersection of materials, surfaces, and the techniques of applying paint. I'm trying to make it into a representation of something, to make it other than what it is.

To be fair, the titles Brown has given his works lead me this way: *Swimming Pool, Ceiling Detail, Dancer*. This is one of the things I find quite interesting about the work. Having made art with computer hardware



Paul Brown, *Dreamtime*, 1995, Iris print, 50 x 50cm

and software since the mid-70s, Brown is not an artist who has just discovered what can be done with a Mac. What's more, he's still happy to present images as prints, in limited editions of 20, while at the same time exhibiting an interactive CD-ROM, *Infinite Permutations V. 2.0* (which looks like it provided the 'plate' for *The Deluge*).

In a way this is a very simple exhibition, but one which has at its heart a question about where the work is made, and who (or what) makes it. It's also about the evolution of an artist's engagement with pattern and improvisation—this isn't jazz, it's trance.

Peter Anderson

Alien Spaces, Paul Brown, Gilchrist Galleries, Brisbane, May 22—June 22

Sport

TOOTH AND CLAW

with Jack Rufus

Mike Tyson's year-long suspension from boxing poses a major problem: what do we do with him for 12 months? Iron Mike is a man of many parts—one more, in fact, than his last opponent Evander Holyfield, so it shouldn't be too hard to find him an alternative occupation.

With his proven skills in ear-biting rugby union is an obvious choice, but he would find experienced fellow biters waiting for him in the scrums. Better to re-direct his energy into other areas: political theory, for instance, where he could develop the Lone Wolf version of Trotskyism he founded during his prison sentence. Or religion, which he picked up in the same prison: Iron Mike's "ear for an eye" Retribution sect could easily assume cult status.

But realistically, Mike's powers must be used in the sport where he's needed most: chess. Put him in Kasparov's corner for the re-match with Deep Blue, and the human race might just have a chance. The computer boffins would cower before his ferocious gaze, and Deep Blue itself would throw in the towel, fearful of its trembling circuits being bitten and spat out in one almighty chomp!

TEE OFF

with Vivienne Inch

Teeing off with Councillor Sam Witheridge at the Kogarah course this week, I was effusive in my praise for his magnificent solution for bringing our embarrassingly untidy city up to par for the 2000 Olympics. The Councillor will be seeking support at the Local Government Association conference in October for all councils to impose fines up to \$10,000 for illegal poster on public buildings. Brilliant! We need more ideas like this. I suggested that Sam have a yarn to Olympics Minister Michael Knight who is, of course, desperate for a revenue grabber to offset the miserable sales of his corporate boxes. The 'Green' Games concept is clearly an albatross. What about the 'Tidy' Games? It's so Australian. I can't wait for them to move from ugly posters to ugly corporate logos, ugly merchandise and, inevitably, ugly sports. Weightlifting, for instance, seems to attract a short-arsed, hairy, sweaty sort of a person; sprinters are all skin and bone and have no dress sense; rowers go red; swimmers get wet; the marathon is a disgusting display of human indignity. Let's face it, only golfers know how to show off a range of coordinated sportswear and to be viciously competitive while keeping themselves nice.

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RealTime at LIFT97

Introduction

Lucy Neal, one of the directors of the London International Festival of Theatre, saw *RealTime* at work at the 1996 Adelaide Festival of the Arts, liked what she saw and invited us to LIFT97, a distinctively cross-cultural festival exploratively spread across London in a variety of sites and theatres and including community and youth-oriented projects as well as major international performances. At 4.30pm every week day, mostly at the Royal Court Upstairs in its temporary home at the Ambassador Theatre, a program of 90 minute Daily Dialogues coordinated by Alan Read provided a festival focus for artists and audiences and was, more often than not, comfortably conducted in the bar foyer. A team of six Australian writers (Linda Marie Walker, Zsuzsanna Soboslay, Wesley Enoch, Richard Murphet, Keith Gallasch, Virginia Baxter) worked with three British writers (director Indhu Rubasingham, director and film-maker Zahid Dar, writer Gabriel Gbadamosi) out of the LIFT offices, our hotel in High Holborn, and in pubs and cafes to produce four *RealTimes* over four weeks. We travelled prodigious distances above and under ground, discovered a different London from the one we thought we knew, successively lost and regained our health, witnessed some excellent and intriguing productions, enjoyed the company of our festival hosts and met artists, artistic directors, consultants, academics, other Australian artists passing through, and enjoyed the mood of cautious optimism London artists were feeling after the May election.

The following selection is about a quarter of the output of the nine writers (not all of whom worked with us the whole four weeks), but should convey the feel of the festival and particularly the themes and issues pursued by the writers: the nature of LIFT, its engagement with the city, cross-cultural meanings and, especially, the *RealTime* preoccupation with the nature of the audience's experience of a work and the cumulative engagement physically, emotionally and artistically with a festival.

If you want to read more of our responses to LIFT97, visit our website which holds all four issues: <http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity>

Don't feel you've missed out on some of the best work in LIFT—there were strong rumours at the festival that Argentina's De La Guarda, with *Periodo Villa Villa*, the Schauspielhaus Deutsches Theater Hamburg, with *Stunde Null* and Saburo Teshigawara with *I was real-documents*, will be touring Australian festivals in 1998. While the Teshigawara didn't please everyone (some of us found the work he'd evolved over a long term with a small group of young British dancers in *Step* more impressive), *Stunde Null* and *Periodo Villa Villa* have to be seen to be believed.

Staging memory and desire: Richard Murphet *K'far* (The Village), by Joshua Sobol, Geshen Company, The Lyric, Hammersmith, June 3

The creative act in *K'far* results from a combination of memory and desire (are they ever far apart?). Yossi, the gravedigger, the survivor, attempts, through raising the villagers of his youth from their graves, to recapture fleetingly a time of peace before the watershed in modern Jewish history: when the oasis of calm amidst the orange groves of Palestine was shattered forever by the impending arrival of Rommel's troops, by the news of the Holocaust filtering through, and by the severing, through territorial struggle, of the seemingly harmonious relations between Jew and Arab. The journey back is deliberately ambulatory, non-dramatic, with the open feel of an epic but interlaced with the miraculously insignificant details of daily living that memory treasures ('...living their most beautiful moments when almost nothing was taking place', Sobol).

Overviewing the whole proceedings from his position on the backdrop, the huge figure

of a young child looks out at us with the faintest of smiles as he floats Chagall-like over a landscape of fields and donkeys.

Yossi, the eternally youthful protagonist of the play is able to exist in a constantly optimistic present through the increasingly tense times the play hints at because he too floats, as the world turns around his village, never quite touching base, in the blissfully uncommitted but politically unreal state of the simple fool.

Beneath, lie the sands of Palestine and its dry grass, clustered like pubic hair or a head full of cobwebs.

This is the terrain of the illicit, the female (in a late scene a search through the foliage turns up items like a suspender belt and a fish) and the animal. Yossi is split psychically between his two animal soulmates: the goat, playful and without care, and the turkey, full of angst, cynicism and eroticism. The potential, personal and social, of that double drive is never quite realised in the play.

Cutting its inexorable pattern across the ground, a revolving platform traces the perimeter of a circle, within which sprouts a jungle of dry grass. This circle on the move burns into the retina—a metaphor of the action of the play.

In this young village of disparate refugees, the circle is the image of the communalising force, the acceptance of all as equal, the round table, the meeting round the campfire, the corroboree.

The fact that it is moving sets up an underlying tension to this socialist dream. At this level, the circle is the passage of time and to that irresistible force even the optimism of Yossi has no answer. When it is moving, characters must walk against its direction to remain in the one spot; if they pause for a second to think or converse, they are swept off and out. It stops occasionally to allow an encounter to be revisited, but the image that remains with me is that of people walking resolutely but ineffectively against the circular flow, as if trying like the play to hold out against the disappearance of the past. In the light of what has become of that Palestinian/Israeli village, the passage of time that the stage depicts can only be seen as a tragic force. This is not perhaps how Sobol would want it read, but the moving circle provides a conflictual resistance that is necessary if his return trip to lost innocence is not to succumb to the temptations of quaint nostalgia that threaten to overcome it.

A note on translation: Memory is circular, rebounding to the rememberer, and spiralling out beyond the proscenium into the laughter and silence of the largely older generation Jewish audience. A communalising was taking place. How does an Aussie reviewer plug into that Russian/Hebrew Communal Memory—sitting in the Lyric Hammersmith with the dispassionate voice of the show's single translator hooked into my right ear? Well, the linguistic distance itself had its own strange power—as in the scene of the news of the Holocaust. This was in fact a scene of translation: a young woman arrives from Europe into the as yet ignorant, innocent village filled with the grievous news of the death of her husband and all his relatives in the death camps. She cannot speak Hebrew and her tale is translated to the villagers, as she tells it, by the dead man's sister. This places us at one remove from the horror—allows it to creep in a side door instead of beating at the portal. Add to this the fact that the earphone translation began translating only the Hebrew sister and then, as she was overcome by grief, switched to translating straight from the Russian refugee. This was, in its combination of visual simplicity, narrative indirectness and communicative complexity, shockingly real—the gaps of translation defamiliarising a tale heard many times, providing space for my own imagination to fill.



Journey to the East

One table and two chairs: Linda Marie Walker

Journey To The East, Part 1, curated by Danny Yung, organised by Zuni Icosahedron, ICA, June 3

The first show I see: *Journey To The East* opening night, at the ICA theatre, just through the door from the bar, where New York mixers Soundlab are doing a night of "cut & paste beats, drum & bass, and dubbed out funk".

Journey is a set of eight short plays in two programs from "The Chinese Diaspora (Beijing, Hong Kong, Taipei)", each written in response to the end of colonial rule in Hong Kong, and each using the standard Beijing Opera set of one table and two chairs, and each about a particular type of cultural violence or violation, some sort of deep interference with/to body and soul.

(The music mixing, an event, is strangely, calmly hypnotically about the language of 'damage', of finding voice—to make once more, to make over, to make new—of remembering, so as to see where memory and flesh are and could be, and to touch the inside of the body, especially the heart—music as fluid and pulse, say. These searches and rhythms are all around, in all the various forms of expression, and I should have stayed longer to listen, after the show.)

The four works of this first program address issues of translation in the broadest sense. How does one tell the infinite ways in which individuals are marked by their culture. And how does one as viewer and listener come to that, wait with that, whether in the theatre or not, and make sense of it, or perhaps not sense as much as will and willingness. How does a community tell another community what it is? We do this constantly, gradually, if we imagine the person nearest us is a community. And although we attend to their voice and gestures, it is inevitable we will be mistaken, and perhaps only hear our own voice anyway. This too is crucial, as it is in hearing another so that one can hear one's own story. So, that might be what happens, a parallel telling, a sudden crossing of paths. A moment where translation is both given and received. "I am listening to you is to listen to your words as something unique, irreducible, especially to my own, as something new, as yet unknown." (Irigaray)

Play One: *Jiu Ge and Lao Qi—A 1997 Rhapsody* by Edward Yang, from Taipei, has a gunman and a 'travel agent', a euphemism for Taiwan politicians, visiting Hong Kong. This, in all ways, takes the shape of known power relations, as the past is revenged. People are referred to as numbers, and there's a good chance someone will be killed, on the chair, and the briefcase is the site of exchange,

also familiar. There are some good lines (surtitles above, performed in Mandarin), like: "The silencer was cool ...", and "Democracy is fun ...", and "Appear to surrender, the Americans will never get it". And then a bit of common ground is found, and over a betel nut, anger dissolves.

Play Two: *Reflection of the Moon on Er-quan* by Edward Lam, from Hong Kong, is a street-wise look at language. The table and chairs are used here for what they physically are, places to be together and places to be apart. They are objects for people. This is a funny and sharp work which directly touches me, because I can't avoid 'you' if you talk to me, nor can you avoid me if I talk to 'you'. And so the language, English, is mixed with the languages Cantonese and Mandarin, and there appears magically the surreal fact of being a being-from a given culture (safe and solitary). And this naming, 'I am...', is deeply loved and resisted, and is the mechanism by which we see and speak to each other in banal and spatial dialogues, which are perhaps even more banal and spatial when one is within and yet outside of another's language. There is this exchange about a sunset: "It was the most incredible thing I've ever seen", "Oh, really". Now, who is saying what? Is seeing a sunset banal, or is thinking a sunset banal, banal?

Play Three: *No story about chairs and tables* by Li Liuyi, from Beijing, tries one's patience. And yet the patience with which devotion is learned must be the worst of all. And so the struggle within that, the actual time of scarring, both the time it takes and the timing of it historically, the implications for the imagination of self and self-relations, and the inevitable repetition, is crucial to glimpsing, as a stranger, the experience of another, without the usual comparison with what-I-already-know. The 'furniture' is cleaned religiously, and is never clean enough, the 'air' (the nothing that we breathe) is cleaned, and then of course each other. Nowhere to go to, no words to play with. And so it goes, on and on.

Play Four: *Piece* by Stanley Kwan, from Hong Kong, uses video footage, voice-over, shadows, slides, and the table and chairs. The movement between these mediums is sometimes fine, sometimes awkward. And, as elsewhere, in film, writing, music, dance, the very personal, the site of amazement, often makes available, simply, quietly, just what it is that wants to speak. And I must then be silent. Perhaps what happens is contrary to plan, as when a number of 'flat' surfaces come together, space itself becomes surface, and three-dimensional, and this without 'real' bodies. Real bodies, the audience, are given space, and there they might appear. Video in the theatre is always unsatisfactory in terms of presence, because other lighting interferes. However, this is part of its charm too, like Super-8, one is aware of form. And in *Piece* one is aware of all the forms at once.

What strikes me now, suddenly, is how these four pieces might 'look' as one, how extraordinary that could be, if they were staged simultaneously, sort of choreographed, mixed like the ambient music being played in the bar. And given that we are so used to these mixes, these overwhelming, and yet ordinary, simultaneous inputs, through walking streets, or sitting in cafes, the cutting together (and here I'm unsure of the words to use, but they are to do with a choral or 'chora' approach, to do with space) of the separate works might in some way make even clearer the possibilities, and difficulties, of the brief that the curator Danny Yung gave these directors.

Finding a place for *The Geography of Haunted Places*: Virginia Baxter
The Geography of Haunted Places, Royal Court Upstairs, June 3

The travelling body takes days to fall to earth. It's like water, then like lead. It aches and sticks, moves on air, clings to the ground. It runs hot and cold, loses itself. With a suitcase full of separates, I try to co-ordinate myself on this new map, in a new image. To complicate matters, though I checked in at the hotel yesterday, today they appear to have no record of my arrival.

Disappeared and fighting feelings of displacement, here in the faded splendour of the West End, I remember the first time I saw

RealTime at LIFT97

• from page 43

The Geography of Haunted Places at The Performance Space (TPS) in Sydney. Akin in philosophy to London's ICA, TPS contains a space which used to be a trade union dance hall. All sorts of contemporary work takes place there—performance (physical, non-text and text-based), dance, multi-artform. The rectangular hall has a small proscenium at one end which most companies cover up. The audience seating is flexible, sometimes dispensed with altogether. In one production, the audience arrived to find their seats surrounded by barbed wire and occupied by the performers.

In *Geography...* at TPS, the audience sat at one end of the space. The performer appeared at the other, initially obscured by a blazing light shining into the audience's eyes. Between performer and audience on little islands of light reflecting in the shiny floor, floated the draped, stuffed marsupials. Beneath the wig and the cheong-sam I recognised Erin Hefferon, not as an actor in character but as someone performing a series of personae. I relished the contrast between the rough edges of her performance and the smooth theatricality of her surroundings. In the milieu of The Performance Space and The Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, where this production began, it's accepted that the skills deployed in acting and performance are different. In the same way we deal with rabbit plagues, when outbreaks of acting are reported we generally try to institute containment programs as quickly as possible.

Here in the Royal Court Upstairs, the audience is steeply raked, looking down at the stage. Erin looks like just another marsupial caught in the light. The program notes go for content, giving no hint of the anthropology of this performance. I suddenly remember the huge photograph of Larry down in the bar and begin to hallucinate—Dame Judy Dench runs from the audience and drags Erin Hefferon screaming from the theatre. Uncomfortably hot in all this velvet. I'm starting to think that maybe, like bodies, there are works that don't travel well. "So nice to find a sympathetic audience", says Miss Discovery and the words disappear into the curly recesses of the proscenium. Like me, she has gone missing. Only when she strides naked into the auditorium and plants her Union Jack amid the audience do I feel anything like the resonances of the earlier work.

In Australia, *The Geography of Haunted Places* was fairly universally welcomed as a timely work that spoke with seriousness and irony about the Australian psyche. Interestingly, it was one of an increasing number of works from the performance milieu treated seriously by mainstream theatre critics. Here, *The Independent* consigned it to "Fringe", Adrian Turpin admitting that he "couldn't give a monkey's" for its "attempts to tell a few home truths about colonialism and white-bread Ozzie culture". More praising of the work, Lyn Gardner in *The Guardian*, thought that this was a work which had obvious meanings in Australia but performing it in Britain was "like bringing the war back home", speaking in the final lines of her review, however, of "being left with images of a map of the dead and of ghosts not yet acknowledged or reconciled".

Days after witnessing *Geography...*, my body finally came to ground inside The Slug and Lettuce. Body clock adjusted to this city teeming with immigrants, scouring the papers for news of the traumatised place I've travelled from, I can't help thinking that Erin Hefferon's personification of the optimistic, racist Australian might be just the shot for an audience of British optimists on a balmy summer in the West End. Australians are happy to take responsibility for the consequences of their own actions and, these days, Australian artists don't feel the same pressing need to seek legitimacy outside their own country. But in re-staging this work, LIFT 97 has given Britons a chance to share images of Australia that they might easily disown at this distance. Here for a brief visit is your wayward daughter, ours too, wanting you to see what the racist impulses of our white forebears have fathered.

[*Oráculos*, a sensory experience for audiences, was a festival hit, but RealTime writers were wary about the claims made for it, as they were with Alicia Rios' *La Feria* (see our website). See Ariadne@LIFT, p45.]

Arriving at one's own spot: Linda Marie Walker

Oráculos, directed and written by Enrique Vargas, Taller De Investigación De La Imagen Teatral, The Former Coach Station, N 1, June 4

1. I had an appointment, and as I waited an older European man came to the ticket-desk to say the pile of abandoned shoes near the exit had disturbed him, reminded him of the concentration camps, I think he said. I'd been nervous for days, not being a fan of labyrinths, being always scared of losing my way. Like, I'm in 'London' and I continually take readings off buildings, which I usually forget, for example on which corner was BANK exactly, and off which road is NEAL STREET: "You can't miss it". Well, I can. And I must mention how exciting (see para. 8) London feels this time round. Is it the weather, or has coffee finally been recognized as a serious art form, and wine as water, and wandering as sex (in *The 7 Stages Of Grieving* the narrator says: "To wonder is to walk").

2. I knew that *Oráculos* had dark passages, I didn't know just how many. Then I was asked to move to the chair by the door. Soon a door slowly opened and I was beckoned. But before I could enter I had to have 'it'. What, I asked; a question, she said (see para.10). And so it started, the journey. I had to leave my shoes and socks with her, I agreed, but I really hated the little doll with pink high-heels.

3. There is no doubt: I did allow myself to take the journey, to make the journey, reluctantly at first. I mean, I think, that I made-up this 'trip'. I seriously had a question. And this because of a 'real' commitment to the idea of 'question', and to what might eventuate through commitment. But I was aware too of being inside a production, inside something called Theatre. Now, this is a question in itself, as for me 'the question' (as research, as philosophy, blah blah blah) is a clearly marked personal, political, and intellectual encounter and endeavour, a means of moving matter (see para. 6). So, what to do, play a game or be game to play (see para. 10).

4. Then, to my horror more than my delight, momentarily, all was revealed, or, the need for a question was clarified. At the core of the work is the Tarot, an oracle. Knowing the Tarot as a form of 'knowledge' I was again placed inside a question other than my own. Why use the Tarot? Because, for instance, a long time ago a friend, a visual artist, used a Tarot card for a photographic work, and all hell broke loose. OK, OK, coincidence, but when I came to write about that work I was warned, threatened, by one of the recipients of that 'hell'. Still, what kindness, what genuine intent, would be aligned with this oracular event? And attitude makes a difference, matters (see paras. 3 & 6).

5. The point is that one is the solitary 'aliveness' toward which performance is made, and each 'aliveness' is a different creature and community. And so it is an almost equal relationship, if one performs too, not as performer so much as self. And all the time one keeps in mind 'the question', if, that is, one decides to take up the offer ("do you have it", see para. 2).

6. Occasionally terrifying thoughts flooded in: would my hands be cut off now, while they were in the dough? Or, are they laughing at me? I mean, where does their, the company's, attention lie? It matters (see para. 3).

7. The intellect is a sensory, sensuous, emotional aspect of 'me'. The intellect does not need to take second place, or need to be "forced to take second place", it is pleasure. The intellect touches, smells, tastes, speaks, watches, and hears. And responds, and resists. I will not leave my intellect with my shoes and socks, and slip it on later (see para. 3). There is no separation, no opposition. Instead there is 'yes' and 'and' (see para. 9).

8. (I could sit here forever with wine, cigarettes, music, cricket, books, and think. And a telephone would be good, and my friends.)

9. I recall: my hand resting, to be lead, on warm soft skin the shape of which almost repulsed me, yet didn't, being a bit too 'human'; and laying on the cart-like vehicle and feeling I might land on my head; and, overall, the mild yet undeniable sense of being in the hands (literally) of others; and guessing the only way out would be with the help of those others (see para. 4).

10. So, my dilemma (a few hours on from: "I could sit ..." (see para. 8)), while at the Spanish cafe, listening to loud techno-dance music, with the rain shining on the road: the Tarot, the idea of oracles, is potent once more within the 60/70s revival, as it was/is a romance in the West, along with Buddhism, Yoga, Tibet, etc; and any misgivings I have are already suspect because of an appropriation that is older than I've indicated. And, to enter this work honestly one decides on playing or not playing. And not playing means something peculiar, in my estimate, due to the nature of 'question'. And playing means the same. So, to play or not to play, that is the (real) question. Because, you can't decide to play, or wish you had begun, half way through, or, you can, of course, but then 'the question' will be conditioned by the circumstances. Anyway, I'm not sure if it matters (see para. 6), given this is Theatre (see para. 3).

11. And yet, and yet, although *Oráculos* is billed as a sensory experience it does 'play' with the brutal and risky business of 'question' (like the "do you like" segment of *Reflections Of The Moon On Er-Quan* in *Journey to the East* (1); this is potent and poignant, why?), and question is central to intellectual, psychological, artistic practices, none of which are exclusive (see para. 7).

12. And the strangest thing of all is that everyone ends up at the same place (life/death), having 'taken' their own 'journey'. It is as if one has arrived at one's own 'spot' (see Castenada). Should I even think about this, or is this disturbance the actual issue, this slow delay about warm inner glows and delusions. We want (see para. 7) so much. And why do we detect uneasiness when another withholds, why are we even watching? And what does to-watch mean, in the infinitive, in the learning of language: I watch, you watch, she/he watches, we watch, they watch (see para. 7). And with *Oráculos*, as with other Theatre, one watches all the way.

The wound and the taint: Zahid Dar puts *Khol Do* in its artistic and political context *Khol Do* (The Return), Battersea Arts Centre, June 10

How does one interpret or use a classical dance form to tell a new story, one that is relevant to the Indian Diaspora, rather than a traditional religious tale which may also be of value, but a soft option in the sense that it may not challenge the community dogma and, worse, may fuel prejudice? This is a question asked by many new Indian dancers who are classically trained. Breaks with traditional story-telling techniques have been made by contemporary British-Asian choreographers such as Shobana Jeyasingh using Bharatnatyam and, to a lesser extent, Nahid Siddiqi using Kathak. In eliminating the orthodox costume and make up of Kathakali, but also in her choice of subject matter, Maya Krishna Rao makes a welcome addition to this modernising principle.

In his classic short story, *Khol Do*, Saadat Hasan Manto deals with the communalism of the partition of India in 1947. Trains travelling between Amritsar and Lahore would depart packed with people hanging onto the sides and sitting on the roofs, but would arrive at their destination with their entire passenger load slaughtered.

As we have witnessed recently in Eastern Europe, history repeats its unimaginable horrors, re-named as ethnic cleansing, as if somehow the mere act of re-naming sanitises the atrocities human beings are capable of. In the re-telling of *Khol Do*, Rao's solo performance in a British context is a sublime experience.

An aspect of classical Indian arts is that an artist may present nine *rasas* (moods or flavours) during the exposition of an improvisation or rehearsed set piece. This range of feeling usually allows an audience to

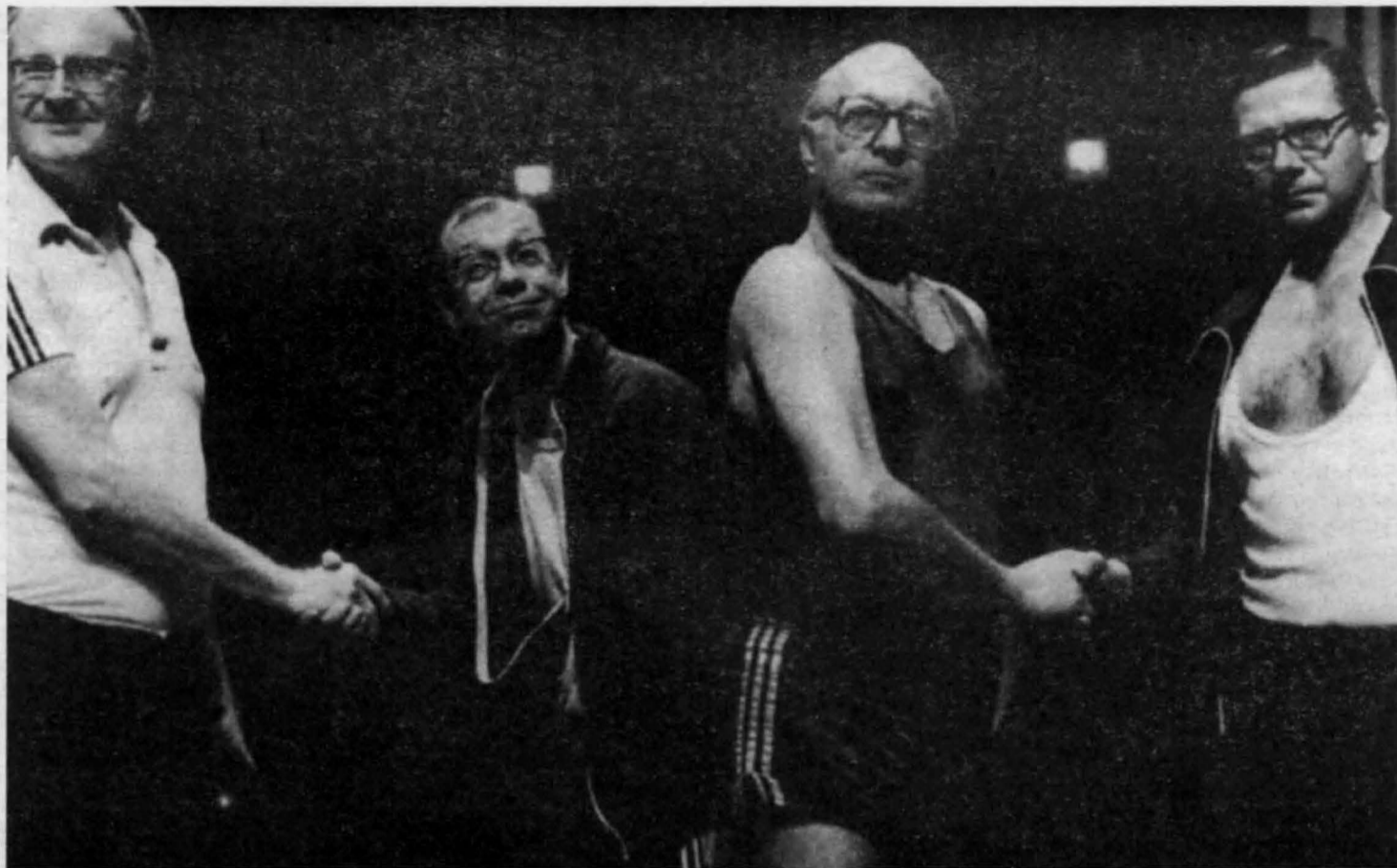
empathise with a work on different levels. Maya Krishna Rao's opening minimal gestures are executed with the technical precision of a classically trained dancer and, enhanced by Gavin O'Shea's sound design, evoke the atmosphere of an Indian train journey. Overall though, I felt the emotions expressed in the work were limited. Viewing *Khol Do*, I felt the pathos of the father separated from his daughter and the desperation of his search, but not his love. The motif running through the performance is the daughter's expression of fear, Rao's gestures of fright being expressed to effect in Kathakali *abiniyah* (visual expression) of *mudras* (hand gestures) and facial movements, in particular, the eyes. The *nritya* (pure dance) element here was minimal and I thought could be developed further to convey a feeling of space. Instead of restricting the performance to the confines of the strong red central dais, it would have been liberating to see some of the explosive Kathakali movements outside this sacred space, in perhaps the profane space of the margins around the dais. Rao's Kathakali *nritya*, both in footwork and poses, transmits a high level of energy and consequently, is more convincing in delivery and reception than the earlier slower movements.

Maya Krishna Rao is courageous in dealing with the subject of ethnic violence during the formation of Indian and Pakistani national identities. The bloody wound that opened up during Partition never healed and is now being salted by fundamentalist Hindu, Muslim and Sikh factions in the Indian sub-continent and supported by the Indian Diaspora. The religious premise for this sectarianism is again raising its ugly Janus head. In order to hold on to their imaginary homeland in their respective mother countries, Asian communities in Britain are unfortunately now more sharply divided than ever. In this respect, one welcomes any artist who transgresses absolutist ideologies. The general disclaimer that Asian communities in the West make of this type of work, especially if it has been created by migrant Asian artists, is that they are not speaking with an authority which is authentic—"the Asian community is not like this". They refer to the artists' "non-Indianness" for hybridising European and Eastern artistic aesthetics. The artist is thought to be tainted by the vagaries of Western political, social and artistic preoccupations. British-Asian artists are described in the Asian community press as having lost their roots in adopting modes of telling their stories or using new forms to re-tell old stories.

All that flows: Keith Gallasch goes with *Stunde Null* *Stunde Null*, directed by Christoph Mathaler, Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg, Queen Elizabeth Hall, June 12

I feel oddly at home in *Stunde Null*, even if I don't know quite where I am or where I'm to be taken. Very little German or Austrian theatre reaches Australia—a smattering of local productions of Peter Handke, Franz Xaver Kroetz, Botho Strauss, Thomas Brasch—but some of us know it as well through Pina Bausch's dance theatre, recognising the musical construction, the sense of scene as image rather than narrative, the set as design-in-itself as well as of dramatic context, the actor as performer and as integral to a choreographed and choral space. Although anathema to the exponents of naturalism, this kind of performance attitude connects with the great non-western theatre traditions with their mix of the contemplative (that makes some theatre-goers restless with its rhythms and repetitions) and the cathartic.

For me, this is a theatre of reverie, of space with which to gradually engage, in which words share rather than dominate the space and the ear, in which personalities rather than characters emerge and states of being rather than character trajectories are lived out. In *Stunde Null* the space is a faithfully rendered old radio studio, save for the mark of contemporaneity in the set of modern microphones thrusting on goosenecks from both walls and into which the team of politicians-in-training mouth their platitudes of a regenerated post World War II Germany. This is also a temporary dormitory where grown men behave like little boys under-the-



Stunde Null

strict guidance of a house-mother (the beloved Mrs Zero Hour). Their ritual enactments of petty violence, joke telling, genital inspections, their training in waving, hand-shaking and ribbon-cutting, resonate with Klaus Theweleit's *Male Fantasies* (Polity Press), a thesis about the male culture and male education underpinnings of Nazism. He describes the rigid, authoritarian body as fearful of "all that flows"—bodies, women, other races, democracy—but as also enjoying its own controlled fluidity in sentimental songs and hymns, dirty jokes, parades and massive, flowing rallies.

The *Stunde Null* politicians are at once powerful (that is a given) and pathetic. Their sentimentality floods out in tears (in chorus), their contradictory messages of guilt and denial flood out in political and personal gobbledeygook. Loss of individual control is always covered (the one exception becomes discreetly isolated), loss of collective control is subdued by sweet, fluid, controlled Romantic hymning or pipes in mouths like babies' dummies. They are not fascists, but they are dangerous—all the signs are there. We know they will succeed; like Conrad Adenauer in documentary footage at the end of Fassbinder's film *The Marriage of Maria Braun*—they will sell their message to themselves, to Germans, to the world, and at the expense of many. And for that they are brutally satirised in *Stunde Null*, made pitiable for what they lack and do not understand however much we sympathise with the moments of apparent pain and doubt. They are (increasingly slapstick) clowns but they are also, in the end, sleeping beauties (the grim Grimm version read to them by Mrs Zero Hour after they battle their refusing beds) whose beauty will not wake, whose anima is trapped in thickets of proliferating microphones. That the opening and framing front-of-curtain speech is by a Helmet Kohl-like figure is a reminder that the lies of post-World War II live on in German politics and in the male body.

excerpt from: Ariadne@LIFT: Virginia Baxter Daily Dialogue, Royal Court Downstairs, June 10, with Enrique Vargas, creator of *Oraculos* and psychotherapist and writer, Susie Orbach.

Enrique Vargas is a man of the theatre who, inspired by the Happenings of the 1960s and then the installation movement, moved into new territory where he could more easily explore ideas like "framing silence" and "the intelligence of feeling". He spoke with emotion of the beginnings of *Oraculos* in childhood memory, of the way it was collaboratively created, how each chamber of the labyrinth is a "research laboratory" and how the whole thing is "charged" by the actively participating audience.

Being a little late, I missed out on a seat in the packed auditorium and was ushered instead to a seat on the stage beside the stars

of the show. It can only have been the setting and this odd re-positioning in the black box that made suddenly urgent the need for stage business. So I found myself copiously noting the language of the audience who, given the opening, wrestled the Daily Dialogue topic ("Trust: The Intelligence of Feeling") from the hands of the usually indefatigable Alan Read, forcing him to play Kilroy Silk ("Thank you for that") while they recounted their personal tales from the labyrinth.

People talked about losing themselves and being taken, being held—glaring at Ms Orbach—"unlike psychoanalysis". They talked about moving from distrust to total trust, of being lifted, of fearing, feeling safe, of falling, of being wonderfully alone and yet linked to some collective consciousness, a virtual community; in an embrace, in states of lucid dreaming and near death. A blind woman spoke of it as one of the most remarkable experiences of her life. Others went so far as to suggest "radical uncertainty" and even further, something "revolutionary" and "not like art". There was a momentary pause in the flow when someone asked what happened to participants who transgressed (a desire expressed by many but contained by most) or ran amok. One of the actors explained that if people got too involved, they would be ushered to another chamber, another theatrical experience, or in extreme cases, evacuated from the labyrinth. Simple as that.

I missed the real experience of *Oraculos*, but from the audience's language I pieced together a work of theatre with more interaction and sensuality than your average theatrical experience. I also sensed a kind of longing which set me thinking whether the Royal Court's architectural solution on display out front with its rather small Studio Theatre Upstairs could adequately contain a labyrinth. Days later, watching the exuberant *Things Fall Apart* uncomfortably contained within the gilt proscenium of The Ambassador and, earlier in the week, Anna Viebroch's wonderful set for *Stunde Null* just squeezing into the Queen Elizabeth, my fears compounded.

excerpt from: *Dangerous Attractions:* Wesley Enoch *Things Fall Apart*, LIFT 97 & West Yorkshire Playhouse, Royal Court Upstairs June 13.

What role does 'attraction' play within the appreciation of performances?

Things Fall Apart is storytelling enlivened by physicality and sensuality. With the danger of a circus, the spectacle of dance, the anthropology of the other, this piece seems to beckon a familiarity with the audience which at times overrides my need to understand character development and plot. Actors slip in and out of storytelling roles, woven together with narration. I sit in my seat at the Royal Court Upstairs and am transported, not to the bushlands of Africa, but inside myself. The

percussive rhythms in sync with heart beats, the movements of bodies evoking responses in my muscles, an intense sexuality pumping through my veins.

The "blackness" and the "otherness" heightens the attraction. I want to draw similarities with my own struggles/histories but resist the generalisation of black experience. My body keeps me engaged with the work, I want the performers to make eye contact with me, I want to be involved, to sit in the circle. The "exotic" is captivating. In conversation later with fellow RT writer, Indhu, we continue an argument about ritual and traditional material in our work. Do we use these signifiers of difference to attract an audience or to truly celebrate our cultural heritage? In the extreme, I see tourist-oriented performance which manipulates traditional Aboriginal cultures to elicit responses of sympathy or to romanticise and homogenise for political and financial gain, but rarely as an accurate representation of the diversity within communities.

This is dangerous territory and open to misunderstanding. I am aware that the image of the Nigerian body, the ideology of the "noble savage" and "authentic" experiences are contained in my reading of this work and I allow myself to wallow here. My attractions disarm my other faculties for a time and on walking home I realise I have left them disengaged and wonder at my motivations.

excerpt from: Indhu Rubasingham on *Authenticity and the Search for Form* Daily Dialogues, Royal Court Upstairs, June 9 & 12

Cultural diversity is the by-word of LIFT. The festival presents London with insights, forms and expressions of theatre from all over the world. It offers the British public other ways of looking, seeing and, hopefully, gives us an opportunity to re-examine ourselves and our own context. Optimistic, I know.

Not only do we have the work itself but the Daily Dialogues at the Royal Court Upstairs which offer the opportunity to find out what is happening in the space between the audience and the performance. It's illuminating to discover the premise that if we (the audience) don't see it, then you (the performer) have got it wrong. But I wonder what is it that we actually see? Do we see what we want/desire/need to see? Is the work being offered to us as a challenge to our perceptions or are we simply confirming our pre-conceptions despite the work? Taken out of its context, do we drown work from abroad with our own meanings?

At the Daily Dialogue on Monday June 9 ("Distant: Discovering the Other") examining the Antipodean experience and in particular, what constitutes the Australian identity/body and how that body perceives the British body, the contexts and identities sounded strangely familiar. The words may have been different

but their use was the same and highlighted for me a fear of any homogenisation of national identity. We learnt from the speakers (Sarah Miller, Robyn Archer, Wesley Enoch, Keith Gallasch, Josephine Wilson) about the diversity and fluidity of Australian identity expressed artistically in a desire to reflect, examine and deconstruct itself.

Of course, we agree wholeheartedly, don't we? We don't believe in the swaggering Paul Hogan, g'day mate, kangaroo-riding, wombat-shooting Aussie. We expect a more complex, disjointed experience, don't we? We're certainly complex here in Britain.

But then three days later...

The desire to see "authenticity" in work from all around the world came starkly into the Daily Dialogue of June 12 ("Belief: The Power of Ritual") with the creators of *The 7 Stages of Grieving*. Even when performer, Deborah Mailman and director Wesley Enoch said that the piece was created from their joint experience, some of it was real and some fictitious, the tenor of the questions asked and not asked, palpably indicated an audience desire for these people to be "authentic". It felt as though they wanted them to be holding the future of Aboriginal vision in their hands, to come from an absolute sense of knowing—not to recognise their art as revealing or searching and drawing from an eclectic variety of cultural sources. Our desire for authenticity was far stronger than our need for seeing. We wanted to be educated rather than to examine, to seek answers rather than to question. Does personal projection swamp and suffocate work in an international festival? Do we expect the 'other' to remain static while we flow from thought to thought, move on or discard as appropriate?

What I noticed is how much we need an Indigenous Australian company to teach us what it's like to be them, to give us an authentic representation of their lives. It was hard to accept that this work was eclectic in form and content, to know that both the experiences presented and the form of their expression were not homogenous, that this was theatre, not therapy.

How much shared knowledge of a nation do we need to understand the nuances of its culture? What prevents the work on show at LIFT from simply becoming cultural exhibits? Do we need to accept more responsibility as an audience and perhaps a wee bit more humility?

Collective grieving: Zahid Dar
The 7 Stages of Grieving, Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts, Battersea Arts Centre, June 5-15

I arrive at this performance with fear and trepidation at having to write about a work by fellow black artists and knowing the larger burden of representation placed on coloured or black artists globally. It's a double bind: one's own community demands an accessible and authentic representation of a particular culture; the mixed audiences for the works expect form and structure associated with contemporary art practice delivered with the authenticity of black artists rooted in cultural specificity. The struggle to meet such competing demands is a problem for diasporic communities and can lead to major difficulties in new work.

The 7 Stages of Grieving manages to work on both levels and with a passion that is sometimes frightening. It is beautifully staged. Its compelling storytelling is not conveyed as the narrative of one protagonist but as the narration of the Indigenous people of a continent. Kooemba Jdarra's aesthetic is a hybrid of Indigenous oral and physical storytelling traditions mixed with the multi-layered textuality of current Western theatre practice. There are many stories entwined in its collage of visual, vocal and movement imagery.

On stage a large, suspended block of ice melts onto a mound the size and shape of a grave filled with red earth. The ice has a visible internal metallic structure, a foreboding of something terrible that may be released—a time bomb.

When will it happen? What horror will be unleashed? Will the force be nature, capitalism or colonialism or the junctures in history where all that is solid melts into air, and leads to a path of wholesale destruction or decimation of land and communities?

RealTime at LIFT97

• from page 45

Deborah Mailman's performance is captivating, she draws you in and doesn't let go until she leaves the stage. The stories she tells are revelations that are deliberately manipulative, provoking, compassionate, forceful and funny. The performance becomes a collective grieving: it explains the grieving stages of Australian Aborigines and at the same time, allows the audience to personally experience that process of pain, loss and sorrow, not as some kind of denial of history and oppression or even suppression, but as catharsis. It allows us to engage with history and the experience of a people and to believe that there is a recuperative dimension which enables reconciliation.

Breathing in, sitting forward: Virginia Baxter
Go Go Go, Juliana Francis, ICA, June 19

A composer-friend in Sydney who works with silence, believes that people hear music before it happens. Here at LIFT I am developing a theory along similar lines that it's the audience who decides when a performance begins. You watch, there's a collective moment before the lights go out when expectation overflows into silence and my theory is that this signal and not the stage manager's cue activates the performance. Before Johann Le Guillerm landed in his sack in the centre of the ring, the audience whispered a spontaneous "ssshhh", a signal to Cirque Ici that they were here too. Throughout the performance, they applauded in small bursts, reminding those of us who were trying to forget that we were after all inside a circus tent where one act normally follows another, though Le Guillerm and his company of musicians had something more continuous (perpetually momentous) in mind in this clever piece of new circus. Fortunately, there are limits to the powers of the audience, proved here in the final moments when our combined breath could not extinguish a candle in the centre of the stage. Only the performer could swallow the flame and end the performance. New works like these activate audiences, implicate them. Opening night of *Periodo Villa Villa*, the crowd had no control over De La Guarda. In this work, created to energise and wake-up a crowd, the audience became an entity. Submitted to herding, stifling claustrophobia, like children they (it?) let out an "ooh" when the lights finally went out, sighed collectively at the lightshow above their heads. At the centre, helpless, hosed with water, fondled and hoisted into the air, they gave themselves, mouths raised for angel kisses, seduced by the performers to become the performance—for an instant. Meanwhile, at the edges a growing number of us silently skirted touch and eye contact, activating complex peripheral vision to steer clear of total immersion and watch the wildness above and the mayhem in the centre of the room from a distance, like an audience.

An audience has a sense of itself. One of the pleasures of watching *Things Fall Apart* was being inside a crowd which included a large number of British-Nigerians who uttered sounds and clicks of recognition. On the other hand, I had an uneasy feeling in the opening moments of *Stunde Null* when some audience members signalled their annoyance at others who picked up early the irony in the formal, flowery opening speech of the actor before the curtain—hissing "What's so funny?" Interpretation aside, audiences don't even see the same things. Among the peculiar perceptions of *Stunde Null* revealed during the Daily Dialogue with dramaturg Stefanie Carp, was that the work was full of Nazi impersonators. Here I suspect the audience member had brought some other performance with him and slipped it in like a contact lens. He also perceived the performance was half an hour too long and offered this opinion to the dramaturg as advice. This sounded rude to me, like saying someone's sentences contain too many syllables. Presumably such observations are based on some internal audience body clock which indicates the proper time to be accorded to a visiting theatre company from Hamburg. Though I didn't immediately respond to Saburo

Teshigawara's *I Was Real—Documents*, I would not begrudge him one second of his time. In fact, I was willing to wait all night to see whether this dancer's own idiosyncratic movement vocabulary would really add up to a choreography for a company of ten. This performance didn't deliver on the night but then the day after the performance, in a conversation at my door, a piece of it fell into place, so it takes time.

Watching Juliana Francis on stage watching the audience enter, I sensed her fright and ten minutes in, could almost smell a mix of hostility and empathy from the audience. She is a frenetic, loquacious performer who looks like she could just keep go-go-going forever, so complex is the experience she is unravelling. But, see, context can snatch an audience's attention. Talk is a problem with American performers working outside the US. Americans have a reputation for talking too loud and too much and this can get in the way. In the post-show talk after one and a half hours of gruelling performance, Juliana Francis said that only on the advice of her mentor Reza Abdoh did she write an ending for this work. In *Go Go Go*, as the performer turned herself inside out, constantly on display for the audience, I sat forward and backward in my chair—as well as having the potential to be moved, an audience has its own kinesthetics, it moves. British-Nigerians in the audience for *Things Fall Apart* nodded throughout the performance. Even further into *Go Go Go*, I sensed that Juliana Francis had got inside the audience and was splitting us in two and that this was no bad thing. I don't think it's simply a matter of 'identification' (that particular audience response could do with a book) or personal connection with the material. No, I was on her side from the beginning and it wasn't the rawness of her revelations that pushed me away. I am more easily attracted to understatement, so this performance sometimes seemed over-wrought, over-acted, over-written, and most of all over-theatrical—she grabbed at costumes, wigs, scraps of music, visual tricks, lights, walk-ons, curtains, magic tricks, effects, video clips, grabs from Japanese movies, from *The Three Faces of...Joanne Woodward*, 50s sitcoms, advertising images—here some missing context to be guessed at by the audience. Juliana Francis grew up with images from popular culture which needed some translation—not much: benignly malevolent father figures like the Weiner King, Oscar Mayer are pervasive, though the information about Jerry Lewis's telethons which exploit and patronise the disabled while raising money for Muscular Dystrophy research, required greater leaps of the audience's imaginative powers. But audiences can be imaginative athletes too.

What brought me forward on my chair, was the scale of this performance. In attempting to illuminate the damage of sexual molestation on the psyche and body of child and adult, Juliana Francis uses everything in her power, every trick, every tug at the audience to try to describe what Nancy Riley McVittie referred to later as something indescribable, unnameable. "Like an artichoke", said Juliana, you just peel and peel to get to the heart. She refers to her text as a skeleton, a map, a guide for a performance. She speaks of sharing rather than choreography, a desire to touch, to set off moments of recognition or understanding in the audience. She speaks to those who have been through the same experience and to those who have not. She talks about displaying herself for the audience and allowing herself minimal privacy on stage. She claims this work is not didactic and while I don't agree, it doesn't really matter because the depth of this performer's personal enquiry is inspiring, her writing so good and the performance so fevered that it forces this audience member to enter another's sense of time. Like much of the work offered at LIFT, this work requires the audience to respond in new ways. Though she projects fright in her Rapunzel persona at the beginning of *Go Go Go*, Juliana Francis says she loves watching the audience enter, noting their handbags and their coats, watching the way they sit. Here, she says, she feels she gets to know each one of us. I hope she could feel me breathing with her.

Loving the Peace: Gabriel Gbadamosi
Periodo Villa Villa, De La Guarda,
Three Mills Island, June 19

It's the first time that I've seen any public event involving Argentinians since that drowning war when my sister and her children went in fear. Someone had daubed "Argies live here" in guttural, ugly paint on the side wall of their council flat. It felt good that De La Guarda and I waited until that government was out.

They hung like corpses, drenched and dredged up to the ceiling, or stood on temporary, rigged platforms under pouring water calling, calling, calling. I wept for them.

I saw women and men in civilian clothes (knickers, skirts, ties—subterfuge in mufti, you could shoot them as spies). And a world in whose mores I would like to live—their kissing and hugging strangers in the moment's trance of eye contact and desire. (The next moment we may have to kill.)

My friend had just made a film on concentration camp survivor, Simon Wiesenthal, when the doors closed on the claustrophobic crush and gas started coming from above. I turned to apologise and couldn't see her. They didn't make it easy on us. I wanted to call out, "I don't want to live here".

Then the room opened, and there was air, and we were loving the peace with the drowned waking above us and running through showers among us with (it's in the detail) their socks fallen around their ankles.

from the ceiling. A childlike sense of watching a thunderstorm roll in over the ocean and breaking on the Land; the fear of destructive power, counter-balanced by excitement and relief. The dance and music engulf me. The performers now unleashed from their harnesses hold the audience, hugging, kissing, encouraging us to dance. The energy I want to unleash is being played out in the space above my head. Women running up the wall, this is my Batman fantasy. Drenched and dripping, they pound the rhythms. This is nightclub, rave, concert, theatre, spectacle. I have no head space for theory here. This performance would not be possible where I come from. In Queensland, at our request to burn a few leaves for *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, the authorities went ape-shit, at one moment threatening to close the show. The laws (internal and external) that govern us would require so much compromise, but here I revel in this moment. There is no danger here, no personal danger that threatens my body. The danger lies in what I will expect from the theatre of tamed lounge chairs and fake velvet curtains. Euphoria.

A Sharpened Wit: Gabriel Gbadamosi
The North, William Yang,
Battersea Arts Centre, June 18

William Yang is a wonderful lecturer. You hear every word he says and there is nothing you do not understand, however far it may be from your experience or imagination. For a



De La Guarda's *Periodo Villa Villa*

Untamed audience: Wesley Enoch
Periodo Villa Villa, De La Guarda,
Three Mills Island Studios, June 18

The audience is crammed into a small space whilst the humming through the speakers grows to a drone and then a tune. We are illuminated by the reassuring exit signs; above us a paper ceiling defines the space as cramped, low, capped. Upward gaze; these words look very optimistic here. The vertical is the space for performance. The performance begins with the angelic/devilish sight of backlit sprites casting shadows on the ceiling. Balloons, toys, fluorescent splatter spots fill the paper with joyful play. They are above us, beyond the ceiling, in another world, but we have access to this world. The ceiling is removed. Removed is too passive a word; ripped, dragged, sliced by human missiles, making the world above our heads available to us. Tickertape pours down from the heavens.

After the storm cloud of paper has passed, the performers are precision drivers doing daring manoeuvres except with no cars, no roads and no helmets. WARNING: Do not attempt this at home. Six hundred people, all of us thinking we are as close as we can get, find the space quickly when water gushes

Black British person it chimes beautifully (his voice rises at times like a swinging bell—it tolls for me): he is an Australian in a Chinese body, a Taoist and ironist, a delightfully waspish commentator on things Chinese and Australian and public and personal.

His delivery is formal, restrained—in bow tie and dee-jay—a gentlemanly combination of the Westernised and Oriental. His voice has a dry Australian wit, biting into the (God forbid) preconception that such a body could not possibly have shared a northern outback upbringing with eastern European immigrants. To a backdrop of slides (he is a prize-winning photographer with no fear of dying bitterly ignored), he takes you on a journey from termite-mounds outback to oriental rock gardens. He is terribly upfront, and apologises for any discomfort with a wry personableness that makes it impossible not to like him. Out in his public persona, he never gives you his back, but can't resist a little bit of side: Good! I don't have to see you again...

The angle of vision is important. He recounts an early tale of southern folk from his northern fastness. Of a man who shaved every day of the week. A tale of soft folk. But when the lights came up, alongside his microphone stand was an image of his lecture notes: a shaving mirror angled to see the

images behind him. All that time he had been preening himself, looking at images of people and landscape in the formation of William Yang. He is enjoying his body, its jokes, its *trompe l'oeil*, its narrative economy, its discreet charm, its bristling wit. He deserves to hold himself in high regard: he holds a knife at his throat—one slip and the blood of China flows from his veins, a moment's inattention and he falls from his own esteem. I never saw anything so beautiful or so finely judged about the person or the place.

"Why," I ask Bev, who gave me my first job in theatre, "can't we do that?" "It starts," she says, nodding, "with the imagination." I ask William Yang if he cultivates a relationship with the land in "a flourishing garden" like his parents. He dismisses the question with a cut of his hand. I trespassed; the piece is poised, and in balance. I caught a flash of the blade. "It starts," she says, "with the imagination."



Utshob

Undivided: Indhu Rubasingham
Utshob, Trinity Buoy Wharf, June 21

Terrible weather threatened *Utshob*, the site-specific community performance. The rain poured down on the audience as hundreds of young people streamed forth, dressed in the colours of the rainbow. Bhangra music and sweet-smelling incense poured out of the warehouse, transporting me to other, warmer worlds.

A fusion of musics turned to foot-stomping, hand-clapping as the stream of young people from 5-18 years old invited the audience into the warehouse. The space was covered in sand and decorated with candles, incense and adorned with vegetables from all over the world—beautiful.

What ensued was organised chaos. One friend said, This is how I imagine India, colour, noise, bustle, distinct routes impossibly entwined. Exactly, I laughed. Music thumped, different groups danced, sang, told stories, competing to be heard. Very young kids wisely whispered their stories to the audience with such a generous energy that I found myself suddenly moved to tears, even though I'm not sure why. Older ones told stories of people perceived as mad but really torn apart as Partition ripped India apart. Another group spoke of personal freedom in a more contemporary setting—the right to wear what you want etc. Papers on the wall were scribbled with multiple meanings for the word 'Freedom'. Hundreds of photographs of students with candles beneath each face adorned another wall, becoming an altar to their passion and energy which vibrated through the room. More dancing and singing invaded the space.

What was special about *Utshob* was the feeling of unselfconscious celebration of multiculturalism, the joy and unmanipulated interaction between young people all looking at what freedom meant to them, personally and globally. As I left, I wondered about the source of the piece—the 50th anniversary of India's independence, a catch-phrase applied to many Asian art programs made in 1997. I

wondered what my forbears would have made of their grandchildren celebrating their efforts and victory in the country they were fighting with and striving for independence from—the irony of the largest temple outside India being built in London, the huge community of Asian people settled in the UK in the last 50 years, the influence that this community has had on contemporary British culture, the trend-factor of ethnicity in the 1990s.

Air/Space/Dreams: Richard Murphet
(with thanks to Jenny Kemp)

I was Real—Documents:
Queen Elizabeth Hall, June 19

Documents of the time when I was real—for I am no longer?

The first thing that happens is that a black box sitting centre stage slides, seemingly under its own volition, to the edge of the space. A moment later a carpet, previously jutting onto

Julian Francis in *Go Go Go*

stands, holding one another like Tristan and Isolde, forever crying goodbye. The last image is magically simple. Two women are centre stage, in a clearing of light. One squats, looking out front, cocks her head (she saw something/remembered something?), looks front again. The other lies, elbow crooked, head in hand, slowly lowers her head onto the ground, then sits up again, then down. Alice lies listening to her sister reading a story, she falls asleep. Perhaps this is where the dreaming began?

Hearing: The heart, here, rambles on
(Part One): Linda Marie Walker

The festival is almost over, and 'over' is large, somehow, larger than expected, as although time runs out, memory doesn't. At the end of any affair there are shadows. And now, with the anxiety of having to write ebbing away, the shadows are darkening.

The shadows are alive, like the virus in my body this past week, having its whole life-time there, noisily ghosting me, reminding me that desire for wellness-of-heart comes from sickness-of-heart. And it struck me that every work I have seen in LIFT is about sickness-of-heart. Is about heartbreak. Is about shadows in the heart. The heart was starkly present at the *Step* project Daily Dialogue (June 23). The young London dancers mentioned it again and again, the word came easily from their tongues. This heart is the weather-beaten, beating heart, it's the one that matters to itself, it's the murmuring heart.

What kind of knowledge is wellness, is sickness, is 'heart'? Something worried me from the beginning of LIFT, in a good way, in a gripping way. For instance, I wanted more of my books around me, I wanted their protection, I wanted my heart protected by the company I love, from home. It was clear that many questioned strands of my own life and practice would arise, and I was not prepared, I was alone. I could not succumb to *Oráculos*' warmth' or accept *La Feria*'s 'generosity'. They could not console me. It seemed an elision was occurring, a sleight-of-hand, and it also seemed that this elision was central, maintained. I was out in the cold. It worked, except for an ongoing half-formed question. Like being at the Daily Dialogues and wanting to say or ask something, but being in another dream altogether. A bit like turning up, stepping into the right dream, as the 'chair' says: thank you all for coming. Then late at night, after a wine or two, the words make a whole sentence and it's too bad. This sickness-of-heart is a powerful creature. Work (theatre, performance, writing, dance, visual art, etc) is made, hungered for, from this heart. The sick-heart must cry. It calls to be well.

But I am affected, imbued, by what I've seen. I'm disturbed by it, overall, at the instant that I recognize it. As it tells about despair, demand, resilience, regret, and awesome reserve (and recognition is unexpected often, it depends whether one is ready or willing, it can be so minute too: a hand held out, the exchange of a glance—oh, how one longs to pursue that pleasure); William Yang talked about 'recognizing' at once what one had never seen before, not the 'thing' of it, but it itself, its relationship with 'me'.

De La Guarda appeared a glorious celebration, but hear their energy, their claim to be present, to create, to be the crucial, risky

artists they are, and you hear the earth and the sky forced open. Nothing will hold them. They push and pull for love and sex, for connection. That dance they do, beating the platform with their feet, their feet are drums; I have rarely been so bodily charged, drenched by the liquid which seemed to gush from their flesh. I call this 'desperate'. This is a sensuous telling, which at the same time as screaming joy, is screaming pain. It cannot be otherwise. You saw the shadows above right from the start, like I did. You saw the body slam into the lush bed, like I did. Oh sure, give me gifts: not likely. (See Part Two and Three on our website.)

excerpt from: Dance among equals
(cabbages and kings): Zsuzsanna Soboslay
Go Go Go, Juliana Francis, ICA, June 19

I am a woman, graced with two breasts and two pairs of lips; I pass through museum portals, run wild on heaths, crave music, write. In seeing your theatres, I have been variously cooked, touched, fried, chastised...and dissolved, made less than I am. What do you think of me?

As a child, held in the O of my mother's arms, I suckled, pinched, wavered and wailed until the edges became clear and different parts of me learnt the world. My fingers landed on the toy, legs on a chair, my breast at table examined by its edge, the rest examined by the mirrors of the world.

And I became adult, making toys, colouring with brushes, crafting the stage. My art of living is meeting the world. With tools, I am equal to the methods. I am Real, my separateness matches the separateness of these others, my skin touches wood and shapes it as it teaches me.

I have learnt to come, to meet. When I come, it's not only with the cry and suck of two lips. I am equal to it: I am I and s/he is s/he and there is abundance speaking within/around me. My lips speak to each other and another, speak me. This is a very complex bliss. (And when we do not come together we are assured of our differences, s/he to me.)

And then I see *Go Go Go*. Crippled to a stop. What is a woman? Nothing much, Juliana says, except an endless play of roles. "There's nothing here," she wails, holding a mirror facing out from her body, the most accurate picture of the effects of violation I've seen.

Facts and figures support her hypothesis, that victims of child abuse figure high as sex workers and gogo girls. She learnt it young: this is a half-lipped body dancing. This is a piece about One who Cums, not two. The abuse to cum in bliss whilst unvoicing another: Do not speak of this, my unequal, sealing her lips (whilst tearing those others open) and rendering her partial, crippling...

The violated self splinters into bits: the peep show box revealing arm, leg, lips, and tits...The body no longer hangs together, there is no One (and hence no god of larger things: the earth, the air, the round 'O' of a trusted world).

I wonder about this literalness. The strip, the body, the tease...She speaks, but whilst her moister lips re-enact, the drier ones and dry teeth hiss the smaller world. This is death, to speak only of and to some parts. Francis replicates this death. The silencer of the gun. And because I know this silencing, because for me this is a re-violation of an old offense (I, too, knew the scene, foresaw the rest), I again struggle to re-member a way out of this.

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Who is this enactment for? For those who know it, sadness, a recognition of pain. And for those who don't, how does it change the world? For me, a reminder of the force, larger than the story, is important. What else accompanies the huge meanness of the world?

LIFT and the cosmopolitan body: Keith Gallasch

Part 4 of "New images, new bodies"
(see website for other parts)

I have been on an expedition, a journey into new body space, the beginning of an inquiry. *RealTime's* involvement in LIFT is part of the newIMAGES cultural exchange between Britain and Australia throughout 1997, an attempt for each country to read the other afresh, to query inherited, often colonial images. It's as if we have become strangers, formed other relationships and have met to see how we've changed. We listen to how the other speaks, we're alert to gestures, feel the touch, register the body, the skin and the space around it—all quite familiar but very strange.

1. *A cosmopolitan body.* The LIFT program appears, at first, not to be British (excepting The Mary Ward House story and West Yorkshire Playhouse's *Things Fall Apart*—and what kind of British is this with its Nigerian content and American director?). But LIFT proposes a British audience interested in culturally diverse works from many countries, not just from the former empire. It allows young British dancers to work over a very long period with Japanese choreographer and sculptor Saburo Teshigawara. Education Coordinator Tony Fegan speaks in a Daily Dialogue about surprising cultural similarities between the island cultures of Britain and Japan. Elsewhere in the program, LIFT embraces former colonies—black South African teachers and students in the Phakama Project. It's not always easy to reach out and touch those bodies—Tony speaks of the extreme difficulty of getting 'ordinary people' funding and passports to get to Britain.

2. *Divided bodies.* In *Utshob*, (London school) children including the diaspora of the Indian subcontinent, collaborate with Indian and Bangladeshi artists on the subject of Partition (fatally divided bodies) in a beautiful, un-selfconscious spectacle of historical re-enactments and reflections on life here. The cycle of performances gently fuses traditional and contemporary (popular) dance, music and sculpture. This is cosmopolitanism with a continued sense of responsibility towards former colonies, to those who moved here, to a sense of history and the encouragement in young people of a global view—through their singing and dancing bodies. LIFT presents an ideal British body, a body of culturally diverse bodies that can speak to each other openly in London and across the world. (It entails a young body—most arts festivals separate that body off into its own junior celebrations at other times, in other places.) Whether or not a secular festival can bring together divided (religious) bodies is a question that hovers on our lips, wishing the answer impatiently. Is *Utshob* a reply?

3. *A fluid, hybrid body.* Homi Bhabha argues a need to "get away from a view of culture as an evaluative activity concerned primarily with the attribution of 'identity' (individual or collective) and the conferral of 'authenticity' (custom, ritual, tradition)". He proposes that "culture" is less about 'expressing' a pre-given identity...and more about the activity of negotiating, regulating and authorising competing, often conflicting demands for collective self-representation", "a process of articulation rather than 'authentication'", "of changing norms as represented in hybridity". In a country fixated on institutions, LIFT offers fluid interpretations of bodies and cultures through reflection and through generating new possibilities through intra- and inter-cultural collaborations.

4. *A wounded body.* This is a country still hurt by the surrender of empire, a condition that Margaret Thatcher exploited, opening the wound, in a general xenophobia and in the staging of the Falklands War. A wounded body can also be a cruel body and a self-lacerating body—it believes to be cruel is to be

kind. The welfare state was abandoned. This was Thatcherism, the culture of the Bad Mother, and many artists I have spoken with are wounded by those years and cannot believe they have ended. Consequently, the election of a cautious Labour government makes for...

5. *A cautious body.* At the Daily Dialogue on the *Step* program (with choreographer Saburo Teshigawara), one speaker saw the dance work as celebrating the possibilities of individualism, not, he said individuality. This individualism he described as the dynamic between the individual and the group (Teshigawara is a liberal exponent of the Japanese version of this). Individuality in Britain, he said, had become a dirty word in recent years. Clearly, he didn't want to speak of the collective or the communal or the political. Instead he finely tuned the semantic of 'individual'. The *Step* program, appropriately, is a meeting of bodies with languages connecting in its wake.

6. *An optimistic body.* LIFT's programming, its collaborative ventures, the tenor of its Daily Dialogues, its marketing strategies, all suggest optimism, not as a message but as an experience—through the senses released (*Oraculos, La Feria, Periodo Villa Villa*), the participation in the generation of new works (*Utshob, Invisible Room*) and the witnessing of culturally diverse performances not fixed by authenticity or tradition. But the celebration is often predicated on an acknowledgement of...

7. *Being sick at heart.* (See Linda Marie Walker, this edition). How many works were about the damaged and abused body (colonial, Indigenous, child, female) or the body trying to find its place (*The North, Journey to the East, Ramzy Abul Majd*) or the body fashioned by culture (*Go Go Go*) and politics (*Stunde Null*)? The title *The 7 Stages of Grieving* says it all—here are damaged bodies, broken hearts, struggling to recover. The physical images of *Periodo Villa Villa* may have been thrilling but the slightest reflection will recall the number of them embodying struggle, pain, helplessness, endurance ("awful and awful" wrote Zsuzsanna Soboslay) with only passionate and fleeting embraces...and a murky climactic battle between a suited man and his naked doppelganger hanging beneath him. Behind the work, as revealed in the Daily Dialogue, *Periodo Villa Villa* is shown to be part of a cultural struggle in Argentina. The performers speak not of content, however, but of going straight to the body of the audience, to ask what they can do to it and for it, setting it loose.

8. *Body and process.* The fluidity of bodies (performers and audiences across and between races, cultures and psychological conditions, in circus and spectacle and intimate one-performer works) in the LIFT program is mirrored in the emphasis on process and open-ended forms. Juliana Francis (*Go Go Go*), De La Guarda (*Periodo Villa Villa*), Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman (*The 7 Stages of Grieving*) and others, all described the evolution of works by many means, various inputs and influences. In a number of works writing was only one possible way into creation, process was often long, and the work subject to revision in performance. Christophe Marthaler told us that *Stunde Null* was a rare work of collaboration in a playwright-focused German theatre—its achievement only possible because of acting ensemble strength and an ongoing relationship between director, designer and dramaturg. (*Stunde Null*, remarkably, was created in ten weeks.) On the body of the audience, see *Breathing in*, page 46, Virginia Baxter.

9. *The city in the body.* LIFT ambitiously attempts to generate a sense of festival in an enormous city, but it is built not on embracing an impossible many but on the opening up of sites, fascinating in themselves (Three Mills Island, Mary Ward House, Trinity Buoy Wharf) but also possible venues for future performances—a LIFT gift to Londoners, an opening out, a deepening of place, a reminder of where you are. It also uses the South Bank and the Royal Court, populating them with formal and cultural strangers.

10. *A slice of life: a body of parts.* How can LIFT be anything but—as someone called the arts festival concept—a slice of culture(s)? LIFT faces the problem of most arts festivals, it occupies a moment of the year, every two years. This could yield a provisional, inauthentic body, a body of parts. But you can see the attempt to build and grow the LIFT body, recurrent guests (Christoph Marthaler, Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry, William Yang,

Christophe Berthonneau, Maya Rao, Saburo Teshigawara and others), to engage in long term projects with artists and communities local and international. These offer LIFT time beyond the festival moment, inviting artists and audiences to return. The mystery is, how many of the LIFT audience see how many shows? How many enter the LIFT vision? How many sites become part of their being?

11. *Translating bodies.* Someone asks, have you seen much British work? The answer has to be no in an international arts festival like LIFT. But I've seen an innovative British arts festival at work, and that is telling—with the bodies it displays and conjures and the issues and images that stay with me and in me. The names of our fellow writers here—Gabriel Gbadamosi, Zahid Dar and Indhu Rubasingham (all so generous with their time and their words)—are also telling. I catch myself unconsciously slipping into their voices. They strike me as British, but not. That is new. But what that means will take time to take shape. Seeing *Ramzy Abul Majd*, a Palestinian rendering of Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (synopsis-following; memories of seeing the original in another festival; and successful guesswork driven by the production's easy naturalism) reminds me how much of LIFT and being here in London has been an act of sustained translation and interpretation, of questions answered and unanswered.

12. *The class body.* Despite the air of cautious post-election optimism, I keep encountering words and assumptions that speak of limits that check creativity, that inhibit, and the final reason given for this is usually class. Discussions about exciting developments, ideas, possibilities, are often checked by class, the final word, and the speaker seems surprised to have said it, as if the body has thrown it up, an involuntary but necessary act. An ITV series on class ends with a kind of sad-happy acceptance of the class condition. Someone said to us, as we trudged through the rain across Clapham Common after seeing *Cirque Ici*, that the British are surprised if it rains in summer, and they're surprised if it gets really hot. An Englishman eager with idealism, in a Daily Dialogue, encourages the black South African speakers not to institutionalise the good work they are doing, to maintain it 'for the people'. The Africans look bemused and one explains that while their work might be bridging a gap between middle class and working class blacks, white audiences will not come to any black theatre.

13. *Bodies for sale.* Over red wine at Le Beaujolais (a home away from home) near the Royal Court Upstairs, Julia Rowntree of LIFT and I have a long discussion about sponsorship. Julia's story (which I will reproduce in *RealTime* in Australia soon) is a remarkable one of a search not just for money for the arts, but the means of bringing the commercial and the public sectors into the arts, encouraging more than patronage—understanding and openness. This is a long process, the rewards not immediate. The Spring issue of *Untitled* (Number 13) includes Jonathan Jones' "Thatcher's Children", a bleak rider to Julia's struggle: "The autonomous gallery scene in London was born as a mutant version of free enterprise". We Australians look on anxiously as our conservative government cranks up talk of flexibility, accountability, performance agreements etc, wondering what kind of artist-marketers we will have to become.

14. *Talking back.* *RealTime* has enjoyed engaging with LIFT97, providing another voice for audience and artists to take home, erasing critical distance. We've also enjoyed our readers' enthusiasm and approval. One person did say we were indulgent. Of course we are. How else do we find out what can be written? Of course we indulge ourselves by writing 'I'. We are writer-artists, not journalists. We don't have a myth of objectivity to propound.

15. *More surprises.* It's interesting to look at press reviews for LIFT. While most of them are favourable, and despite the fact that LIFT has been around a long time and has won awards, there is a sense of surprise, that these strange things (works, places, projects) are happening in this city. The corollary in some of these pieces is that LIFT is good for you. This reminds me that LIFT is not a huge festival, that it is distinctive, and that compared with theatre programming and other festivals, it is adventurous, alien even, at home in London, but an organism within that keeps worrying at, creatively irritating the bigger body.



Wesley Enoch, Indhu Rubasingham, Zahid Dar



Virginia Baxter, Gabriel Gbadamosi, Richard Murphet



Gabriel Gbadamosi, Richard Murphet, Keith Gallasch



Zsuzsanna Soboslay, Linda Marie Walker

RealTime at LIFT: Editorial Team

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More on LIFT in the next issue of *RealTime* on the subject of cultural exchange and the newIMAGES program.



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