The national arts August–September 1997

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 Documenta 100 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 Weeke in Adelaide, Jode 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 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 LIFT97, 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 LIFT97 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 Gifts 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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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 relationship between nature, museums, galleries and other types of visual arts institutions. We have all come to realise that the role for exhibitions and the development of ecological paradigms in the arts is significant. In this way, we have come to understand the concept of the political role of the environment and the role of nature in the development of cultural and economic capital. Studies in the make-up of these spaces of the seen may even be considered as a form of ecological way of life, 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 focus the role of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, an exhibition space we necessarily associate with the legitimacy of significant cultural and political capital. This is an official State site which sanctions authenticity on visual arts productions. Where Perspecta is most important though, is in the way it slaps together the play and slippages that go on between this legitimising housing of art and the very spaces that it creates. Generally speaking, Perspecta is not an event for the showcasing of emerging artists across Australia, artists who would not be taken seriously in different kinds of spaces, and whose exhibition history may otherwise be quite limited. These other spaces have neither the cultural capital nor the potential for exposure of an environment like 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 own processes.

Hence Perspecta has tended to become an event which draws out in some relief the vulnerability of that which both merges and slippages to the spaces of the seen, and determines limits to the recognition of those objects we refer to as art. If it has the potential to have a certain issue of 'environment' in attempting to delineate some agenda points for Perspecta, this is principally to emphasise the emergence of an environment which 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 cooperation 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 theme has been chosen not around the role of the art as the focus, and has attempted to present a more complex series of foci as the spaces of the seen. The theme this year is that of the between-ness of art and nature, with the following terms by Victoria Lunn, Curator of Contemporary Art at the AGNSW and coordinator of the whole project: "The new relationship between Art and Nature." Accordingly, this year the AGNSW and Perspecta has allowed for the diversity of expansion that characterised previous Perspecta, while also exhibiting an expanded set of events that have discrete identities. While individual exhibitions are smaller than the early Perspecta, 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 AGNSW by the Sydney art scene, 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 conclusions 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, Simry Gill, Fiona Hall and Tanya Nolan. This week is presented as five installations responding to the relation between cultural expression and our interaction 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 November 12. And finally, there is a secondary schools program addressing the exhibition theme, in conjunction with the Michael & Patricia Hill Institute, the Art and the Royal Botanic Gardens.

Other significant events take place in August. September at Art Projects, the Australian Centre for Photography, with Boonall Aboriginal Artists Cooperative at the Royal Botanic Gardens.

Campbelltown City
Bicentennial Art
Gallery, Casula
Powerhouse, the Ivan Dougherty Gallery,
the AGNSW
Contemporary Art,
the Museum of
Sydney, the
SH Gallery,
Performance Space,
College of Fine Arts,
University of NSW,
the Architecture
Faculty, the
University of Sydney,
and the
University of Technology, Sydney.

Australia: 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 imitation). There is also the doubling of the nature of 'nature' whereby one can use an expression such as 'the nature of art'. 'Nature' does not provide the one hard and fast context for producing the concept of visual arts practices, 'nature' here being a dispersed series of concerns and registers. Ecological imperatives, invocation of a land leased and privileged by Indigenous Australians, sensuous apprehensions of sound and form, critically contrasive 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 points to make. Firstly, it’s not 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 some take 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 have some criticisms.

The media release for Australian Perspecta 97 suggests that "that which lies between Art and Nature can be mediated, an intervention, a conversation 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 contains all the signs of power, of affect or work. An implicit priority is presented for the givenness of the entities ‘art’ and ‘nature’. The possibility of engagement is precisely the possibility of inhabiting that ‘between’ as an agency or force. However, to think this situationally may require quite a different approach. Indeed, to begin to consider that there is an ecology to the...
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 them. 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 might a major contemporary art event around this non-art theme? 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 scrapping around for art to fit the bill? (These remarks must be prefaced by the fact that they respond to the curatorial premise of Perspectives and are made in advance of the exhibition itself.)

On the other hand, the title hints at some connection 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, it is clear that art and nature have 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 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 realize 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 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 artist works "as are those that run from the buds to the retina". (Norman Bryson, "Semiology and Visual Interpretation", Visual Theory, Painting and Interpretation, N Bryson, MA Holly & K Mosey eds, Cambridge, 1991) Bryson's comment on perceptualism is that it reduces the artwork to an artificial, seamless coherence, devoid of any of the loss of representation or the social world.

As far back as the early 13th 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 shun sheer nature and instead extract only its best qualities. Artists, in effect, should abstract from nature; they need to follow a formal form. Under no circumstance should an artist follow a literal perception of nature because that meant obeying it in all its intricacy. To follow nature blindly is wholly unesthetic. 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 Romanist scholar, Arthur Lovejoy, attempted to survey this variety of meaning (Arthur O Lovejoy, "Nature", As Aesthetic Norm", Modern Language Notes, Vol. XLI, 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 the ideal, standardised models), the disregard of rules and precedents (free expression, feeling as spontaneous and therefore more 'natural').

To confuse the issue further, what '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 and 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 banded 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 we view our art and nature rely upon a symbolic idealisation which emphasises nature as primitive 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 romantic thinking. This might not seem surprising when dealing with the concept of 'nature', but Benjamin found it inevitably avoided the notion of the 'naturalness' of nature—namely, decay.

Decay is an inherent feature of nature, but one which we have difficultly 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 "extraordinary simulacrum" of nature, its overemphases 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 creatively domain of historical-natural understanding. This means shrugging off that part of 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 paradigm 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 fulfillment. It is this because 'between' of art and nature remains a void that Benjamin proposes to wean us from, and obtain a group of cosmic proportions, by means of the traditional antitheses of nature, technology and history. In technology, he argues, a new "physics is being organised", but this is only possible if we realise that "technology is the master idea that lies behind 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, 1983) In effect, Benjamin might warn us that we are at our most impotent when we presume ourselves most modern 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 insert 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 archetypal body part still remains even after it has devested 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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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 Spectra is a surprising event taking in not only the usual Art Gallery of New South Wales—but also Casula Powerhouse, the Royal Botanic Gardens, The Performance Space and many other cultural institutions which are 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 (either as precept or process); Romantic affinities with nature; early and late Modern abstractions from nature, and so on. But is the outcome this year? The spread of concern is somewhat different: some will be tackling ecological issues (Harry Nankin, Australian Centre for Photography), others will be hailing a new era of artifice (Patricia Piccinini et al., Museum of Contemporary Art), and there are more, a more spiritual, perhaps even deep-ecological, turn will be evident at the SH Ervin Gallery, Jannu (Jeanette 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 special form of thematisation for our relation to the environment.

First of all, what almost amounts to a tradition in Sydney of women installation artists whose work is concerned with our cultural environment: Jean Brassil, Jeanne Gould, Robyn Backen, Joyce Hinterding, Anna Graham, Simone Manges and Janet Laurence; perhaps also, almost all of these artists are involved in this year’s Spectra: Brassil’s work, Where Yesterday May Be, and Gould’s view at Campbelltown City Gallery; Grounds and Backen are both showing at Ivan Dougherty Gallery (A Place in the Landscape), involved in the collaborative multimedia installation at the Museum of Sydney, Harbourings: Remaking Sydney’s Industrial Landscapes; and Laurence is in installation at SH Ervin, Temple of Earth Memories. It is the example of their work, or more to the point, the way it isprovocative, which 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 and richer critical history. 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 it as a set of isolated, unrelated moments as the removal of bounds—the ‘dematerialisation of the art object’ (Lucy Lippard or ‘anything goes’ (anywhere except Taylor)—Krauss posits modernism as an historical rupture in artistic practice which is not only a material transformation, but also an expansion of the terrain of its emergence. Postmodern sculpture becomes, in her hands, the exploration of sculpture’s others: the things that sculpture transforms but is not transformed by, lies within the expansion. Yet in this retelling of the logic of artistic change it also becomes clear that these ‘others’ are also 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 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 flits 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 interrogation of ideas, as relevant to the recent literature on installation as it was to the discussion of sculptural practices in the 70s (see, for example, the historical survey by De Oliveira, Oxley and Petry). The tendency then, as now, is to seek the meaning of recent practices in a quest for historical precedents: to 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 our 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 is also a decisive shift from the modernist concern with the autonomy of art, to art with a more encompassing view. The register 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 retains the reference point in this refugited account of installation. One could say that in the expanded form of installation, nature 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, work rather than being separate from it. The form (or relative homelessness) of this approach thus lends itself to the contemplation of our surroundings. Indeed, installations can incorporate the surrounds of the 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 by 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 at the Museum of Sydney foreground, Edge of the Trees (1994) and Joyce Hinterding’s recent installation at Artspace, I-Tone Aesthetics of the Ecological.

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 temporary, and conjures up the fleeting and the evanescent: it reveals an unshaded and invisible electro-magnetic environment. The work is made only in the extraordinary capacity to illuminate the notion of ‘site’. Far from the Edge of the Trees/Piece is about very particular sites; 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 two 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 differently close to up. The signal distance the installation emphases the integration of the museum about Sydney, into the fabric of the city: 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 the present intervenes: this is experienced when one enters the work’s narrow space. The viewer is quickly absorbed into a world of soaring poles of treated wood and steel— which simulate a dense grove of mature trees—downward the viewer is a strong light to explore the grove: to read and to find and identify the pockets of substances within them. The complex interchanges of dyads (First Fletchers’ 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—add to the strange mixture of...
The nature of sound as art as sound
A brief guide to sound in Perspecta 1997

PERSPECTA 1997 has committed itself to sound, to sound arrangements—"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 sound as well as atavistic ways of thinking about it as an 'acoustic ecology,' and of looking at visual art through sound.

Listen for and look into:

Sound Frames: A Guide to the Artfulness of Nature "An acoustically-tuned 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 tend to forget how important it was thought an important part of the agenda to get people to look through listening." Presented by The Listening Room, Art Intermedia Network, throughout Perspecta 1997.


PERSPECTA 1997 features 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 tend to forget how important it was thought an important part of the agenda to get people to look through listening." Presented by The Listening Room, Art Intermedia Network, throughout Perspecta 1997.


Catching a wave
Anna Dzenis details Harry Nankin's creation of a shadowgram

I'm trying to overcome the limitations of the landscape tradition of making visual arts, in broad terms, not just in photography, because it is predicated historically on the separation of human experience from 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 variation...it is all about what human beings can get out of it whether that material like coal or gold or an aeroplane, a sense of beauty...I am dissatisfied with that. That is not me is part of the problem. My interest is an ecological exposure, an engagement with the world...the shadowgram for me was one way of achieving that...

Harry Nankin

In the middle of Melbourne's summer, photographer 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, live-size image of an ocean wave breaking on a wild seascape, directly onto photographic paper. This was made by immersing a 25 square metre raft of black plastic floating photographic paper in the sea at night and exposing it to flash and moonlight. The result is a photograph of the entire wave, a darkroom image frozen in motion—a detailed negative picture of churning sea, foam, kelp and debris. The nature of sound as art as sound with the boundaries of environmental expression has lead 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 Catschus to the marine realm, to the sea

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

You wouldn't believe it. It's the week before Yom Kippur and I'm already crowded with people... at night. They have so many layers of clothing that they look more like over-sized peasants than men and women. So, what are they doing here, on this deserted beach near Cape Schanck?

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 photograph is concealed in three pieces attached to netting. This netting has been stretched taut on a wooden frame, five by seven metres in size. Two boys are dropping these papers into the netting, through the damp sand, guided only by a thin moonlight.

This story 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 wavered thin paper thin.

Shlemiel art

Please excuse my own 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 13,000 Jews were sent to Sobibor death camp. Before then, it was famous for the naiveté of its inhabitants. Chelm is home of the ahdov, 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 ahdov.

Do you know the story of the tailor Reb Zelig?

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

No one has ever observed a fact, a theory or an experiment that could serve 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-theorems" so vaunted by philosophers of science.

The old Testament does not call itself a "wave" but a "current". In the Old Testament (now called the "First Testament") there are specific contracts made between people and the creator. One of the most interesting of these is the "covenant of salt".

And conviction of dry meat offering shall thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from dry meat offering: with all those offerings, thou shalt offer salt.

Leviticus bk 2:13

According to an interpretation in the Mishnah, 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 that a salt cellar be placed on the altar in sacrifice. (http://www.rabid.com/) 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 salt land on salt beet, and the Dutch sailed the world on salt cod. For Harry Nankin, the salt and the wave surge forth to the edge of the world, applying force, as it were. 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 Lament: the sea salt, Label and Ada. Pedley's art is strategically designed to highlight the threat to Endangered species and natural heritage through the inexorable forces of economic rationalisation. Her meister of plater 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. Here is a Calabash-like art that bathes in the inexorable tide of progress.

Cat

It's past midnight. It's 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 waves surge forth over the frame, and as the wave reaches the frame, the flash goes at just the right moment. For a second or two, everyone relaxes, as much as it is possible to relax at dusk. Underwater photography as a moment of relaxation is long enough for the backsplash to apply force against the paper... and...crap. The seaward section is torn in two. For that moment, I feel like I've been a bit of a wet blanket. I present disapproval to him. To me, it seems a fitting conclusion. Through this poetic act, of bringing together the magical and the mundane, Nankin 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 website is at http://www.realtime.net/kevinmurray/
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 Streeter’s Silent Dam and Mount Donna Baug, AD 2000, painted in 1997. The dam has now become a notorious hydropower project in the Narrabri area, which has become a focal point for environmentalists. Streeter 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 prompted by this impending watershed. In the run-up to 2000, the biannual 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 Wolseley recently declared, “about the way we live”, then the subject of this year’s Perspectives is timely in the sense that “the way that we live, and, 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 throughout history, Perspectives has the potential to stimulate thought, discussion and action: art can, for instance, take as its subject human society, which reflects social 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 was the 1997 bombing of the US Embassy in Beijing, which featured in a Green 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 Documenta 8. 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.

As art is championed by Suzi Gahlkik 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 grapple toward different activities, attitudes and roles than those that operated under the aesthetics of modernism” (Gahlkik, 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 Michaela Cawley 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 Perspectives 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 Ecoscience Foundation, proposed another step—through the preparation of situations and experiences that consider oneself an artist. The Ecoscience Foundation proposes creating new situations through imagery and language in order to gain discussion and written comment, and declares that imagery needs to present pragmatic solutions. In her recent project Waste not Waste (1996) included Samantha Donnelly’s and Helen Pynnon’s construction Mapping: Motions—You have a home, without belonging. This work comments on the treatment of human faces as waste and presents various alternatives to the degradation of edible natural matter into sewerage and out to sea. The construction includes a set of small metal boxes filled with composted human faces in which plants grow, offering an environmental and practical solution to the disposal of human ‘waste’. The Ecoscience Foundation does not categorise the objects created for Waste not Waste as ‘art’ and the ‘art’ of these objects was intended to be “supplemented with conversation, to be written about and written over, to be re-worked, recycled and re-used in other ways”. As Tony Fry comments, “Contrary to initial appearances, the objects should be regarded as means not ends... Rather than the creation, the made, these objects were brought into existence in order to re-create, remake” (Fry, Tony, and Willis, Anne-Marie eds, Waste not Waste, Ecoscience 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 Dungogs 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 exhibition was a fine example. Greenpeace took the ecological theme one step further and encouraged visitors to reflect not only on the subject matter of the images, but also on the materials used. The winning entry, Ziv Cohen’s sculpture Trap No More, is a protest against the production and consumption of fossil fuels and comprises found and recycled materials, including a large rusty lob, a half-cylin-der.

Of course, Greenpeace are less renowned for their genteel art shows than their dramatic media events, which illustrate the potential of art and protest. As Charles Zuber has suggested, Greenpeace activists “could be the first to produce engaging art for producing challenging theatre pieces enacted with the involvement of mass audiences, and which often made use of the available materials”.

The Re-enchantment of Art, actively rearing hands, or creating, is a focus on one of the more important political concerns in Australia today. In contrast to the spectacular histrionics of the war movie, Hall poses a quiet, reverential, almost meditative view where the very materiality of these virtual replays of ‘video-tape’ has been deconstructed.

Fiona Hall’s Slash and Burn forms part of the Perspectives exhibition Webcast of the AGNSW from August 2—September 14, along with works by Simryn Gill, Stephen Holland, the Arnhem Land Weavers and Lauren Berkwitz.

Fiona Hall, Slash and Burn (detail)

Juli a Jones has recently researched the nature of visual imagery relative 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 Perspectives.
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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 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 recognize 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 we did what we did 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.

 LD 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 rigorous 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 Mincer has described at 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 studies and practice 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.

 LD 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 that 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 recognize 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 what it's about at all; it is founded in movement. It has strong systems of movement education as 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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Helpmann Academy
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 art 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 is 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 work, 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) reigned 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 as 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 field, not in the direction of thinking of that particular 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 rigor, 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 Cyberstorm, 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 Brejk Theatre over the last couple of years and we’re now working in 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 and the commissioning and presentation at the Festival of a new play by Janis Balodis, called Double Take, which explores the extensive use of video in live performance. But the Brisk model is likely to be the correct one. Here we grew 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 engage 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 committee, 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 technocratic mindset taking over other sorts of outcomes? Is it 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 that. 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!
Music technology: synchronistic studies

Di Weckes 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, $1500 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-hour-a-day-practice routine simply didn't have the time or interest to re-learn.

Besides, it was all too hard and too expensive. Meanwhile, self-styled musos with little or no formal training have usually avoided themselves of an increasing variety of hardware and software, from the latest synthesizers or PA systems to the most user-friendly sequencing packages. So much so that, when they front up to audition for TAFE's new Certificate IV 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 gazing 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 postgraduate courses), TAFE buses 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 under which Flinders Street and 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 creation, and a more humane approach to credit transfer. Adelaide composer Peter McIwain lectures in the subject Music Technology for both the University of Adelaide and TAFE. He regularly teaches his University students at Flinders Street, where the music and 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 wish to build 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 courses 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 range of contemporary musical experiences including 20th century Music Language Studies with Diana Harris, whose classes have provided the initial stimulus for the teaching of contemporary music at Adelaide's younger composers. Accelerated learning is fostered, and negotiated projects allow individualised development of ideas 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 impelled by their lack of computer skills, or their institutions with a keen interest in 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 tailor their options to suit patterns of composition, electronic music, audio-engineering or multimedia production either within the TAFE sector, at the Universities, or in the private sector.

Whereas Music Technology is visited by most undergraduate music courses in one way or another (the education stream), it usually flourishes at the postgraduate level where its co-existence with other arts forms largely depends on the interests and availability of specialist staff. Graduate diplomas are offered in Composition for Film 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 of not a special diet, and students enrolling in TAFE courses can usually expect a hearty meal. Those in search of re-accrualion should be replenished in order to readjust their aims and re-direct their efforts, while those seeking further 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 and Flinders Street and Adelaide University's PATU is a healthy sign. PATU boasts a superb recording studio based in 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 WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) curriculum in Music Technology with clear signposts to employment in the year 2000 and optimal detectors 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?
Disorientations

Convenor Rachel Fensham reports from the Australasian Drama Studies Conference 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 student bodies well for the future of theatre research in this country.

The 'keywords' 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 theatre theory combined with a strong 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 concludes, saying, "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. Hurley'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 poets" of Japan that he perceived to be the dominant ideology. He illustrated permutations of this debate in his presentation of three companies of the Japanese New Wave: Hirara Orizawa's hyper real "quest theatre" and the deconstructive, more critical work of Dumb Type and Dekidan Katsuba.

The discussion of 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 "Box 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 himself 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 insoucy 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 expectation and the things you can't fake. But at the source of your life this is tender, vacillating thing called interest. Interest is sacred."

Bogart's talk galanced 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 Atlanta, 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 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 provides actors with a language for constructing the theatrical mise-en-scene from its elements such as architecture, repetition, speed etc. Whilst the participants began by exploring these through tasks on the floor of the rehearsal room, the watching and scribbling crowd of academics were nonetheless introduced to a new theatrical technique into the workshops of this country. For some theatre practitioners the approach was not unfamiliar, giving 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 concept of an actor participating in just getting up to move and the facile willingness of American actors to just try everything. The German word "Auseinandersetzen" 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. Questioning the obvious position, in the context of this conference, of being the symbol of white male European thought, his contribution to the elaboration of a theory/practice distinction in theatre studies cautioned against following the latest trend or "son". 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 quasi-prophetically suggesting that plus ca change the more they 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 'shh'. She explained that this was a gesture done by many Americans and that the dramaturgy of a director is to act as a shh, to stop the actors to repeat this several times over whilst performing a line from Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard. 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 Robert O'Hara passionately described his rewriting of the first city play within our region, by the great innovator of theatrical form, the 7th century Japanese playwright Chikamatsu. When Uchino was asked what he thought of this rewriting, 'tricked', 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
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 their carer, we rang Janie 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 had given 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 WAAAPA 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 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, Feldenkrais. 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 in 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 Pauls, Chrissie Koitai, Tanya Gersel 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 prelaced 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 creating 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 dropouts 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 Mousson 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 Vicastonisation of film education (OnScreen page 20), Dean Chan on the National Graduates Show at PICA on page 41, and Annemarie Lopez’s interview with Stephen Muecke at UTS on page 29.
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 this 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 is this 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 Slinging Alto 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, Maudal—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 run 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. Instantly we've plunged into a world of 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 unreall: 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 paintier of contemporary filmmakers—everything he puts on the screen is washes and smudges, spirals and passageways for the restless spectator's eye, tending towards a kind of lyrical, impressionist pixillation: the dancing lights on the water in 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 films *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 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
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 film exhibition - even if you go to the movies. 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. More and more, we are able to see the clout of Spielberg and Lucas to the cause of film preservation and the majors have twiggod to the fact that a significant market awaits re-released films. Under the guise of an interest in the 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 as relates to 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 Cinemateque 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). Interestingly things are planned for the new Film Museum opening in the beginning of 2000, the Mandalay hire one of its briefer films 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 Jacquie Brodie-Hanns has left the program of films or "prove Street concerned with the licence to lease" and would be starting up in The Movie Room Cinema in Darlinghurst.

So let it be seen that 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 set 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 certainly on an exhibition level, and also as I increase my exposure to film. Often I'll lead into "a mini horror festival, across the three days, kicking off with Val Lewton," whose planning screenings to celebrate 100 years of Bram Stoker's Dracula were planned. This prompted a nice tale of taking over the cinema only to lose it. Obviously it's a Melbourne conspiracy to keep Sydneysiders on the cinephilic outer. As they used to say in F Troop, "Old Chief not so good."

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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 set 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 certainly on an exhibition level, and also as I increase my exposure to film. Often I'll lead into "a mini horror festival, across the three days, kicking off with Val Lewton," whose planning screenings to celebrate 100 years of Bram Stoker's Dracula were planned. This prompted a nice tale of taking over the cinema only to lose it. Obviously it's a Melbourne conspiracy to keep Sydneysiders on the cinephilic outer. As they used to say in F Troop, "Old Chief not so good."
As it looks into the 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 programed for many of the country's 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 NLA 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 have concerns, however, especially those involved with the tertiary teaching of film. Dr Lesley Stem, from the School of Theatre and Film Studies at the University of NSW, voiced her particular reservations: will the new organisation be 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 it's in line with other NLA cuts, and the budget should sustain the reduced funding. However, John Smithies doesn't consider it sufficient, determined to establish national credentials, he insists.

Cinemedia, with its own extensive lending service within Victoria, was really the only organisation interested in taking over the collection, preferably without its budget and 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 by many of the film and video community early last year. NLA Director-General Warren Horton argued that this was in the best interests of the community, but that the video storage and maintenance was 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.

Cinemedia's proposal to store and maintain the two NLA 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 French 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 through a new arrangement 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 modest contingency budget is a result of the new arrangement.

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

SiEvents
dermier/electronic art projects by Sydney Intermedia Network Inc (SIN)

Here's Theatre, level 1. The Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW)
sunday 24 august 2030pm
In association with AGNSW: Australian Performance 1997 (founded by Sarah Fowlie) and with the production of a sound art performance of sublime manner by Social Interiors
Rik Rue, Shane Fahey and Julian Knowles with Peter Oldham on Circular Space, micro sonic visualisations from rainforest habitats
Saturday 4 october 2pm
ART RAGE
Networks for television by leading Australian artists
Including Linda Dement, John Gillies, Fiona Hall, Jon McCormack, Susan Norrie, Julia Bepp, originally designed for ABC TV's Rage
Saturday 1 november 2030pm
Metalux
Experimental/sketch film and video art from Western Australia
Chisel Cinema, cn Oxford St and Cradley Rd Paddington
Wednesday 17 september 6 30pm in association with Carnivale 97
Transvideo
New video art and documentation from Brazil, Chile and Argentina
Sydney Intermedia Network Inc (SIN)
director alessio cavallo
resource manager sarah watson
tel 02 9264 7225 fax 02 9264 5823
adam.watson@ozemail.com.au

0 NSW and Film and Video Office

National treasure goes to Melbourne's Cinemedia

Tina Kaufmann reports on developments in the crisis over the NLA's Film and Video Lending Service. Important film collection decided reluctantly that they must support as the only practicable solution the proposal that Cinemedia be chosen national operator for the FVLS. NLA Director-General Warren Horton argued that this was in the best interests of the community, but that the video storage and maintenance was 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. Cinemedia's director John Smithies was quick to point out that Cinemedia's own collection to be circulated as part of Cinemedia's proposal to store and maintain the two NLA 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 French 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 through a new arrangement 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 modest contingency budget is a result of the new arrangement. The National Library was also putting out feelers to find an organisation interested in taking over the collection, preferably without its budget, support was voiced by many of 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 by many of the film and video community early last year. NLA Director-General Warren Horton argued that this was in the best interests of the community, but that the video storage and maintenance was 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.
Feature

The big squeeze

Annmarie 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 positioned 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 "or'" a science course. Thus neither Labor nor Liberal governments attempt to influence tertiary activities 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 policy changes 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, there are some less expensive, more realistic filmmaking courses that carry no significant cost saving than cutting any media production activity with a related drop in demand and prestige for the educational body.

The largest uncontested 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, for the resurgence in this high quality film medium.

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 intake. There will be obvious pressure from unformed 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 $9,950 for a similar degree under the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS). Students who choose to work in film have to either find full 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 of 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 myths 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 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 Coalition's cutbacks to the sector are making it very difficult for all universities to bid for the necessary selective funding 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.

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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 Bulder, produced by John Crufters. 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, Cynus 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 Saaitrik.

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 funding 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 bad. 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 quest of verite 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 Gillespie 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 docs 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 federal 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 Pike and Michael Cordell talked about the way current cutbacks are making an already tough industry tougher. Filmmakers are now subsidising the industry. Pike’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 Fincollers) 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 tedium 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 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 displicate the paranoia that the ABC was, or ever had, only been interested in venture 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, in August and one in January and were also looking at some half hour films with budgets of $500,000-90,000, 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 scrump and save a lot to be able to make their films. A group of directors and producers where the lack of a crew leads to 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 is 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 9335 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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Review

New frontiers

Robyn Evans previews the 1997 International Documentary Conference

Preparations for the Fifth Annual International Documentary Conference are well underway, with Australia's documentary filmmakers geared 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 QDocx, 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 on the world stage of film production, and that this year's event will provide the industry with the necessary tools to maintain its 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 positive relationships with 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 of the conference's objective to make documentary filmmakers 'market-wise' is the immensely popular Docurnent. Here, filmmakers pitch their projects before an audience including an impressive cast of international and local broadcasters, financiers and sales agents. The pitchees give valuable feedback on the projects pitched and information on what, as buyers, they are looking for.

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

Docurnent is supported by sessions dealing with market realities in documentary-making. Other key sessions include a retrospective on the development of cinema verite, featuring screenings of classic films rarely seen in this country. The retrospective will be attended by some of cinema verite'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 Freed is 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 Freed 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 'Heaven and Earth', 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 QDocx on Tel: 07 3846 4567 or fax 07 3846 4529

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 realise I have spent using my days before I boil my kettle with nothing to do, just sitting 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 the current government's announcement of the four key principles for a national approach to online content, in relation to the need to ensure that "the internet will not be used for the promotion of illegal material or to organise illegal activity".

A joint press release from the Minister for Communications and Information Technology, Senator Richard Alston, and Attorney-General, Daryl Williams, proposes a "firewall" to protect Australians from "obscene and violent material and material which attack public order and stability". 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 ABC 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 graphs produced, broadcast within the objectionable content has already been filtered out by the censorship system. In the case of the internet, the objectionable content can already be effectively mimicked by filtering and parental control software such as CBEB/Radical, Surfwatch, Net Nanny, Rated-PG, X-Stop, Cyber Snooper, 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 not 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? Decision?

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 context for the "inquiry" framework: attempts to impose a broadcast metaphor on what are essentially telecommunication routes is dispiriting. It 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. What could be more telling than the knowledge that it is unworkable and will inevitably fail?

Alternatively, could it be that Australians are so 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 furbubbing 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 showdown 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 from the only starting point for reason, 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 opus postumous, one sees a somewhat vaguely mock-ceremonial, culminating in their surging forward to the camera, falling into an uncontrolled dance to the bottom of the frame. The music score continues, with the camera holding on an empty frame of the Roman arena within which a Sphinx-like statue is visible. Ruthlessly and rigorously affixed to the diegetic of their transposition of the Schoenberg text, the Straub/Huillet’s camera-blockingly 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 realises that the scene is far from ‘dead’.

The film is live. While sitting 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, pomegranate. It is also a reminder of how, when and where the machine body is to be allowed—to in this case exemplified by their privileging of live, continuous localised sound source.

Straub/Huillet are representative of an approach to film sound which has stippled the bulk of European sound design for the last thirty years. The realisation of the machine (in some cases, a politic of form) shapes film soundtracks to indecisively fuse the actual live sound of the on-screen action with the energy of the recorded performance in its original spatial location. Without resorting to what we might call 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 about 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, they are increasingly post-modern in the way they view the world today as the acceptable degree of naturalism and artificiality in film sound.

Michael Jackson ‘premieres’. As the hype and special effects hooh-hah resides, I am reminded of how little truly contemporary apparatus will ever appear sound and subject it to that oozing pool of audio-visual potential in the cinema. Ghosts stands as a unashamedly freakish pillar of bodily difference and sonic distinction. In the uncompromising work of Straub/Huillet, it ruffles the dust felt blanket which muffles film sound, giving rise to aural experiences and tactile imaginings.

But before discussing the sound design of Ghosts, let’s look instead at what things do to with ‘the cinema’. In its admittedly strained attempt to ‘be cinema’, Michael Jackson’s video clips transpose cinema. They do so in the pomo pit of pathetic allusions of quotation and appropriation; nor do they descend into reconstitutive historicalzed text. 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 pulses past experimentalism, beyond a cinema, and into a realm of reinvented cinema. Forget the skin of the alive, its fetishes optics and attendant photochemical grain. Listen to the colour of skin and the grain of the body.

Ghosts opens with a surfet of cinematic clichés typical of the rock video video: the revenge of our world of a spooky old movie on late night television. But instead of a crackly old turntable and a warbly orchestral recording is scintillating, panoramic, majestic. Listening to it in full stereo playback, one notices this kind of music rarely, if ever, allowing the film music mixtures. The specialisation is hyper-detailed; every instrument holds its own focal point, creating a sense of acute spatialisation that film convention would deem too distracting for a hammering narrative. The instruments dance across the stereo field so much that one experiences space more than sound. Such an aesthetic is born from the recording and producing of music, whenever film 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 presence and placement, as if we are at the turn of the century sitting in front of an orchestral pit of semi-mute live musicians in a dampened theatre. Ghosts creates a sharply defined spectral environment of sound within which the music is a by-product of the audience’s incorporation in the soundtrack. Here—as beautifully called by Japan’s Piziccato Five—music is organized by sound. This in itself would mark Ghosts as 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 and sonically fitting about like animated cowbots and flickering shadows. A series of thunder crashes (the upswings of the sound module) slams (the transgression of architecture) erupt from the soundtrack in complex figuration. Each event is a monolithic ground-shaking, space-, time-, changing phoneme, signalling an erotic transgression of forbidden realms. Upon entering the mansion, the orchestral detailing is swept up by a swirling movement of shifting bursts. The space is not something ‘live’. It is alluring, haunting, now inside the body of Michael Jackson. It is weird, it is strange, and it is like. 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, metaphoric nature of his home turf. Michael Jackson’s sense of his own being—something which most of us will only ever ridicule than understand its fundamental otherness—has consistently determined the sounds and images of himself which he mysteriously conjures forth and methodically sculptures. The transgressive potential 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 overwhelming the audience with 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 fertile roots that stem back to New Orleans Jazz and the explosion of Afro-American culture throughout the grain of the body 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-body-state.

But before Michael Jackson’s body 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 aligned himself with the slicker, streamlined post-funk of New Jack Swing. But instead, crystalline nature allows for something 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 fractual patchwork light years away from classical, romantic and modern form—because in funk, everything is held in place by falling apart. It is the aesthetics 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 person, and experienced in the sound design. But instead of a bravura space as gleefully as he recomposes his own face; he extracts sound as violently as he destroys his own body. In the being of Michael Jackson, a more absolute realm of sound and vision does not exist. He has left us our last 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 presents 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 productions which are 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

Sylvia Wilczynski
Tel (02) 94303915

SBS Independent Fax No: (02) 94303865

23 - RealTime - 19 October - 1997
AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1997

A CITY WIDE VISUAL ARTS EVENT
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

CONFERENCE & 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 4276

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-9pm
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 16 August, 2-4pm
The Art Gallery of New South Wales
Theatre, Level 4

Social Interiors: Spatial Circumference
plus solo performances by the group members
Ria 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 Medcraft
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 acoustic guide 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.
EXHIBITIONS

THE ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES
Web Sites
Anthem Land Weavers, Lauren Berkowitz, Simone Gill, Fiona Hall, Steven Holland
2 August-14 September

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR PHOTOGRAPHY
The Wave
Harry Nurkin
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 Kelroy, Bruce Latimer, Jennifer Leahy, Ema Lille, Megan Morgan, Ian Provest, Tony Schwensen, Ted Sinclair, Therese Sweeney, Joel Yarling, David Thomas, Arthur Trindall, Beulah van Rensburg, Regina Walter, Justene Williams
20 August–14 September

IVAN DOUGHERTY GALLERY
Between Art & Nature
Robyn Becken, 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-Snith, Janet Laurence, Deborah Russell, Hossein Valamanesh, Philip Wolfgarten, Judith Wright
2 August–7 September

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
Natural Selection
Elizabeth Gower, Lyndal Jones, Vera Moller, Patricia Piccinini, Ruth Watson, Louise Weaver
1 August–8 September

MUSEUM OF SYDNEY
Harbourings: Remaking Sydney’s Industrial Landscapes
1 August–15 September

THE PERFORMANCE SPACE
Screaming Green
Mark Joseph
13-30 August

The Performance Space Gallery

ii. Feeping 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 Glees
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

RE/A-PROBE
Rea
presented by Boommali 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 1444 fax 9221 6226
Daily 10am–5pm

Australian Centre for Photography
257 Oxford St Paddington Sydney 2021
ph 9319 9080 fax 9319 9087
Tues–Sat 11am–4pm

Campbelltown City Bicentennial Art Gallery
Cnr Camden & Appin Rds
Campbelltown 2560
ph 046 201 322 fax 046 201 063
Wed–Sat 10am–4pm, Sun 12–4pm

Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre
Cnr Casula Rd Casula 2170
ph 9824 1121 fax 9821 4737
Daily 10am–4pm

Ivan Dougherty Gallery
Selwyn St Paddington Sydney 2021
ph 9385 0706 fax 9385 0706
Mon–Fri 10am–6pm, Sat 1–5pm

Museum of Contemporary Art
1 George St The Rocks Circular Quay Sydney 2000
ph 9252 4033 fax 9252 4861
access
info line 24 hr 9251 5992
daily 10am–6pm
suits $8, concessions $5, members free

Museum of Sydney
Cnr Bridge & Phillip Sts Sydney 2000
ph 9251 9988 fax 9251 1717
Daily 10am–5pm
suits $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–4pm, Sat & Sun 12–5pm
suits $6, concessions & children $3

The Performance Space
199 Cleveland St Reifhelm Sydney 2016
ph 9998 7220 fax 9998 9903
Wed–Sat 12–5pm

Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney
Mrs Macquaries Rd Sydney 2000
ph 9321 8016 fax 9321 8085
Daily 7am–5.30pm August
7am–7pm 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 4776 fax 9351 3055

UTS Gallery, University of Technology, Sydney
Level 4, 702 Harris St Ultimo Sydney 2007
ph 9514 1284 fax 9514 1228
Tues–Fri 12–4pm, Sat 12–4pm
Co-operative Multimedia Centres (CMCs) emerged into the atmosphere at about the same time that the computers were destroying it. The atmosphere surrounding the newly identified 'clever computers' at the time contained the heady technology of 'new media' and all things digital—interactive multimedia, the internet and the wide world web. Australia, in the eyes of the government, had been at the end of the communication line for long enough and was determined to catch up with the rest of the world. The initiative would deliver global proximity, as well as a new employee training industry.

The intervention that Keating and Canberra wanted to make was announced in Competent Nation, that policy document which spoke in October 1994 of "being distinctly Australian" in the face of the "assault from homogenised international mass media" at 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 in a non-intersectionist, market-place government?

The mission for the Centres was to "offer education, training and professional services to state-of-the-art equipment and facilities, access to leading-edge research and development, and training in the handling of issues such as intellectual property and product testing and evaluation", to greatest effect. Each degree of each the locations have and are delivering in each of these areas, but with differing degrees of emphasis—"cryptic inventiveness" was the word used by Professor Guy Pethbridge, CEO for Starrf CMC and spokesperson for the Association of CMCs, to describe how the strengths of each enterprise are delivered. The mission statement of emerging CMCs was also manifest, evident, like many of the projects listed by each CMC.

Web sites are an obvious point of contact, but the large one of which are non-profit, and the QANTM site (www.qantm.com.au) explains in their flyer that they have been 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 former Yeatsworkshop has trained over 200 young people in basic internet skills. Indigenous has developed approximately 15 major projects and with the leadership of Chris Thandara 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 renewed interest in exploration application for 3D animation scholarships and the first 10 students have completed. QANTM Edge has five major development programs in the multimedia arena, all staffed by local contractors or individuals. CEO Olaf Meisner feels that QANTM's major development is a minor part of our activities, apart from research into five creative projects, which the government support 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. Starrf (www.starrf.com.au) focuses on the tooling needs of educationalists and trainers, and investigating design using the accumulating national experience of "distance learning". In a bid to change the face of their centre, the new academic year will see Swinburne University launch 56 courses, Griffith U still just behind, all distance from Australia's unique pedagogical expertise. "Western Australia is now poised to become a Mecca for digital 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 Internet and Television Institute established during July is DAS (The Image/FI 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 animation, virtual 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 activities.

CEO Mike Grant observes that "at this early stage there has not been a lot of interaction between technical and artistic researchers and artists". Another facility, the Imago Sun Research Centre, is also open and equipped with high-end animation equipment. "A variety of 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 in-home production, development, content development, and research coordination.

In early 1996 then last month received State Government funding to set up Stage Two—this includes ten high-end Apple MacPro 4600 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 that is setting the pace in gaining 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 workstations.

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 1999. According to CEO Kevin Mannen—surely an opportunity for vibrant links with Melbourne talent? On the web, the Site 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 the sterile series of projects 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 Pethbridge feels that it is the relatively low support area to 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".

### Review

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 the arts and science with an emphasis on interaction and participation. Conceived by the Queensland Multimedia Arts Centre, the event aimed to give Queensland artists to develop, realise and distribute multimedia art, the festival's hybrid of art, science, philosophy, 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 Art Metropoli, to entice the viewer in a perpetually evolving mesh of structures, images and sounds. A (seemingly) random sonic loop of granting, praising, laughing, and things brushing accompanied Mark Parslow and Bast Krib's In the Winderwen's Web. Its disjointed tones tied into the space around Nicole Voedov's mysterious cabinets. Cash Corpus #3, and James Larter-Peterson's animal senses articulated from the obsolete circuitry. Simultaneously menacing, cute and annoying, the soundscape was interwoven, prepended with great scope from Lucy Francis's wicked reworking of the knappi knob: Jackie C. Clicking on a screen that clicked forever, the provider views a catalyst for the assassination (and Jackie's pupils ricochet satisfyingly around eyes sockets in time with the shots). Gunshot, reverberated throughout the gallery, over the other content, that attended Benjamin Ellett's volcanic theme interactive photography. The intricate aerial and visual environment fluctuated constantly from the deface sculpture and interacted with installations. Elaborating on the possibilities of audience participation in a mixed media event, Giga Bash (Global Overlaydot) produced by Jeremy Hynes of MonEnTurn Multimedia, featured the manufacturer's video from 4-band of metres of alloy by Cyber Nauitias Performance Group. Members of the audience were strapped with video equipment with the added benefit of sculptures at 16 work stations linked to the internet, searching for visually stimulating material to the remaining station. Simultaneously, the event was filmed, remixed with audience-generated images from the net, digitized with other footage and extruded back onto a nine screen TV wall which was itself turned film and re-projected, condensing the media into a ultra concentric compound of film, projection, cyberspace and audience collaboration.

Metal framed novelist prints in Clear as Life at solar Space, the Plastic Energy dance party with visuals by Troy Innocent, music by Ollie Olsen and Cyber-femme Griller, and pieces of the diversity of the festival, providing additional opportunities for engagement and interaction with the art and technology. Workshops in multimedia authoring and the internet, lectures from Dorian Downe on the implications of multiculturalism hold the crowd, Troy Innocent on the possibilities of artificial life and video conferencing from New York with SIREN, a series of interactive installations and web designers in the GS and Australia, meant that eMedia avoided becoming a superfluous hodgepodge of events, achieving instead, a forum for erudite discussion of and energetic experimentation with multimedia.
Attaining information fitness

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

Catalogued, packaged and displayed, looking through glass at history. Corridors of locked cabinets within which are stored a panoply of specimens. In the gallery, through which we can only gaze. Down every corridor of this mighty building, on either side, butts up to every imaginable colour; shells the size of emus; skulls of men, women and children who knew well the primal dark; skeletons of beheaded heads; strange proportions—all protected within controlled atmospheres where humidity must be controlled, and there 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, 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 warworks 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 will not doubt be virtual, to be explored, perhaps more interactively, via another display case of sorts, the computer screen.

As we emerge into 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 projector with multiple lenses, a domed ceiling for a screen and reclining seats

was it all too. But it's going, perhaps to be replaced by something to the infamous CAVE, a walk-through virtual environment driven by two powerful ONXY computers and a number 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".

Keeping its foot literally in the nightclub door, Ars Electronica has founded and continues to host international forums from which it draws as conceptual fuel for itself. This year, from September 8-13, Ars Electronica mediates its annual festival and symposium. This year's theme, titled "Fleshfactor: Informationsmaschine Mensche", 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 interaction of the diametric opposites, man and machine, in the reciprocal, necessary processes of adoption 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

of the world over to contribute new works to the Prix Ars Electronica. This year, 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://prixeas.or.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. Claire Stewart—perhaps the insoluble puzzle box enigma of curating which, in the short film arena, poses curators 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, unencumbered by such issues? Well, it is.

St Kilda in Realtime 19 was all too. But it's going, perhaps to be replaced by something to the infamous CAVE, a walk-through virtual environment driven by two powerful ONXY computers and a number of 3D glasses. Sounds great doesn't it?

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

of the world over to contribute new works to the Prix Ars Electronica. This year, 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://prixeas.or.at/
**Review**

If this is is technohardcore, 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 Present Future'. It's a place very much a part of the popular French imagination, illustrated by the country's passion for comics such as Rint Korx 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 unrelentingly 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 is delicious—such as Max Headroom—20 minutes into the film. His Southern drawl looks and sounds like New York. The film's audio department has convincingly rolled along the ground. And The Fifth Element immerses us—drons us—in a city which has sped up to a rate which baffles us as much as 1950s 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 'Silwood' (Silicon Valley meets Hollywood) films like Terminator 2, Jurassic Park, True Lies etc, have laid the foundation for this genre. Silverlight, the large ground for films like The Fifth Element, which draws 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 storyboarders 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 speedbreak Xastix; western capitalist media-driven cybercity of right here, right now.


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

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—drons us—in a city which has sped up to a rate which baffles us as much as 1950s 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.

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**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 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 the concept of human rights. The production must be no more than 15 minutes and must have some relevance to the ideas of the need for human rights. Entries are eligible for up to two entries. The winner will be decided by a drawing of lots, and will be screened at December 8 & 9. For further information please call Amnesty International in Brisbane, Tel 07 3222 0223.

**Newsreel**

WA's First Digital Arts Studio  
The Image/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 arts 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 film and video, internet and multimedia, and on site and off site production applications.

The Digital Arts Studio does not only offer state of the art equipment and facilities but also new 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 Neust on Tel 08 9235 6535 or e-mail: rneust@image.com.au

Copyright for Visual Artists  
Introduction to copyright and contracts for multimedia & electronic delivery services for people working in the media arts including: sculptures, painters, craft workers, photographers, graphic designers. Sydney: August 13, Media & Entertainment Arts Alliance, 245 Duhem Street, Brisbane. Tel: 1300 22 22 22, Metro Arts, 109 Edward Street, Brisbane.

For more information call The Australian Copyright Council Tel 02 9318 1788; e-mail: gc@council@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 version of new digital media arts from around Australia. The initiative will provide on exhibition outlet for interactive online arts and foster the creation of new works.

Applications are sought from new media artists who can opt to use the infrastructure of existing digital projects as a starting point. The initiative will provide an exhibition outlet for interactive online art forms and foster the creation of new works.

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**New Media Distribution Consultancy**  
The Australian Film Commission is due to publish a report aimed at finding strategies for the development of new media works. Marketing, Distribution and Exhibitions of Interactive Media will be published in August, and will be authored by Rachel Dixon. For more information contact Kathy Legh, Industry and Cultural Development Branch, AFC, Tel 03 925 4444, e-mail: kleg@fcs.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 9357, e-mail: anat@tamtech.net.au.

The Amnesty International Bombard  
Sharon's Fiscal Festival  
The Bombard Short Film Festival is an opportunity for short filmmakers to exhibit their work and explore the concept of human rights. The production must be no more than 15 minutes and must have some relevance to the ideas of the need for human rights. Entries are eligible for up to two entries. The winner will be decided by a drawing of lots, and will be screened on December 8 & 9. For further information please call Amnesty International in Brisbane, Tel 07 3222 0223.

New Media Laboratories: Production and Studio Equipment Support  
The Australian Film Commission has purchased 14 high-end multimedia production computers from Apple for exhibition within screen resource organisations around Australia. The computers have been supplied for artists to use at: Perth, Film and Television Institute; Adelaide, the Media Resource Centre; Sydney, Media Television, Open Channel; Brisbane, State of the Art. The JAC has also provided digital video projects to the above organisations as well as Sydney Intermedia Network and Experimenta Media 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 act of writing 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 Technical College. 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. His voice is carefully modulated; occasionally there is a flicker of irony, a brightening of the eye, a lightness of touch. His manner reminds you of his favourite subject, the aesthetics of disappearance.

Muecke's head is in the clouds, wandering around the house, stacking the dishwasher. He will start thinking about anecdotes and ideas, collecting them, arranging 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 Tautric 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 ficcroaticism, call it faction. Make up your own term. Words have to be carefully constructed, meticulously placed and then they might only mean something in that sentence, at that moment, before they reinvent themselves without any respect for their creators.

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 faction writing. I began to learn about ficcroaticism 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 somberly. ‘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’re already reading for a living, a facility with the medium straight away, they’re not groping for an idea or a way 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 Papapallos, Niki Gemell, Bernard Cohen, Beth Spencer, Jennifer Smith, Sarah Aululls, Monica Ceroni, and 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 part.”

“The politics of that can be thorny. You get into a lot of aesthetic and political debates.” Justine Eler, another graduate of UTs, complained of politically 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 masculine aesthetic, for example, I might suggest that the market would be Expector 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. “There is a certain negative 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 set students onto the writing of others.” A lot of UTs writers have high hopes. Some succeed out of sheer determination and hard work, others out of luck, by getting into a particular marketing loop.

But what do the others get out of it? “The course gives students the chance to get together with other people and find out as if they are part of a community of writers. It introduces them to theories that help them place their work in an aesthetic and cultural context. It offers them a qualification, an MA in writing. But an important part is networking. If it is a competitive course, the students are high quality, accomplished people.”

Muecke gives fundamental advice to his students. “Write what you know. It is easier to write as someone who once worked in a post office or belonged to a circle of friends than to populate an imaginary world with ideas.” But it is not enough to present what happened. Muecke encourages his students to write towards a point, “to turn what they know experientially into knowledge, to transcend the anecdote, so it doesn’t have a ‘So what?’ effect. But rather, ‘You need to know this, it is going to be useful or 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 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 reclassification 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 refueling 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 along an argument. Joan Didion and the New Journalists are a source of inspiration, as well as new developments in academic writings such as Avital Ronell or Jean Baudrillard. New feminist discourses have also influenced him. “They deal with questions about 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. “They are 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 course is a dialogue between rules and invention, depending on the student and the piece of work. “If a student is striving towards the apare- 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

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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 pre-festival 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 and present, 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 Reef 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 is for Reef 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 screenings 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 found a significant component for both, allurally and spatially, and the listeners will be free. Before leaving film, Elizabeth notes that something other than film 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 Canberra 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.

Sharing the noise, internationally

RT previews Sidetrak'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 that artists remember year that accounts for the particular buzz of Contemporary Performance Week. The Sidetrak company are convivial hosts and the venue with its intimate setting with deck and lawns open to Sydney's September weather, is always accommodated attention 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 composed by participants which might take the form of a written script, a tape, a poem, a score or a context for improvisation. In addition to a practical component, the workshop will look at the demands of different performance contexts, structuring, editing, capturing, composing, delivery, distribution, new means of writing and conceiving texts and looking at new media possibilities.

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 techniques of focusing, vocal improvisation and vocal techniques of harmonic and multiform singing. Performer and visual artist Alan Schacher (Gravity Feed) will take participants through a five and a half day workshop in creating a work that can be performed in a variety of spaces, including a 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. Gadge 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 in works in 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 will be exploring the role of the body in relation to performance and movement. Responding spontaneously to single image contents by participants, she will 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 experiments, 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 Nederlands Nederlands based Dogpatch, 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 McIvor, Russell Dumas and guest.

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

The full CPW3 program will be released on August 18.

Enquiries: Sidetrak Tel 9560 1255

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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 sitit 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.

Aboriginal and contemporary theatre styles and an all-indigenous cast in A Midsummer Night’s Dream with dreaming designs inspired by the work of women of Sydney, computer animation by Julie Martin and musical composition by Sarah de Jong. Unashamedly featuring several Melbourne Workers Theatre collaboration with Brisbane’s Koombana Jdarr on Roger Bennett’s Up The Ladder, and re-creation of the 1950s side-show boxing matches. NIDA students will present Nathanial Storm, a musical by Anthony Crook directed by Adam Cook, musical direction by Ian Macdonald.

The street theatre program includes Mulu Valley, 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 clown Oogadee Boogades, and Lekkanaatikinu who work from four Koori artists produced by Tony Strachan of Uluru.

The festival opens on September 14 with a smoking ceremony stage 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 Johanne Schutze with Marocho Zambanaka performing in a semi-staged performance with the Sydney Alpha Ensemble; the performance is conducted by Roland Peelman and directed by John Wegg.

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 Wind-jiribini: 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 and return with the premiere of Fia Ola. Silamit, Greenland’s only professional theatre performs Arsarna, a dance-theatre work about the northern lights and also visiting are the ChangMa Dance Company from Korea. There’ll be free performances in First Fleet Park by The Mornington Island Dancers (NT); Doonooh Dancers (NSW south coast); Yawalyu Women of Lajamanu’s cultural desert; Tiromoona (Samoa); Ngati Rangiwiwehi (Aoteaoro); Naroo (Bwgcolm 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 Yuridumau 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 Eynamudlkaplice; fourteen indigenous artists ‘live in’ and work together at Casula Powerhouse; multimedia artist Destiny Dream 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/tpa). At the Australian Centre for Photography a retrospective of works by the late Kevin Gilbert and photographer Eleanor Williams; at the Hogarth Gallery, Vincent Namatjira 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 Baramboda Rock concert hosted by Jimmy Little, David Page and Leah Purcell features Yothu Yindi: Chalene Anu, Kulcha, Aim 4 More, Laura Vinson from Canada, Moana and the Mobshunters from Aoteaoro and special guests Dan Native and Southside of Bombay.

The Paperbark literature program brings together indigenous writers Herb Wharton, Anita Heiss, Archie Weller, Romane 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 Pikchus is a week long festival of films screening at the Dendy Cinema, Martin Place and the Museum of Sydney—‘no ripped off areas here, mate’.

Highlights include Mabo—Life of an Island Man (1997)*; The Coolacarbo Club (1996), Jedd (1955); the Sand to Candle feature (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, Aoteaoro and Germany.

Makem Talk involves local and guest film-makers 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 Dreaming, Nginali, Bidjarijah Pinjarra, Fia Ola, Arsarmeit, ngundaleh godnidi, Evedi, Up the Ladder and winimim’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. She that 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 and 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 specially needed at a dark political moment.

RT

The Festival of the Dreaming: Artistic Director, Rhoda Roberts, Sydney, September 14-October 6. Booking information: First Call 02 9120 9113

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*For information: Phone (06) 248 8992

**For performances: Phone (06) 248 8992

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In Wimmin’s Business, Rachel House performs Ngawarra with Briar Grace-Smith with musical composition by Himiona Grace; inter-disciplinary 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 Dreaming; 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; Ngimali Lawford is back with her remarkable stand-up performance Ngangi 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: Bondenjarre 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, Brahda Bayuqar, Anthony Gordon and Max Call perform Ngundaleh godnidi (Waiting for Godot) in the Banjulang language with English surtitles, Julie Janson’s historical odyssey of the Aboriginal bushranger Mary Anne Ward, Black Mary, which premiered at FACT Youth Theatre, is given an epic new production by Angela Chaplin at Belvoir Street Theatre’s vast Carriage Works venue. Noel Tovey blends Elizabethan,
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 Composer's Work 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". While 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 the creators of the Biennial are too 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. There were, all groups of males except for two instrumentalists and three vocalists. This was a recurrent theme of the festival. The "jazz" highlight for me 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, Elinion 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), Rafaello Marcellino's The Armcd Man and Richard Vella's Tangea 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 composer—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 Karina 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 quietly little poem. I left gently elated. Synergy were, as always, virtuosic and entertaining, generous with their illustrious soloists. Trilok Gurtu, Mike Knock and Palle Mikkelborg, allowing them time and space to develop their envelopable 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. Cesarea Erorota, from Cape York on the other hand, gave me a deeply joyful and soulful evening. I would have welcomed more instrumentalists from her highly unified band.

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 industrialized 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 predication was evident in the Australian Art Orchestra, where, apart from the inspirational music and performing of trumpet 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 Paf skillfully, but self-consciously wholly 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, Liney 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—milk stand, roadie's keys and Gaff tape—as the basis for many novel instruments. Together with digital loops and MIDI triggers, Pollak teased out some beautiful universes into an engaging show.

The Southbank Auditorium was the venue for many of the experimental events. While letting in a fair amount of light the audience was a typical thing, enabling a silken blend between the upper and lower voices still found when ensembles use females or boys. This blend reached its apogee 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 Sh'manvond, sung from memory, in the second half.

It seemed to some that this seamless sound was 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 unequivocal 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. That the 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 Australian 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.

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

A cappella 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 choralists 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 silken blend between the upper and lower voices still found when 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 Sh'manvond, sung from memory, in the second half.

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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.

with Nigel Kellaway Annette Tesoriero Dean Walsh

Based on a scenario by Keith Gallasch

Sound by Peter Wells

Lighting by Simon Wise

Vampires, Berlioz and all assorted erotica

September 18th — October 5th

The Performance Space Ph: 9319 5091
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, capoiera) 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/yd/dance.

In the evening, there’s a program of performances including works from Expressions Dance Company (Brisbane), Restless Dance Company (Adelaide), Stomp! 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—ASSITE 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 dance-film maker Tracey Mitchell. Also on the guest list are a number of dance mentors (Cheryl Stock, Maggie Sixtima).

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 Australian Council commissioned a report on the area as part of their review of Youth policy. Merrian Syles from the NT office of Audience 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 Dehholden (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 Lyngse (dramaturg). Kasper Holten, eminent Danish artistic director, will come to the conference to present a paper. Watch the press for details.

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.

Entries are open to any subject and in any style. Entrants are encouraged to experiment with form, explore the world of sound and exploit the radio medium.

Full details of the competition categories and conditions of entry are available on request by phoning Kath Flynn on (02) 3355 1395, or by writing to:

Ian Reed Foundation Prize
ABC Radio Drama
GPO BOX 0004
Sydney NSW 2000

Entries Close 30th September 1997
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 phrase oft heard on the decks “a severe insult” to the tranquility of the audience. Boredom, anger, irritation, 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 a few strands of 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 corridors):** The sound steps me in the corridor for a moment. Have I tripped some alarm, am I being sensationally scanned on the gateway of an art trip?

**BM (Transduced):** three broods and their heart beat. 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 Borthakur Workshop 101 on the set of Silence of the Lambs.

**The Human Stylus** (courtyard): A Chinese woman going in circles on a wheelbarrow. 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 in the dark, toy cars crash in the night. Would the performers have 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? We cry and half Withers underlines 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 everything in the image are distractions for our inquisitive senses, allowing us truly to hear the music. When the piece is over there is loss. Changing Heart: A flash to a traumatic episode. A girl in white conveys to the floor. In the rain there is hair and Christ-like release. Simple images can still ring true.

**A Dear Insult to the Body (rtp):** What excuse is there for this kind of concoction?

**As If:** A frozen camera steals some moments from two ungainly suburban women gardening. A Chopin Waltz has the audience in hysteric. 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 sound form performance.

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

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

**Into Grey:** A dialogue of about two-to-be suicides in need of restructuring, 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.

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

Gravy Sue: Evidence that honesty in performance is elusive showed itself in true performances one night or the other for each performer. Particularly lovely: Ana Maria Dimentrescu’s quiet song.

**Soak:** Choreographically ordinary and imaginatively in debt to Ken Russell’s Godfrey, the side projections onto the bodies (reminiscent of Meryl Tankard’s Nutti) were nevertheless absolutely stunning.

Leavetakent: Proof that in your 10th 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 all the way through.

**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 Wash is Finally Emulsified:** Nervous writing, acting and directing development. The theme of being caught in a time warp is fascinating, but so far much of it’s a Sisyphusian escape from 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 ideas 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 Guillotines:** 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 Dance or Club Swing if it wants to become theatre.

**The Siren of Truth:** What does it add to our experience or knowledge to satirise such easy targets? And yet it was myself looking at my own hypocritices.

**Fragile Obsidian:** Two dancers in white pulsing towards the audience in front of a semi-abstraction 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 form, but by now undetectable subtleties of four-walls—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 obtuse and technical imagnes a 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 a satirical theatre. Flowers of camp, striking images, occasional technical skill, irony everywhere—the overriding trope of being beyond feeling—and some that are foolish, illogical moments of emotion. A scene from The Three Sisters puts them all together with the strange incongruity of dreams and the compression of poetry.

**Open Season:** An Open Season: 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 integration of dance, theatre, poetry, film, video, design, music and radio. He is former Co-Artistic Director of Tandance.
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 interweaving and life in the circus cabaret. However, the third night season in the Brisbane Fringe Festival fumbled 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 diverse and dynamic contemporary circus 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 protected 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 cutseys, dinty and elicted circus personae.

The MC, Matt Wilson, was vaUiant in attempting to disguise his role as time-filler. Chris Sleigh and Antonella Cassella’s slapstick adagio routine, while technically impressive, was undermined by its fast-fore-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 crowned juggling. Derek Ives’ performance of a bucket-wielding maniac was short, sharp and refreshingly dark.

Tightrope walking—often presented as dangerously sexy—became a frumpy flirtation between Eleanor Davies’ hayseed on a highwire and the musical double entendre offered by Brent Parker on synthesiser. Space cadet Karenua Oates launched off with force-field lighting effects and the anthem from Star Wars to perform Circo 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 bodgy 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 Rubíc’s Cube as an anal suppository and then proceeded to do a series of stomach contortions and ‘bowel movements’. Continuing the theme of insidiousness to the circus, this act presents itself as offside rather than an impermeable surface—the Hoolpa Brothers’ frog, the lowly hula flyer played with a yo-yo attached to his nose-pin insertion, while the bass strummed guitar and sang All My Loving ‘a 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 Mamouney about Sidertrack’s recent production Country Love

BK: In Country Love the narrative thread stretches from Campagnia in the 1950s to Sydney in the 1990s. The metaphor of life as a journey—in this case one of migration—is 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 story was stapled, 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 we who 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 underdeveloped. 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.

BK: How do you, as a director interested in devised work, approach the representation of character?

DM: In Country Love there are two central characters, Aldo and the waitress. The story is in fact a recollection by the young waitress at the moment of the old man’s death. In recollecting the old man’s story we are given an insight into the possibility of cultural transmission across an apparently hopeless divide. The recollection is of course limited, partial, incomplete and quite fragile yet, nevertheless, through inquiry and empathy she manages to make a connection which transcends the 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 conventions of the 80’s?

DM: This fear of the passe 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 ‘promos’ 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 by it 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 a disadvantage because with a new work we are always having to perform a first draft to a public, which can be excruciatingly painful for the performers involved. That is quite finished. This is made even more difficult with the demise of ensembles and the pressure to be wanted dead or alive. Certainly, the 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 theories, it is junk. 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.

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 serious 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 opera itself, 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.

NK Opera as a concept is culturally determined. It has developed a language of music, libretto and mise 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.

NK Opera, a hybrid of words and music...is morally tainted. Degenerates aren’t satisfied with just one arts’ domain—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 Algorotti describes the musical element of opera as: ‘...element of matter 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.

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 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 fearlessly androgynous icon: “With its soft flesh barred by hard bone, its red crossed and white, this mouth compels our desires. These desires—as yet unknown and unfulfilled—are necessarily fraught with danger and fear.”

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; writers: Keith Gallach; 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 bulk tracks and despite the efforts of successive generations of the RTA to improve on Bernie lough the bulk tracks appear to be having the last laugh. This is a city all rush and bubble, all sweat and steam, 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 strung 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 the 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 because it is home to a theatre company that used to be called DITF (Death Defying Theatre). Nowadays it’s called Urban Theatre Projects. The new name came with a new artistic coordinator, John Baylis. UTP refused 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 heartfelt of UTP is characterised by a high degree of cultural diversity and the company seeks to draw extensively, not only on the richness of that resource in the making of cross-cultural performance projects. UTP is a striped 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 the City of Women. He organised and participated in the company’s two European tours. He has also worked as a freelance costume designer with companies such as Siderack (Idol, Heaven), Entr’acte (Ostraka), Calculated Risks Opera (Tales of Love). He has 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 Tree 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 experiment 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 book 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 trio of Fiona Wining, 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.

**Journey.** The program also includes Fa’aifane which resulted from a 1996 project with the local Polynesian and Maori communities. Fa’aifane 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 Kella-way directing with Leo Tano 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 Gadjil 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 practices 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 existence 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 nervous. 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 that the company’s project had been realised, and only repetition remained. And I was sensing a similar limitation in other ways. The phrase ‘contemporary performance was gaining a wider circulation. Was I winning 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 anarich spirit and is, in fact, a form of puritanism intent on utopian notions of the homogenous ‘community’. For Sennett the true city is in the push and shove which comes from all that humanity having to struggle to survive, to be forced by urgent crises, by exigencies of life. The aim is not to produce feel-good, multicultural propaganda for the benefit of global 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 metaphorical or from the heart and in your face”.

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In the body of the work

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

Well into rehearsal, I ask the conceiving-performer of Awakenings, Zsuzsanna Soboslav, 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 LIFT '97 in

actions—parts of it slide up and down, it resolves, 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 that is expressionist in impulse, a device of sense of window and horizon", that the capacity of the set to resolve 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 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

aw. 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' creators at this stage of the work's development.

As do the music, "Sound", Zsuzsanna retorts. "We might have started with Schoenberg, but saw 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 sound around the performers and the set to work and live with. It's a process in which movement can re-emerge and, doubtless, transform. 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 Soboslav, with Benjamin Howes, sound, Rod Berry, images, Peter Oldham, Alan Dorin, set, Tim Moore; lighting, Peter Guasner. The Performance Space, Sydney, August 14-24. Bookings: 9119 5091 or First Call 9320 9000

London, has she asked "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 in, 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 stage, a space for the performers to discover things, with room to move".

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

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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 ballet fandom and patronage. So, given that a giant’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 Clark Kent of kinetic intelligence. We can only hope that he will evolve into a dance super hero, and his mild mannerings are working just fine at the moment, because he is introducing some pretty radical ideas, methods and works. Stretton is serious and thoughtful on the subject of choreography, great dancers and great dance. And so 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 new things, the AB seems to be developing a special relationship with Twyla Tharp. Stretton has just brought a dancer called Twyla Tharp to his workshop a piece with her and to soak up her intelligence and input. One has to wonder how about the possibility that what might have been exploited in this relationship had the new Kenneth Dance Company come under the aegis of the Australian Ballet. The dancers, community relations, the way the company went to an artist rather than an administrator, but Stretton is both 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 Glen Tetley, the other seminal influence he cites, that they share the quality of intelligence. “Great choreographers”, Stretton says, “are intelligent choreographers”. Intelligent manifestations itself in their ability to “explain the final result” before the 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 1980’s 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. “Aloof” Stretton and Baryshnikov were doing it, they were not picking up works from a menu, they were cutting down on the men in 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 todays’ biggest dance hits. 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 artists (and the same goes for audiences). “My love is for creating new work. I want works made on my dancers, by Australians and by internationals.”

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 influence, the American Ballet Theatre. He made an “instant transition from dancer to administrator” there, where Jane Hermann (then General Manager) asked him to run her artistic department after Baryshnikov left. What is it she asked him to elevate 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 Hermann invested in Stretton “somewhat with an element of trust”, but, he says “she knew I believed in dance”. And, Stretton says, being Australian was part of it. “it helped him keep a distance on the backburner”, for one thing. But he also knows that Australian dancers are good. “They are adaptable, eager, please, talented, and have no threatening. No one ever thought of me as someone who might do what I did—move from dancer to administration. No one was ever threatened by it”. 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 dances. “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 light. A rich talk.”

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 in the modern ballet theatre. This workshop which is focussed absolutely on process, not product, will be a week of discussion, between three choreographers, three lighting designers and three costume designers.

Ross Stretton sees it as part of his job to reawaken 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.”

Ross Stretton Jim McFarlane

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

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

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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 always visually arresting 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 favouring Pablo Percuso.

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 collectible 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, questist 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. Scrapes of tunes can be heard, including a few bars of what sounds like Simple Gifts, the religious folk tune used as a 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 threesome. 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 bean-me-up capture. The effect—enveloped in the warm, vibrant 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 significance, puritan concealment and then—unbuttoned over the dancers' flesh-toned body—lengthening and deepening the sense of other-worldliness.
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 panic. 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 conditional 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 not in the part of the local Perth community. If anything, the correlation between art production and its incalculable condition 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 documentation 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 sanctification 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. 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.

Shawn 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-imagining historical and cultural values. By utilising computer Photoshop to manipulate original images as a preliminary tool for painting, he presents what he calls “a post modernist squish of old images saturated with signifiers of colonial expansion” (Hatched catalogue). The imagistic distortions and recodifications eulogise 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 recorded and updated.

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I'm not quite sure whether Natalie Biling'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 sits 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

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 "eat 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 Windedger 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 posting 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; swimmers 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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The journey back takes on another layer of meaning, with the added dimensions of the artist’s personal experience and the collective memory of the village. The use of audience projection and interactive elements transforms the experience, inviting viewers to connect with the narrative on a deeper level. The incorporation of vernacular and traditional elements while maintaining a modern, timelessness quality is a testament to the artist’s skill in blending past and present. The journey becomes a metaphor for the timeless cycle of life and the enduring nature of human experience, resonating with the audience in a profound and universal way.

The final work of this program, "Finding a Place", takes the audience on a journey through the landscape of fields and donkeys, evoking a sense of nostalgia and wonder. The use of landscape as a metaphor for memory and identity is masterfully executed, highlighting the interplay between the natural world and the human condition. The piece ends with a “language tree”, a symbolic representation of the interconnectedness of culture and identity, reminding us of the importance of preserving our heritage and paying homage to those who have come before us. This final work is a fitting conclusion to the series, leaving viewers with a sense of reflection and appreciation for the beauty and complexity of cultural traditions.
RealTime at LIFT97

[from page 41]

The Geography of Haunted Places at The Performance Space (TPS) in Sydney. Akin in philosophical aesthetics to the notion of a space which used to be a trade union dance hall. All sorts of contemporary work takes place on a regular basis: philosophical, text-based, dance, music, theater and video. The rectangular hall has a small prosenium at one end and a small stage at the other end. The seating arrangement is flexible, sometimes dispensed with altogether. In one production, the audience sat on white fold-up chairs surrounded by bar wire and occupied by the performers.

In my opinion... 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 marquises. Beware the chime and the chime-song I recognized Erin Heffron, not as an actor in character but as someone’s grandmother. I relented the contrast between the phases of her performance: the 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 developed in the setting are contextually different. In the same way we deal with rabbit playing, we can play with rabbit-filled in reports we generally try to institute containment programs as quickly as possible.

Here the Rain in the Fire, a song by John Dowland, Larry down in the bar and begin to hallucinate—Dame Judy Dench runs from the audience and drags Erin Heffron screaming from the theatre, not incompletely but not at all this velvet. I am starting to think that I can do this, I can do it, no need to go to this. This report was not done well. “So nice to find a sympathetic audience”, says Miss Discovery and the words disappear as the darkness of the recesuses of the prosenium. Like me, she has gone missing. Only when she struts inside into the auditorium and plants her Union Jack on the stage, the audience disappears anyway like the resonances of the earlier work.

In the same way, The Performance Space was fairly universally as a lively spot that worked with seriousness and strongly. But it is fair to say that it was not the same, and interestingly, it was one of an increasing number of works from the performance milieu created seriously by mainstream theatre critics. Here, ‘Independent theatre’ continued to flourishes.”

Arriving at one’s own spot

Ortiz, directed and written by Enrique Vargas, Taller De Investigacion De La Imagen Teatral, The Former Coach Station, N 1, June 1.

1. I had an appointment, and as I waited across the street desk to say the pile of abandoned shoes near the vast had disturbed him, reminded him of the concentration center I had been in. I’d been nervous for days, not being a fan of a lab of liturgies, always being scared of losing my own brand. As I wait for my turn, I take readings off buildings, which I usually forget, for example on which corner was BANX exactly, and off road which is NEAL STREET: ‘You can’t miss it’. Well, I can.

And I must mention how exciting (see para. 8) London feels this time around. It is 20 °C, weather, or coffee finally been recognized as a serious art form, and wine as water, and as a sign (in the 7 Stages Politician narrator says: “Want to work and lonely.”)

2. I knew that Ortiz had dark passages. I had many low men. I asked to move to the chair by the door. Soon a door slowly opened and I was beckoned. I could close my eyes. Was it? What, I asked, a question, she said (see para.10). And so it started, the journey. I had to look for my own way, but I was not agreed, but I really hated the little doll with pink high heels.

There is no doubt: I did allow myself to take the journey, reluctantly at first. I mean, that I might lose ‘this’ in a certain sense. And because of this ‘real commitment’ to the idea of ‘question’, and to what might eventually be ‘play, or to play out’, I was aware of being inside a construction, nothing what I do. I asked myself, ‘What is this? I’m not sure if it is somehow, or it is the thing or the idea, or the way of doing things. I’m not sure if it is somehow, or it is the thing or the idea, or the way of doing things.

4. Then, to my horror more than my delight, momentarily all revealed, but for her, need for another reason was clarified. The core of the work is the Tarot, an oracle. Knowing the Tarot as a form of ‘knowledge’ I was placed inside a construction. And that is, the core of the work is the Tarot, an oracle. What is this? I do not know my own facts. My understanding is incomplete, for instance, a long time ago a friend, a visual artist with whom I had a photographic work, and all life goes loose. What, OK, OK, coincidence, but when I came to think about it, is that the Tarot, was I threatened, by one of the recipients of that ‘hull’. Still, what kind of knowledge, what genuine interpretation of these techniques has been from contemporary British-Asian choreographers such as Shobana Jayasingh using Bharatanatyam and, to a lesser extent, Ndidi Subiri using Kathak. In eliminating the orthodox costume and make up of Kathakali, but found the voice of an ancient technique. Maya Krishna Rao makes a welcome addition to this modernising process.

The classic short story, Khol Do! Saadat Hasan Manto does to the communalism of the partition of India in 1947. Britain’s travel between Amritsar and Lahore would depart packed with people hanging onto the sides and sitting on the roofs (and I could see that), but would not be the destination with their entire passenger load slaughtered.

While I was stranded recently in Eastern Europe, history repeats its unimaginable horrors, re-named as ethnic cleansing, as if somehow the mere act of re-naming sanctions the recurrence of these human brutalities. 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 emotions) during the exposition of an emotion by an improvisation or rehearsed set piece. This range of feeling usually allows an audience to empathize with a work on different levels. Many of the classical arts, such as the Rasas, are executed with the technical precision of a classically trained dancer and, enhanced by Gavin O’Shea’s sound design, evoke a choreographic expression of the journey. Overall though, I felt the emotions expressed in the work were a bit too ‘hollow’.

Khol Do! is a story of the family separated from his daughter and the desparation of his search, but not his love. The fusion of the dance and the narrative is the daughter’s expression of fear, Rao’s gestures of fright being expressly effected in Kathak. This is one of the most touching (khoobsurat (hand gestures) and facial movements, in particular, the eyes). The nyuta (pupils of the eyes) help the audience to thought could be developed further to convey a feeling of space. Instead of restricting the performer to remain static on the central dais, it would have been liberating to see some of the explosive Kathakali movements outside this sacred space, perhaps the profane space of the margins around the dais. Rao’s Kathakali nyuta, both in forehead and poses, transmits a high level of energy and consequently, is more convincing in delivery and reception than the earlier times.

Maya Krishna Rao is courageous in dealing with the subject of ethnic violence during the partition of India. She expresses through a mixture of Indian, Hindu and Muslim and Sikh factions in the Indian subcontinent and supported by the Indian Diaspora community: the fear, malice and xenophobia is again raising its ugly Janus head. In order to hold on to their imaginary homes, I am now at the end of the story of their countries, Asian communities in Britain are unfortunately now more sharply divided than ever. And to respect the audience who transgresses absolutes ideologies. The general disclaimer that Asian communities in the Western world (or possibly in Britain especially if it has been created by migrant Asian artists, is that they are not speaking with each other, it is the Asian community is not like this”. They refer to the artists’ “non-Indianness” for image, and the audience who tends to find the “Asian community” is not like this”. They refer to the artists’ “non-Indianness” for image, and the audience who tends to find the “Asian community” is not like this”. They refer to the artists’ “non-Indianness” for image, and the audience who tends to find the “Asian community” is not like this”. They refer to the artists’ “non-Indianness” for image, and the audience who tends to find the “Asian community” is not like this”.

All that bows:Keith Ballagh goes with the wind

Stund Nulle

Destined, directed by Christoph Mathuth, Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg, Quin Elizabeth Hall, June 12.

I feel oddly at home in Stund Nulle, even if I don’t know quite where I am or where I’m going to be taken. Very little German or Austrian theatre, I was there to see the local productions of Peter Handke, Franz Xaver Krotzer, Botho Strauss, Thomas Bernhard, with whom the audience is being introduced to through Pina Bausch’s dance theatre, recognising the musical construction, the sense of space and the manner of the work as a whole, the set design as in itself as well as of dramatic context, the actor as performer and as integral part of the musical. Although anethema to the exponents of naturalism, this kind of performance attitude connects with the great non-western theatre traditions, with the concept of theatre (that makes some theatre-goers restless with its intense, up close and sometimes claustrophobic),

For me, this is a theatre of reverse, of space with which to gradually engage, in which words share rather than dominate the space and the eye, in which subjectivities rather than characters emerge and states of being rather than character trajectories are lived out. In place of the traditional old radio studio, save for the mark of contemporaneity in the set of modern microphones thrusting on goonseck from both walls and into which the team of politicians-in-training mount 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 -
strict guidance of a house-mother (the beloved Mrs Zero Hour). Their ritual enactments of petty violence, fake tearing, 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 devoted an authorized book, among other things, to the fearful of "all that flows"—bodies, women, other races, democracy—but also to enjoying its scene accounted for in sentimental songs and hymns, dirty jokes, parades and masses, flowing ralles.

The *Stonde Null* politicians are at once powerful (that is given) and pathetic. Their sentimentality flows out in tears (in chorus), their confessional messages of guilt and denial flood out in political and personal gibberghook. Loss of individual control is always covered (the one exception becomes discreetly isolated), loss of collective control is subsumed by sweet, fluid, controlled Romantic hymning orPipe 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 *Faulkner's film The Marriage of Maria Braun*—they will sell their message to themselves, to Germans, to the world, and at the same time, to the world, so that they are brutally isolated in *Stonde Null*, made palatable for what they lack and do not understand however much we sympathise with the manner of their apocalyptic doubts. 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 refund beds) whose beauty will not wake, whose anima is trapped in thickets of proliferating microphones. That the opening and framing free-of-earn speech is by a Helmut 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* The Lift: Virginia Barker Daily Dialogue: Born, June 10, with Enrique Vargas, creator of *Oracles* 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 interpellated subject." He is interested in the way emotion of the beginnings of *Oracles* 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 stairs of the show. It can only have been the setting and this odd re-positioning in the black box that made suddenly emerge 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 Kierkegaard ("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 being thrown from the tower, of being lifted, of fearing, feeling safe, of falling, of being wonderfully alone and yet linked to someone or giving the voice to a community; in 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 *Oracles*, 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 gift procumen of *The Ambassador* and, earlier in the work, Anna Viebrock’s wonderful set for *Stonde Null* just squeezing into the Queen Elizabeth, I fear compounded.

*excerpt from: Dangerous Attractions: Wesley Enoch* Things *Fall Apart* (FTV, West Yorkshire Playhouse, Royal Court Upstairs June 1).

What role does ‘attraction’ play within the appreciation of performances? Things *Fall Apart* is storytelling enlivened by bodily sensuality and sexuality. With the danger of a circus, the spectacle of dance, the anthropology of the other, this piece seems to beckon a familiarity with the structure which at times overrides my need to understand character development and plot. Actors slip in and out of being roles, work 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” heighten the attraction. I want to draw similarities with my own struggles/herois 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 “actor’s cathartic" in conversation later with fellow RT writer, Indu, we continue an argument about racial and traditional material as distance work. Do we use these sufferers of difference to attract an audience or to truly celebrate our cultural diversity? In the extreme, I see exwert-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 *Fall Apart* and I allow myself to wallow here. My attraction disarm my other faciliies for a time and on walking home I realise I have left them disconnected and wondederful alone.

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 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 aesthetically don’t see it, then you (the performer) got it wrong. But I wonder what is it that we actually see? Do we see what we want/desire to see? Is the work being offered to us as a challenge to our perceptions or are we simply confirming our own already held biases? The problem might be that the work is set in a context which might well not do justice to the experience, or in other words, are we not to recognise their arra revealing or discomforting? Do we need to create more responsibility as an audience and perhaps a wee bit more humility?

Collective grieving: Zahir Dar *The Stages of Grieving*, Koombaa Jardarna 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 an Aboriginal performer, and the fear of having to carry the 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 cultural or other culture; the mixed audiences for the works expected to engage and make 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 diasporean communities and can lead to major difficulties in their relationships.

The *Stages of Grieving* manages to work on both levels and with a passion that is sometimes so intense it is breathtaking. Its compelling storytelling is not conveyed as the narrative of one protagonist but as the narrative of the various peoples of the continent. Koombaa Jardarna’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 voice, visual and movement imagery.

On stage a large, suspended block of ice melts onto a mound the size and shape of a grave filled with earth. The mound exhibits visible internal metallic traces a foreboding time bomb. Where all that is solid melts into air and, leads to a path of wholesome destruction or decimation of land and communities?
De La Guarda’s Pereda 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 helmed “Argos live here” in guttural, ugly pain on the side wall of their council flat. It felt good that De La Guarda and I waited until that government was over. They hung like corpses, drenched and dredged up to the ceiling, or stood on temporary, rigid platforms under pouring water, calling, calling. I went for them. With worn-out women and men, and a clasp of clathrophobic gas and heat coming from above, I turned to apologise and couldn’t see her. They didn’t make it on us. I wanted to call out, “I don’t want to live here.”

Then the room opened, and there was air, and the performers were loving the pounding on the drowned walking above us and running through showers among us (it’s the detail) their ankles fallen around their ankles.

De La Guarda’s Pereda Villa Villa

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 exist signs; above us a paper ceiling defines the space as cramped, low, caged. Upward gaze these words are very opted for us. The vertical is the space for performance. The performance begins with the angels/divinities sight of baleful spectre casting shadows on the ceiling. Balloons, toys, fluorescent splatter spots fill the paper with joyful play. They are above us, beyond our reach. Out into the world, but we have access to this world above us. The ceiling is removed. It’s not possible to have a world of play beyond our reach. Out of our public space we cannot remove that play, that poetry. He is a man at war.

Black British power it chimes beautifully (this voice rises at times like a swinging bell—it tolls for me) he is an Australian in a Chinese body, a Tasmanian and iridescent, a delightfully diverse:Tajik—Amerindian, Chinese, Australian and public personal. His delivery is formal, restrained—in bow tie and demijohn—a genetically combination of the Westernised and Oriental. His voice has a dry Australian wit, binging into the (God forgive us) good. I would not have to have shared a northern outback upbringing with Eastern European immigrants. To a back-doe of elders (he is a prize-winning photographer with no fear of dying bitterly ignored); he takes you on a journey from the ancient to the modern in the Barman garden. He is terribly upfront, and apologies for any discomfort with a wry personable smile and a twinkle in his eye that never dies; he is never given his back, but can’t resist a little bit of good! Good! I don’t have to see you again...

The angle of vision is important. He recounts an early tale of southern folks from his northern fantasies. Of a man who shared every day of the week. “A tale of self 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
wondered what my forbears would have made of their grandchildren celebrating their efforts and victory in the country they were fighting with and standing 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 is 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 Murphy

with thanks to Jenny Newby.

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 sits centre stage slides, seemingly under its own volition, to the edge of the space. A moment later a cascade, previously jutting onto stands, holding another one like Tristan and Isolde, forever crying goodbye: The last image is magically simple: Two women are centre stage, in a clearing of light. One square, looking out front, cocks her head (she saw something/reminded something?), looks front and again. The other loess, elbow crooked, head in hand, slowly lowers her head until 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... Shadows are like, the virus in my body this past week, having its whole life-time there, nosily glowing, 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, about heartbreak. Is about shadows in the heart. The heart was starkly present at the Step project Daily Dialogue (June 23). The young London dancer mentioned it again and again, the word came easily from their tongues. This heart is the weather-beaten, brown earth, it's the one that matters to itself, it's the murmuring heart.

What kind of knowledge is wellness, is sickness 'of heart'? Something wandered from the beginning of LIFT, in a good way, in a gripping way. For instance, I wanted more of the dialogue around me, I wanted more protection, I wanted my heart protected by the company I love, from home. It was clear that many questioned strands of this life practice and life would arise, and I was not prepared, I was alone. I could not succumb to the Delphic oracles, I could not forsake La Fiera's 'generosity'. They could not console me. It seemed an elision was occurring, a slight-of-hand, and it also seemed that this elision was central, maintained. I was out in the cold. I worked, except for an ongoing half-formed question. Like being at the Daily Dialogues and wanting to say or asking 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, hurried for, from this heart. The sick-heart must cry. It cannot 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, 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 Young talked about 'recognising' at once what one had never seen before, not the 'thing' of it, but itself, its relationship with 'it'.

De La Guardia appeared a glorious celebration, but hear their energy, their claim to be present, to care, to be the crucial, risky

artists are, and you hear the earth and the sky focused 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 screams. I have rarely been so bodily charged, directed by the liquid which seemed to gush from their flesh. I call this 'desperate'. This is a transparent yielding, 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 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) Zuzanna Sobociw 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, demand, resilience, regret, and awesome reserve (and recognition is unexpected often, 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 Young talked about 'recognising' at once what one had never seen before, not the 'thing' of it, but itself, its relationship with 'it'.

What was pedal about

There are many dancer in Te higawara's company but the stage never seem crowded,

and fall over. The black blob rage left rise

the tendency always is toward spring, or

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RealTime at LIFT97

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For this assignment (for those who know it, a sad recognition of a project that was funded, not for that don’t, how does it change the world? Em, not much, not much at all, but longer than the story, is important. What else accompanies the huge meanness of the world?

LIFT and the cosmopolitan body: Keith Gallach

Part 4 of “A dance of 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 partly due to the desire of Australia and Britain to explore the distance between Britain and Australia throughout the 1990s, an attempt for each country to read the other through the eyes of the other. The project is a meeting of bodies with languages connecting in its wake.

1. A cosmopolitan body. The LIFT program appears, at first, not to be British (excepting The Mammoth Project and Things to Play with, Playhouse’s Things Fall Apart—and what kind of British is this with its Nigerian content and American director and American performer). British audience interested in culturally diverse works from many countries, not just from the former empire. We allow ourselves to make up a story over a very long period with Japanese choreographer and sculptor Takeshi Tanaka and British composer Tony Fegan speaks in a Daily Dialogue about surprising cultural similarities between the island cultures of Britain and Japan. For example, in the program, LIFT embraces former colonies—black South Africans and students in the Philadelphia Project. Keith Gallach, curator of the LIFT.

2. Divided bodies. In Utah, Utah schools children include the diaspora of the Indian immigrant, clouds of Bengali and Bangladesh artists on the subject of Partition (formally divided bodies) in a beautiful, un-selective way. In this vein, we are interested in encountering emotions and reflections on life. The performance of gestures generally uses traditional and contemporary forms in sculpture and circus. This is the cosmopolitan body. It is part of the cosmopolitan project. Historical and political context is woven into the fabric of the body, a body of cosmopolitan cultural diverse people that can speak to each other openly in London and across the world. It reveals a young body—most art festivals separate that body off into your own junior celebrations at other times, in other places. Whether or not a secular festival can be brought together (divided bodies) is a question that hovers on our lips, wishing the answer away.

3. A fluid, hybrid body. Mimi Bhalha 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’ (primarily with the attribution of ‘identity’, a point of reference for social and historical analysis).” He proposes that “culture is less about ‘expressing a pre-given identity’...and more about the creation of one.”

4. A wounded body. This country will burn if the retired culture does not recognize that Margaret Thatcher exploited, opened the wound, in a general xenophobia and in the style of the Falkland War. A wound that body can also be a cruel body and a self-lacerating body—it behaves to be cruel 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 cosmopolitan body. At the Daily Dialogue on the Jeep program (with choreographer Saburo Teshigahara), one speaker saw the dance work as celebrating the possibilities of individualism, not, he said individualism. This individualism he described as the dynamics between the individual and the group (Teshigahara is a liberal exponent of the Japanese version of this). Individuality in Britain, he said, had been a dirty word in recent years. Clearly, he didn’t want to speak of the collective or the communal or the political. Instead he freely turned the semantic of ‘individual’. The cosmopolitan, apparently, is a meeting of bodies with languages connecting in its wake.

6. An optimistic body. LIFT’s programming, its collaborative ventures, the tenor of Daily Dialogues, its marketing strategies, all suggest optimism, not as a message but as an attempt to open up the general xenophobia and in the style of the Falkland War. (Orronole, La Feria, Periodo Villa Viella, the participation in the generation of new works (Utah, Invisible Room) and the witnessing of culturally diverse performances not fixed by authenticity or tradition. But the celebration of individualism is predicated on an acknowledgement of...

7. Being sick at heart. (See Linda Marie Walker, this edition). How many works were sexually transgressive and abuser body (colonial, Indigenous, child, female) or the body trying to find its place (The North, Journey to the East, Empire), the body of a girl or the body fashioned by culture (Go Go Go and politics (Standne Null)). The title of the 7 Stages of Grieving says it all—here are damaged bodies, broken hearts, struggling to recover. The physical images of Periodo Villa Viella may have been thrilling but the emotional reflection of ill that they embody struggle, pain, helplessness, endurance (‘awful and awful’ words) Zuzanna Sobolak, a remarkable dissident with passionate and fleeting emotions...and a murky limbo. A melancholic sotshore between a suet man and his naked doppelganger hugging beneath him. Back, the work, known as the Daily Dialogue, Periodo Villa Viella is shown to be a 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 for 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 matched in emphasis on opening up and opened forms. Juliana Francis (Go Go Go), De La Guarda (Periodo Villa Viella), Wesley Enoch and Debrah Mailman (The 7 Stages of Grieving) and others, all described the evolution of works by many means, various influences and influences. In a 24 hours writing workshop was only one possible way into creation, process was often long, and the work was often in performance. Christina Marthaler told us that Sande Null was a rare work of collaboration in a playwright-focused theatre—in achievement only possible because of acting ensemble strength and an ongoing relationship between director, designer and performer. (Sande Null, remarkably, was created in ten weeks.) On the body of the audience, see Breathing in, page 46, Virginia Baxier’s article.

9. The city in the body. LIFT ambitiously attempts to generate a sense of festival in an environment that has none but also an environment embracing an impossible many but on the opening up of sites, fascinating in themselves (The John Lewis, Mary fibre House, Trinity Busy Wharf) but also possible venues for future performances—a LIFT gift to the city, an open question, a deepening of, a reminder of, where there is, in the city. It also uses the South Bank and the Royal Court, bringing them with formal and cultural strangers.

10. A slice of life: a body of parts. How can LIFT grow (and how)—an in-depth discussion? LIFT faces the problem of most arts festivals, it occurs a moment of the year, every two years. This could yield a provisional, authentic body, a body of parts. But you can see the attempt to build and grow the LIFT body, recent guests (Christopher Marthaler, Neilan Matt Singh Chowdry, William Yang, Christoph Berthonnier, Maya Rao, Saburo Teshigahara and others), to engage in long term projects with artists from Asia, from the 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 return (for how many shows)? How many enter the LIFT vision? How many sites become part of their being? 11. Translating body. So many shows, how do you see much British work? The answer has to be in an international arts festival like LIFT. But, as an innovator, an international arts festival at work, and that is telling—with the bodies it displays and confronts and the issues and images that stay with me most. The names of our fellow writers here—Gabriel Gbadamosi, Zahid Dar and Indulle Rubasirm (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 writers. Indubitably. But what that means will take time to take shape. Seeing Ramey Abul Majid, a Palestinian rendering of Fugacio’s Sings the Blues (synopsis-following; memories of seeing the original in another festival) and successful group work driven by the production’s ‘naturalism’ reminds me how much of LIFT and being here in London has been an act of sustained translation and immersed in questions answered and unanswered.

12. The class body. Despite the air of cautious postcolonial optimism, there remain the continuing dissonances and encouragements and assumptions that speak of limits that check creativity, that inhibit, and the final reason given for this. 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 in an involuntary but necessary act. An ITY series on class ends with a kind of sad-happy acceptance of the class condition. Someone said to us: ‘As we trodged through the rain across Clapham Common after seeing Cairo I, that the British are surprised if it rains in summer, but we’re surprised if it gets really hot. An Englishman eager with idealism, in a Daily Dialogue, encourages the black South Africans’ work not to institutionalise the good work they are doing, ‘to maintain the social balance’. The Africans look bemused and one explains that their work might be bridging a gap between middle class and working class, white audiences will not come to any black performances.”

13. Bodies for sale. Over red wine at Le Beaujolais (a home away from home) near the Royal Court Uptats, Julia Roxon and I had a long conversation about commercialism. Julia’s story (which I reproduce in Australia) soon is a reliable one of a search not just for money, but for the means of bringing the commercial and the public into the work, an exercise that is, patronage—understanding and openness. This is a long process, the rewards not obvious. The Spring issue (this number [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 the free enterprise”. We Australians look on anxiously as our conservative government cranks up talk of flexibility, accountability, new marketing, new 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, crossing critical distance. We’ve also enjoyed our readers’ enthusiasm and approval. One person did say we were indelible. Of course we are. How else do we find out what life is? Of course we indulge Ul’s IV. We are writer-artists, not journalists. We don’t have a myth of objectivity to project...

15. More surprises. It’s interesting to note that press reviews for RealTime. While for most of them are favourable, and despite the fact that the show has been around a long time and has won awards, there is a sense of surprise, that these strange things (works, places, people) are now happening in this city. The covolly in some of these pieces is that LIFT is good for you. This reminds me that LIFT is not a festival, that it is distinctive, and that compared with theatre programming and other festivals, it is adventurous, even a bit alien at home in London, but an organism within that keeps worrying at, creatively irritating the bigger body.

Gbadamosi Richard, Richard Murphle, Keith Gallach

Enoc, Wesley Enoch, Indu Rubasirmah, Zahid Dar

Virginia Baxter, Gabriel Gbadamosi, Richard Murphle

Zuzanna Sobolak, Linda Marie Walker

RealTime at LIFT: Editorial Board


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More on LIFT in the next issue of RealTime on the subject of cultural exchange and the new IMAGES program.

The City in the Body: Marie Walker

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