

Like our cover this issue, the overlap and interplay of art forms is increasingly evident, no more so than when the editors of *RealTime* come to group articles for publication. In the early days of *RealTime* we resisted categories in our advocacy of emerging hybrid arts practices and the experiments with new media within traditional forms. But for reasons of sheer convenience and, inevitably, advertiser demand, we evolved a loose if predictable structure based on the usual forms. However, the time is drawing near for a hyperlink device to be added to our pages to alert readers to other incidences of their favoured artforms in other fields on other pages of *RealTime*. When, for various complex reasons we initiated our film and new media supplement, *OnScreen*, one objection promptly heard was, no kidding, "Oh no, *not* film in an arts paper!" A more justifiable objection was that we were privileging film, already at the top of the funding pile, at the expense of performance and other innovative practices. Well, we thought, at least film is framed by the other arts in *RealTime*, and it has always been our goal to encourage artists and audiences to enjoy the art forms of their choice in the context of everything else that is happening. You'd hope therefore that *OnScreen* readers of *RealTime* 21 would want to read about the *Microdance* series, the Sue-ellen Kohler-Mahalya Middlemist dance-film collaboration and be alerted, should they live in Sydney, to the film component of *Intersteps* with its forum featuring the filmmakers and choreographers who collaborated on *Microdance*. Performance and/or dance fans will note two responses to skadada's latest show, *skadada goes BOOP!*—one in Sarah Miller's performance report from Perth, the other from Ric Mason in *OnScreen*. The McKenzie Wark-Geert Lovink exchange on the Englishes of the net was originally intended for our writing section, but with Lovink coming to Australia as part of ANAT's *CODE RED* event with Wark on the same program, the dialogue ended up as lead feature for *OnScreen*. On the visual arts pages, you'll find Adelaide artist Andrew Petrusevics giving an enthusiastic account of working on the web. Readers of our sound and music section will note the appearance of Amanda Stewart, Carolyn O'Connor and Social Interiors at Sidetrack's Contemporary Performance Week (CPW8) in our performance section. Douglas Kahn reminds us in our page 3 story that Yoko Ono was not just John Lennon's companion-accomplice in music and politics, but a key figure in the Fluxus movement making significant contributions to performance and to sound art. Other kinds of overlap and exchange are at work too in the domain of the cross-cultural, most noticeably in the powerful experience of The Festival of the Dreaming in Sydney, but also in reports from Ouro Preto in Brazil and from New Caledonia drawing our attention to the collaborative potential in the South, between our southern hemisphere nations and cultures. In *RealTime* 22 we'll bring you a report by Mary Travers on the arts in South Africa. However, the European connection initiated by our LIFT visit will continue with a report from London on two new innovative works by playwright Caryl Churchill and a review of a visiting Belgian company. *RealTime*-LIFT writer Gabriel Gbadamosi will report on the role of the artist in the Middle East. And there'll be a full preview of Robyn Archer's impressive and idiosyncratic 1998 Adelaide Festival featuring works from Europe, Asia and the South. No more line-dancing, get out those accordions, bandeons and squeezeboxes.

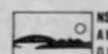
RealTime welcomes the recently announced funding support from the NSW Film and Television Office towards *OnScreen*.

The second part of our LIFT 97 (London International Festival of Theatre) report on the relationship between British and Australian bodies has been held over until *RealTime* 22.

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The two Yoko Onos

Douglas Kahn places the work of Yoko Ono in pop and experimental arts perspectives

Eleven Yoko Ono albums have just been re-released on CD by Rykodisc (distributed by Festival Records). Who knows what this might do to elevate her music to the spot in the pop pantheon already inhabited by her persona. But for those more interested in that fertile place where the experimental arts run among various subcultures and vice versa, let alone where they intersect with mass culture, then several of these CDs, the early ones in particular, will do her no harm. In this respect, the current project is a corrective upon the six CD Onobox from 1992 which under-represented this aspect of her work in favour of the pop-oriented Ono. Perhaps her consumerist status rests in pop, but her artistic importance lies elsewhere.



Iain Macmillan

She was simply one of the most original artists of the 1960s but, as has been said so many times before, her relationship with Lennon was both blessing and curse when it came to gaining due recognition. If she could have had Lennon without his shadow or without the anti-fan stigma of Beatles-Plus-or-Minus-One, then she would certainly be known more widely now as one of the matriarchs of experimental art and new music. Their relationship was conducted at a unique point of interpersonal traffic across gender, race, nations, high art and pop culture, and in keeping with the 1960s there was heavy traffic across art and life, especially when she combined her feminist performance and experimental arts concern for the everyday and put it to work right at home. Lennon confessed that "Yoko changed me. She forced me to become avant-garde and take my clothes off when all I wanted to be was Tom Jones". Instead of singing in a rain of women's underwear, Lennon said he finally experienced success once he started changing nappies, baking bread, improvising and experimenting in music, sex and politics. Of course, the class cultivation of this Garden of Equity remains in the background—millions upon millions of dollars would aid mutation in many a working class hero's heart, just as it could usher the wayward noodling of any avant-gardist into the orbit of mass culture—but this is the price paid for the public spectacle of private lives.

It would be misleading to try to prise apart the two creative lives represented on this set of recordings, since there they are in 1968 on the front of *Unfinished Music No. 1 Two Virgins* in full frontal nudity and on the back with their backsides and on the inside doing an extended improvisation and concrete melange in a style similar to their avant-garde intervention later the same year, "Revolution 9", in the heart of the Beatles' *White Album*: Nevertheless, the basic features of what she brought to even

their closest collaborations had already matured during the early-1960s when she was associated with Fluxus and when the Beatles were still in knee-highs standing in Liverpudles.

Arriving in the New York scene in 1957, by 1960 the next generation of experimental artists effectively announced their presence in a series of performances held in her loft. Her work was beautifully poetical and austere conceptual long before conceptual art—her 1962 exhibition of word paintings predated Joseph Kosuth's similar work by three years—taking cues from the sayings of Zen masters such as Hakuin. Yet there were also effusive, aggressive and destructive elements to her work, ones which cast off detachment for a confrontation with harsh social realities. For instance, take her *Voice Piece of Soprano*:

Scream

1. against the wind
2. against the wall
3. against the sky

Romantic or task-oriented readings on this last instruction fall away as we learn that as a child she survived the horror of the US fire bombing of Tokyo, where tens of thousands died as low-flying aircraft released incendiary bombs on the wooden homes of civilians, a dry run for the attacks on the civilian populations in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Less dependent on biography,

more politically evident, her *Cut Piece* (1964) long ago entered the canon of feminist performance art.

Along with many other artists and musicians, Ono was working willingly within the shadow of John Cage, while trying to go *beyond-Cage*, as was said at the time. Her linking of sound to poetics and politics, and to her personal life, was one of the ways she successfully differentiated her work from Cage's musicalisation of sound and eschewal of ego. Just listen to track 3 on *Unfinished Music No. 2. Life With The Lions*, over five minutes of nothing else but the intra-uterine heartbeat of a baby who did not survive, immediately followed by two minutes of a very non-Cagean silence on track 4. But, then again, right on its heels is a late-modernist exercise of over twelve minutes of "Radio Play", what sounds like an extended version of a George Brecht Fluxus piece which instructs the performer

to turn the radio on and, when a sound is heard, turn it off. What you get is the contours of a broadcast sliced up as though at a very primitive sampling rate.

What kicks off *Unfinished Music No. 2* is "Cambridge 1969", a long duet of Lennon on guitar, which nobody knew he could play like that, and Ono singing and vocalising in wails, rants, tremblings and bi-phonic groans in a voice sounding like the offspring of a soprano sax and a sine-wave generator. Nobody backs anybody.

At times Lennon's soaring feedback, which he uses to move the instrument into the realm of the voice, meets Ono's sustained screeching a few cents off to create beating patterns. At all times Ono's voice gains in affective range what it loses to the guitar's sonic vocabulary. That now familiar voice seemingly came out of nowhere when she first used it in her early performances in 1961. You cannot listen to it without hearing all the extended vocal technique singers who followed, including Meredith Monk, Joan LaBarbara and Diamanda Galas. Her mother reportedly taught her some 'ancient vocal techniques' but the most immediate parallel was the screaming of Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Albert Ayler and Pharaoh Sanders on the sax, that instrument Adolphe built to approximate the human wail.

In fact, on her *Plastic Ono Band* album, there's Ornette Coleman, along with Eddy Blackwell and Charlie Haden playing on "AOS", a 1968 version of a piece she did in 1961 for David Tudor. The disc starts off asking the musical question *Why* and answers on the next track *Why Not*. In my task here as your obedient consumer advocate, when asked to answer the question *Which I would say Why*. It was no doubt this song which prompted Lennon to describe

her as an artistic revolutionary, one sporting a sixteen-track voice. I would avoid *Wedding Album*, where Lennon and Ono's mutual admiration society gets thick with itself in its anthem "John and Yoko". They also trot out their hotel suite analysis of world politics in an interview during their Bed-In For Peace in "Amsterdam". This media performance is interesting from a distance but the fine print is nostalgic.

There is a return to avant-garde form in *Fly*, especially disc 2, which includes two pieces which accompany films. "Airmale" goes with Lennon's 1971 film *Erection*; not as autobiographical as some would like, the film chronicles the construction process of a high rising building, and "Fly" goes with Ono's famous film of



the same name where the camera forgoes the normal fly-on-the-wall point-of-view and follows a fly on an excursion over her naked body. Ono's voice is well suited to fly speech but she refuses to issue those famous last words from that other fly film: "Help me! Help me!"

Beginning with *Approximately Infinite Universe*, Ono begins to plug her lyrics into a variety of pop styles, and continues



Francesco Scavullo

to do so to the present day. One problem is that the voice that can autoerotically inhabit a fly's eye has difficulty commanding the styles she inhabits. Employing the best session stars money could buy further compounded the problem because they produced a slick homogeneity running counter to the rawness of her voice. She also abandoned her way with words, as earlier demonstrated in *Grapefruit*, opting for a more prosaic brand of lyrics in service of autobiography and politics; the political speech at the point of her pop transition in 1972 was notoriously unkind to poetics. She remained in the pop idiom, forced by the times if not by Lennon to leave her clothes on and become less avant-garde, like a Lennon in reverse.

Douglas Kahn's essay, "The Latest: Fluxus and Music" is included in *The Spirit of Fluxus*, edited by Elizabeth Armstrong and Joan Rothfuss, Walker Arts Centre, Minneapolis, 1993.



Dreaming the future

The Festival of the Dreaming: performances, reviewers, issues

When RealTime 21 went to press, *The Festival of the Dreaming* was two-thirds of the way through its program and enjoying considerable praise. Here's a progress report on the works and critical responses to them.

The Festival of the Dreaming opened with a cleansing ceremony at Bennelong Point which attracted thousands of people and one or two gripes in the press about a few people getting smoke in their eyes. The perceived hitch in proceedings was enough to shift the opening onto page 2 or 3.

Since then the press has been pretty much on-side. In fact, the overwhelmingly positive response to the work on show and Rhoda Robert's insistence on frank criticism provoked some to suggest that critics were giving the festival the kid gloves treatment. Accordingly, Radio National's *Arts Today* organised an on-air stoush between visual arts critic John McDonald, theatre critic James Waites, festival director Rhoda Roberts and commentator Martin Portus. Martin pushed for tough criticism and ventured some niggling doubts about Aboriginal interpretation in Noel Tovey's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. James Waites could see no reason to be tough on what he saw (kitsch elements aside) as "as good a version of the play as you'll see", citing the recent touring production by the RSC in comparison. Rhoda Roberts called for informed and serious criticism in preference to fawning tokenism and, importantly, for more Indigenous critics.

More interesting than either the gripe or the stoush, has been the opportunity the festival has provided for critics and audiences to compare and engage with so much Indigenous work. Jill Sykes writing in the *Sydney Morning Herald* about *Wirid Jiribin* questioned the possible absorption of Indigenous aesthetics. She defined Tony Lewis score (collaboratively written with Mathew Doyle of Wuruniri Music and Dance) as "an international blend...built on an Indigenous theme and powered by Aboriginal cultural links, [but] these are not its dominant means of communication". Similarly, the choreography by Aku Kadogo (a black American living and working in Australia for 20 years) is "sensitive to Indigenous styles which emerge as distinct sections of choreography rather than the infused movement usually seen elsewhere".

For me the pleasure of *Wirid Jiribin* is in watching the work of artists who have considerable experience in the area of cross-cultural collaboration. The musical composition (percussion, marimbas, drums, trumpet and didgeridu) is a major achievement for Tony Lewis and musicians Leigh Giles and Jess Ciampa. It's based on a long relationship between Lewis and Matthew Doyle who collected and recorded the songs and stories from the Tharawal people. The musical score sensitively interprets a traditional story using a mix of traditional song patterns, passages in the Tharawal language and contemporary percussive rhythms and melodies.

The dance is inspired by traditional dances also collected by Matthew Doyle. I recognise some of the language—the stamping, hands behind backs, small animal gestures of heads and hands—performed with elegance and strength by two willowy dancers (Rayma Johnson and Earle Rosas) and Matthew Doyle as the storyteller. The authority of Doyle in this work is central. He plays the didgeridu, sings, jokes and dances—including some spectacular mid-air spins. At one moment, in feathered headress he watches from the audience. The narrative line of *Wirid-Jiribin*, woven from the history of the people and the Lyrebird legend, is the most difficult aspect of the production to grasp, relying as it does on that most elusive vocabulary, dance narrative, here sometimes melodramatically embodied so that it

reminded me (not without fascination) of 1950s movie musicals. What worked most powerfully was the shape of this work, its circularity, the easy flow of the elements in conversation with each other and the audience.

I couldn't see Bangarra Dance Company's *Fish* but read Jill Sykes (*SMH*), in an otherwise glowing review of the work, express some commonly held reservations about the company's blend of traditional and contemporary forms. Most fascinating for her were the graduated variations between the two extremes of heritage (Yirrkala) dance and contemporary movement: "the detail that lifts some fairly ordinary contemporary dance language onto a different plane through references to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural traditions. These details are more often infused in the bodies of the dancers. They are in the angularity of arms and legs, in a feeling for the ground that emerges in the dancers' firm stance, engagement with gravity and floor work which is more than the modern dance techniques it borrows". Sonia Humphrey's in *The Australian* drew a harder line in the sand: "Their strength, their magic, their wonder is as a company which keeps its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origins in clear



Leah Purcell in *Box the Pony*

focus...When they perform like any other contemporary Western dance company, they are mediocre." (See RealTime 22 for Eleanor Brickhill's response to this work.)

Aside from the fascinating stories they tell of the separated self, it's been interesting to compare versions of the solo woman on stage presented in the *Wimmin's Business* program. *Nga Pou Wahine* is a play by Briar Grace Smith about displacement within the Maori community. When her mother dies, baby Te Atakura is stolen and brought up by her aunt who has lost the baby she conceived with a white man. The girl is rebellious and unhappy until she discovers the truth about her mother and her red-headed grandmother who ran from her white oppressors to be eaten by fish. Rachel House deftly handles the play's sometimes cumbersome theatricality which requires her to switch from playing the girl to the aunt, uncle, her mother and her friend by moving to spots on the stage and assuming a physical stance for each. Colin Rose in the *SMH* deemed this performance "a tour de force".

Whereas I would have given round one to Leah Purcell on the same double bill in *Box the Pony* written by Scott Rankin and based on the performer's own story of growing up in rural Queensland. Purcell also plays a number of roles—a fictional character (Steff) as well as her own child and adult selves, her mother, family and friends. The difference between this work and Grace-Smith's play is that here the performer moves rapidly through

personifications of character and self without the constraints of tight theatrical framing, along the way showing us some exhilarating codeswitching as she moves from rural roughhouse to city savvy. "Bullshitting is basically what I'll be doing here tonight" she says winking at the audience. Though he enjoyed her performance, John McCallum in *The Australian* was sometimes uncomfortable with "being treated a bit like a TV audience" by which presumably he meant being addressed directly and insistently which I must say I preferred to the awkward fourth wall of the first work. Like Ningali Lawford and Deborah Mailman (also on the *Wimmin's Business* bill), Leah Purcell uses an exuberant, rude, funny and touching performance style tailor-made for telling complex stories of survival.

Canadian-Indian Margo Kane is both writer and performer of *Moonlodge*. In a radio interview on Radio National's *Life Matters* she said that standing on stage speaking about yourself is alien to her Cree/Saulteaux culture where storytelling has a healing function. So her story must be coaxed from her by a gathering of native women at the Moonlodge, after which she uses a simple theatrical narration, quickly sketching in characters with changes of voice to move us on a circular journey

around the rectangular stage. I know from the same interview that her character (Agnes) is a woman, not unlike the performer, who has been snatched from her family at an early age in 'the scoops', as they called the practice of forcible abduction of Indian children in Canada. Brought up by white people, Agnes has no recollection of her real family until through a series of painful adventures she finds her way home via Santa Fe and on to her first pow-wow and the Moonlodge. Again, it's difficult to separate the form and tone of this work from the experience of displacement and survival Margo Kane is elaborating. The ease and generosity of her performance eventually coaxed me in from auditorium, where I was watching at designated theatrical remove, and made me go the distance with her.

Murielle Borst upset some people who put her in the box labelled "insufficiently culturally specific" or, conversely, "too American" and stopped listening. Theatrically speaking *More Than Feathers and Beads* was certainly a bumpy ride. In contrast to the very smooth Margo Kane, Murielle is from the Spiderwoman School of Theatre. Director of the show is her mother Muriel Miguel, a founding member of that company. The style is messy, its rhythms unfamiliar, using rough character sketches, dressing up and in Borst's case, filmed segments projected onto a cartoon teepee—mostly of the performer in a red fringed outfit running wild through the streets of Brooklyn. She moved through a

rather awkward set of characterisations requiring her to act somewhat beyond her abilities and then thankfully into a more comfortable stand-up persona, Bunny who I suspect was closer to the performer's heart. Here she could speak freely, dishing the dirt on all the "dog-assed Indians" who get under her skin. "They say to me, hey, I've stopped beating my wife and I say, you're not supposed to beat your wife. What do you want, a cookie?" It took a while but I warmed to Murielle Borst. Here she was miles from home speaking to a room full of strangers as if we knew just what it was like to be a native American in Brooklyn, telling us her side of the story, asking us sincerely "Is survival enough?" even if some of us weren't listening.

White Baptist Abba Fan was another story of loss and survival, quite formally structured and directed by Cathy Downes. Writer-performer Deborah Cheetham says it took her 30 years to bring all the pieces together to write it and she's still living it. She's an accomplished singer who this year appeared in *Porgy and Bess* for the Brisbane Biennial and studied at the Julliard School of Music. She tells the story of her upbringing and sings a selection of hymns and operatic arias by Saint Saens, Puccini, Handel, Gounod and Dvorak accompanied by piano and string quartet. Hers is a simple story. Stolen from her mother by a Salvation Army Major when she was a baby, renamed and reared by a white Baptist family, she sang in the church, became a singer and was performing one day when she looked out into the auditorium and saw someone who looked just like her, followed them and eventually found her way back to her Aboriginal mother, unalterably changing her life. ("Nothing from this work convinces me that Cheetham's life at this stage merits biographical attention." James Waites *SMH*) But so much that is far from simple is conveyed in the presence of this woman on the stage breezily chatting about love and lesbianism one minute and recounting family horror the next, then filling the room with her strong soprano. Sometimes she controls time and space. We travel 30 years. At one unforgettable moment, the Playhouse's usually unforgiving acoustic makes a soft bed for the recorded voice of her Aboriginal mother, Monica Little, reading a letter to her daughter. Deborah Cheetham listens and then sings her sorrow in an aria from Catalani's *La Wally*. The *Wimmin's Business* program has been full of such complex simple stories.

Virginia Baxter

Up the Ladder, by Roger Bennett and produced by Melbourne Workers' Theatre and Kooemba Jdarra, is about an era when one of the few ways for Indigenous men to make a mark in the white world was through boxing, and for many still is. *Up the Ladder* is rough: roughly scripted, broadly performed, full of boxing bouts and a bizarre wrestling match, the house style strongly reminiscent of the APG in *The Hills Family Show* era and very Melbourne, physically inventive line by line and wildly funny. The action builds on the skeleton of a script with plenty of good throwaway lines, the odd song and a kind of master of ceremonies holds it all together—boxing manager/spruiker/promoter/radio announcer all played with an eerie historically accurate expertise by Jim Daly. Everyone in the cast (John Moore leading with his right) is charismatic and the tent is small, you're inside the show and it's easy to cheer along to the well-crafted boxing (no question of brain damage here and not too much about show biz exploitation) replete with the ref hilariously trapped amidst the flying gloves. *Up the Ladder's* playfulness extends to a funny Italian boxer routine comparable to Lillian Crombie's hilarious stage-Irish Mrs Byrne in *Black Mary*. The dark side of the tent show life reveals itself in the Indigenous boxers' pay being taken by the government in lieu of their lesser



Up the Ladder

welfare allowance, while slide projections of advertisements of the kind "Golden Fleece Soap will Keep Australia White" suggest a pervasive discrimination. A storyline bursting with missed writing opportunities flies by with contradictions in motivation and the leanness of a fable (Indigenous boxer saved from knockout by visit from dancing spirit). The richness is in directors Suzie Dee and Wesley Enoch's attention to jokey detail, to bigger than life but un-laboured performances, and in the evocation (beautifully lit by Eferpi Soropos) of a form of popular entertainment I can just remember at the Royal Shows of my childhood—but this was the first time I'd ever been allowed in the tent. There was a keen resonance with Leah Purcell's opening bout in *Boxing the Pony* as she punished the punching bag while rattling off a family roll call of boxing brothers.

On a more spectacular scale, *Black Mary* also evokes a form of popular entertainment, big 19th century theatre shows with live animals, action and melodrama. This is a bushranger tale with horses, gunfire, a lake, a rainstorm, modest crowd scenes and a mountain—a very large sloping hill, actually, which takes the audience by surprise when revealed. Again, broad characterisation and vigorously physical performance give the play its momentum. However, the departure from tradition is much more marked in this work. *Black Mary* is a female bushranger. She's in love with a white man, also a bushranger. The relationship has a modern sometimes raw sensuality. The tension between the lovers is pivotal and the failure of the relationship in the second half demands intimacy in script detail and in playing. Director Angela Chaplin's epic staging cannot meet the demand—the abandoned *Black Mary* seems merely angry, her lover cold and simply treacherous, even though signs are that the relationship runs deeper. Microphone headsets cannot compensate, the actors pull back from projecting too much, but they go halfway there and the voices on opening night slipped into a dull monotone. Someone should have told them they were in a movie. There's some very good writing in *Black Mary* but not where it

counts in the second half. Equally, once you've got horses you're stuck with them and what is exciting before interval becomes a set of galloping longeurs. Margaret Harvey as Mary rose above much of this to reveal a fine performer, the most able of the cast to match the demands of scale. I'm pleased I saw *Black Mary* for its evocation of another kind of theatre, like its antecedents a potentially very popular one, ambitious, direct and sometimes poetic, sometimes moving, attempting to imbue an heroic and melodramatic form with the realities of failure and prejudice.

Stiltwalkers, like horses, also require time to get about with their long, loping steps save at occasional virtuosic moments of speed and risk. It's not surprising that *Mimi* (a collaboration between Stalker, the Kunwinjku people of Western Arnhem Land and Indigenous artists) is a lyrical experience with a spare, sometimes barely there myth narrative in which gentle choreography and music conspire to seduce a willing audience, including critics. Curiously, questions of the tradition-modern synthesis didn't come up in reviews, even though two male dancers provided bursts of exquisite traditional dance in contrast to the slow, sinuous, modern lilt of the *Mimi* spirits. Choreographing stiltwalkers is probably not easy and accounts for occasional tedium and musical fill, but there were moments when humans and spirits intriguingly echoed each other's movements, and the contrasts in speed and form evoked the meeting of very different beings. The outdoor setting, the wrap-around sound (a predictable but enjoyable world music synthesis rendered a little odd by a sometimes dominant fiddle) and the exploitation of distance as the *Mimis* and, later, a gigantic villain spirit, emerge from the dark, make for a powerful dream of a night.

I couldn't say the same for Noel Tovey's production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Press reviewers and arts editors loved it. Perhaps they enjoyed its plainness, the lack of 'attitude' (save Deborah Mailman's lone attempt to give a modern edge to her

character); no fear here of a director's vision being forced on a classic. The performers were 'playing Shakespeare', neatly and with the verse well-mouthed. Signs of a meeting of Shakespeare the humanist and Indigenous culture were everywhere—in set, costume, dance, music, computer imagery—everywhere but in the acting. Having black actors dressed in brilliantly white Elizabethan costumes and bare feet says nothing on its own; portraying the world of Oberon and Titania as Indigenous strains against western faery tradition, especially when, again, the performers are busy 'playing Shakespeare'. It's conceivable, in the near future, that ensembles of Indigenous performers might take to Shakespeare with a performative critical axe, if they're at all interested to. After all, not too long ago Tovey did direct Mudrooroo's *Aboriginal Protesters...* and applied the blunt end of the instrument to Heiner Müller, but of course Müller was no liberal humanist.

Keith Gallasch

The Festival of the Dreaming's director Rhoda Roberts has made it clear that she is not presenting a celebration of traditional arts. The event is promoted as "intimate, contemporary, true". And so it mostly has been, and impressively so, though the meeting of Indigenous tradition and the modern is evident in many works—typified by the dancing spirit that appears in the boxing ring in *Up the Ladder* or Titania's waratah 'bower' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Only occasionally have Indigenous tradition and the modern been juxtaposed as black versus white, more often the polarities co-exist within Indigenous individuals— independent women reconnecting with the spiritual and with family in *Wimmin's Business* without losing a modern sense of self, as in Deborah Cheetham's lesbian opera soprano. Juxtaposition and co-existence are one thing, they provide a theatrical, psychological and cultural dynamic for many of the works, but synthesis is another matter. Which brings

us back to something implicit in the dance critics' yearning for a fruitful meeting of traditional and contemporary movement in Bangarra's *Fish*, of wanting choreographer Stephen Page to go that bit further, to transform his modern dance into something remarkable through the traditional. It will be fascinating to watch over the next few years what does emerge as Indigenous performance develops in itself and of its cross-cultural collaborations (evident in the participation of many white artists in this festival) and the exhilarating range of theatrical forms it has already embraced. You find yourself wishing that Rhoda Roberts and her team could be among the major players in the 2000 Cultural Olympiad so we could all witness and celebrate the future of this collaborative dreaming.

There will be more on *The Festival of Dreaming* in RealTime 22

Up the Ladder, by Roger Bennett, directed by Suzie Dee & Wesley Enoch for Melbourne Workers' Theatre & Kooemba Jdarra - Indigenous Performing Arts, Tent, Seymour Centre Forecourt; *William Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Noel Tovey, Sydney Theatre Company, Wharf Theatre; *Mimi*, Marrugeku Company, Centennial Park Amphitheatre; *Black Mary* by Julie Janson, directed by Angela Chaplin for Company B Belvoir, Wilson St Carriageworks; *Wirid-Jiribin: The Lyrebird*, Matthew Doyle, Marguerite Pepper Productions; *Wimmin's Business: The Playhouse*, Sydney Opera House; *Leah Purcell, Boxing the Pony*: Murielle Borst, More Than Feathers and Beads; *Nga Pou Wahine* by Briar Grace Smith, performed by Rachel House; *Deborah Cheetham, White Baptist Abba Fan*. *Wimmin's Business* presented by the Olympic Arts Festivals and Sydney Opera House Trust. Managed by Performing Lines.

The Festival of the Dreaming, Olympic Arts Festival, Sydney, September 14-October 6.

Top end mix

Suzanne Spinner reports on the pleasures and plights of The Festival of Darwin

In its previous incarnation it was The Bougainvillea Festival of Rhododendron, Waratah and Jacaranda, now it's The Festival of Darwin of Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney et al. Back then it was an excuse for local businesses and service clubs to festoon the trays of big trucks with plastic Bougainvillea; now it's a ridgy didge arts festival with strong community content and participation and a smattering of specially commissioned or imported events.

Although it was only renamed last year, the transformation of the Darwin Festival has taken place over six years since the appointment of its director, Fabrizio Calafuri and the formation a community-based festival committee. The Festival of Darwin has to tread a fine line between art and populism and it does so by building on and amplifying the strengths of Darwin—its multicultural mix, the Aboriginal and Asian connections and the almost ingrained tradition of community arts in the town. As an umbrella it takes in various entirely autonomous events ranging from The Darwin Rodeo to the National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory which attract their own specialised audiences. The central festival event is The Grand Parade which culminates in a free outdoor concert on the Esplanade under the stars. This year Circus Oz were the featured artists.

The Grand Parade theme was *Rivers to the Sea* and the festival again sponsored artists to work with schools and community groups. These days bamboo has replaced bougainvillea as the generic material of the ceremonial artefacts produced for the parade. The switch to bamboo, apart from its natural logic, was spearheaded by Techy Mesaro, who has been the resident festival artist throughout the transformation. Even among so many stunning large scale bamboo sculptures on the floats, the Grand Prize winner made by the PNG Society stood out. It was an outrigger canoe with a decorated

sail; the *piece de resistance* was an exquisitely made giant woven fish trap.

Last year's festival included a series of installations at sites all over Darwin; this year, apart from the Aboriginal Art Award, visual art was thin on the ground. However there was a rare treat, an exhibition from the Agung Rai Museum in Ubud. *Between Two Worlds—Contemporary Balinese Art* was held in the Great Hall of the palatial new Parliament House. The opening performance of the Legong Kraton by two classically trained Balinese dancers formerly from Ubud who have settled in Darwin spoke eloquently of the nearness to Asia. The exhibition was relevant and interesting but appallingly hung on ugly temporary screens instead of using the high walls of the hall. It is not an easy space to place such intimate work; but if it had to be there (given that the impetus came from The Department of Asian Relations—the pet project of Chief Minister Shane Stone—it did) then it could have been done elegantly. The exhibition early this year of the Kaltja Business Meeting Place modular mural, showed how to hang art in the Great Hall.

The highlight of the festival was, unquestionably, Tracks' show *4WD—a Night of Sweat, Dust and Romance* staged on the lawns of the Botanic Gardens. Directed by Tim Newth, *4WD* was an extraordinary community spectacle involving four *4WD* trucks, 80 performers including professional dancers, local footballers, ballerinas, PNG and TI dancers, ballroom dancers and school groups. The visiting choreographers and dancers included Beth Shelton, Nicky Fletcher and Michael Collins (Danceworks), Michael Leslie (*Bran Nu Dae*) and Markham Galut (PNG National Theatre Company).

4WD had it all—sweat, dust and romance as well as fireworks, smoke, large puppets and a powerful original music score composed by Scott Trenwith and realised by the classical musicians of the Arafura Ensemble, the percussion group Drum Drum and Aboriginal

songmen from Yolgnu Manikay. The only things missing were elephants and generators. As a local wit observed, "It reflected the great pastiche that is us Darwinians".

The next best thing was the performance by Waak Waak Jungi/ Crow Fire Music in the foyer of The Supreme Court. Waak Waak Jungi is a collaboration between two small communities—Ramingining in north-east Arnhemland and Christmas Hills in Victoria—which began four years ago and has involved musical exchanges and cultural homestays, resulting in the resurrection of 'lost' songs of the Woirworrung people from the Yarra Valley. Waak Waak Jungi brought together Sebastian Jorgensen, Sally Grice and Peter Mumme from Victoria and Songmen Jimmy Djamunba, Bobby Bununggurr from Ramingining and George Bambuna who lives at Fish Camp, along with drummer Alan Murphy who has played with Yothu Yindi and other Aboriginal bands and, a long time ago, lived in New York and was a member of The Village People.

As well as amazing black and white voices you heard the didgeridoo, a live synthesised soundscape and the strings from the Arafura Ensemble; and then there were the dancers—a group of Countrymen (and women) who live in town, or try to, at Fish Camp in the mangroves in between the suburbs of Darwin.

Such songs they sang—about cockatoos and crows, of a massacre at Christmas Hills, about kava in the community, about botting cigarettes—in rasping, hard, plangent voices to the tap-dripping wood-chopping sound of the clapsticks and the drone of the didge. The result was a thorough mix, no pastiche, but an impassioned and subtle impasto, that said as much for the reality of reconciliation as it sung out strong new music.

The ongoing vitality of the festival, let alone its very existence, depends on the ability and willingness of key local arts organisations to respond to the opportunity with relevance, innovation and creativity. Yet three of the best placed organisations, the Darwin Entertainment Centre (DEC), Darwin Theatre Company (DTC) and the Darwin Symphony Orchestra (DSO) seem to passively resist it with spectacular ineptness. One can only wonder what is going on? They seem to guard their patches out of a fear that they might spend money on something that might make the festival look good, blind to the notion that

they could actually gain national profile and local artistic credibility from partnerships and collaborations with the festival.

DEC are particularly intransigent; not only do they offer nothing by way of entrepreuneuring partnerships, they manage to book out the centre to business conventions and conference groups at high rates and make it impossible for anyone else with more imagination or nous to utilise the prime performance venue during the festival. A few year years ago DEC were offered Nigel Triffit to direct a production of *The Fall of Singapore* with ten local actors and turned it down; last year they programmed a minor British two hander set in a freezing London flat; this year they offered Theatresports! Last year the DSO did their usual *Top of The Pops* concert; this year it was *The Magic of Brahms!* Other organisations who usually come to the party, Corrugated Iron Youth Theatre and 24 HR Art programmed badly and missed out, although 24 HR Art did come up with a brilliantly clever pirate float for the parade which managed to link the show they had on at the time on tattoo art with the sea theme.

So instead of the festival being an annual focus for these major arts organisations, an opportunity for them to program and commission their most exciting and innovative work which will have the best chance to make a mark locally and nationally, they go to ground, or water as the case may be, and proceed as normal, as if the festival wasn't happening.

So at the end of every festival, its director Fabrizio Calafuri questions continuing the good fight, but every time there are some things that make it all worth the risk and the ridiculous stretching of resources—this year it was the Tracks show and Waak Waak Jungi, last year it was seeing Tychy Mesaros' big bamboo bird sculpture on Mindil Beach, and a few years ago it was watching The Flying Fruit Fly Circus from the Murray River performing with the Maningrida kids. Calafuri feels he's given it his best shot and wonders "Where to next?"

Suzanne Spinner has moved back to Melbourne after living in Darwin for 10 years. She returned to Darwin for the festival and to work with Corrugated Iron Youth Theatre.

Countercultural heat

Cassi Plate at Ouro Preto's Winter Festival in Brazil

Brazilians have a strong sense of being part of the Southern Hemisphere; only artists from this part of the world can compete in the Videobrasil International Festival of Electronic Art in São Paulo. If they've heard of Australia at all, they embrace us as belonging to a similar world—non-European. But the most distinctive aspects of Brazilian culture are unique. Modern day Brazil is a vibrant mix of the cultures of its enormous population of African-Brazilians—former slaves in the mines and sugar plantations; the abundant cultures of the Indians, now largely exterminated in many areas of southern Brazil; and the Europeans who started arriving from Portugal in the 1500s, and now include Italians and Germans, as well as Japanese and Lebanese immigrants. Except for the most recent arrivals, none of these groups remain separate, and Brazilian society has probably the most integrated mix of races and cultures in the world.

There are virtually no direct trade or travel connections between Australia and Brazil. To make a cultural connection with the 29th Winter Festival of Arts and Culture of Universidad Federal de Minas Gerais we had to travel nearly three days each way. The festival is held in the baroque mining town of Ouro Preto (Black Gold), once the richest city in the world and now a UNESCO-protected heritage site, perched high in the mountains inland

from Rio de Janeiro. We also share seasons—every July since 1962 (except for six of the violent and paranoid years of Brazil's military dictatorship 1964-1982), the town's population has exploded with students pouring in from all over Brazil to attend this Winter Festival. With its roots embedded in the counter culture, the Festival provides a haven for experiences, training and cultural activities not available elsewhere in Brazil. When The Living Theatre—the quintessential 60s theatre group—came to Ouro Preto in the 70s, the government, terrified of the counter culture, had them arrested—not for their performances but for smoking dope.

For three intense weeks, over 70 workshops offer African dancing, environmental art, jazz improvisation, drumming or video portraiture. The list is wide and long. This year's festival focussed on video production, with producers and artists invited from Australia, England and the USA to teach alongside the Brazilians. Access to courses like performance video is unique to this Festival; in terms of film production, the nearby Federal University which hosts the Festival offers only animation training during term time. Scholarships to study film in Cuba or the UK are the only other way for Brazilians to gain experience.

Apart from the workshops, the Winter Festival has a well-earned reputation as a

cultural event in itself—evenings turn into Rock Music Festivals with Virna Lisa and Arlindo Atunes, Brazil's most popular bands, performing free in the town's main squares; experimental theatre, film, music, dance and video can be seen at every available venue. The Festival also played host to experimental performance groups from Slovenia and Bolivia and a three-week long Charlie Chaplin retrospective. The steep streets of this beautiful cobble-stoned town were devoid of cars and filled with people, spilling out of the bars and restaurants, dancing and clapping with ubiquitous trios of Brazilian drummers, embracing and talking till dawn. In these weeks the small town of 10,000 lights up like a bonfire.

The workshops have generated some of the most interesting contemporary performance groups in Brazil, and these make the annual pilgrimage to perform for the next generation of students. This year saw the return of the percussion group Uakiti (an Indian word pronounced Waka-gee) who conducted a huge one hundred member percussion workshop and performed their own music. Based on Brazilian rhythms, Uakiti incorporate specially made instruments such as a glass marimbah, and combine these with ideas of minimalism to achieve a restrained and delicate sound. They're currently performing in another incarnation at the World Wide Video Festival in Amsterdam with video artist Éder Santos. *Passagem de Mariana* (Journey to Mariana) plays with the idea of the seven sins, using multiple screens which operate as an extension of the rhythmic complexity of the music,

displaying images of pre-recorded material of their performances broadcasting from video recorders and mixed live with material from numerous cameras. The multiple screens serve to obscure the live performance from the audience.

We also saw a return performance from Grupo Galpão, the most well-known innovative theatre group in Minas Gerais state, with a strong base in street theatre. They erected a miniature commedia d'el arte stage in the main square and performed a mixture of bits from Moliere's plays intermingled with references to contemporary political and social events in Brazil. The performances were very direct with bold and memorable costumes. The audience were in uproar, though the language barrier excluded us from the best of the Portuguese jokes—a problem so wonderfully absent from music!

Unlike Australia, Brazil's bigger population supports a broad network of local community television stations—events in Brazil are surrounded by camera operators, and the festival provided hours of air-time. This probably explains the popularity of the video production courses which will repeat their success at next year's festival. Videos featuring the town's population were watched eagerly on the local channel, also at times bringing out the uneasy tension between the local traditional Catholic community and the festival—there was difficulty airing a video which included nudity.

Though facing severe funding cuts the festival will do well to perpetuate its tradition of counter-cultural inspiration as it continues the process of redefining itself and maintaining its relevance and excitement.

Escape from paradox

Di Klaosen reports on arts developments in New Caledonia

In one of Noumea's main tourist publications the list of on-going *fetes culturelles ou artistiques* mentions a range of possibilities—including beauty pageants—but fails to make any reference to the visual arts or exhibitions of any kind. This sums up the paradoxes of contemporary and traditional arts in New Caledonia today.

The French government administers New Caledonia as a part of France, so that New Caledonians have full French citizenship. Happily, the widely documented Kanak unrest of the 1980s appears to have abated, following long overdue concessions from France. (The word Kanak has been reclaimed by the local Melanesian people, after its earlier, pejorative connotations.)

Surprisingly, despite its French influence and administration, New Caledonia has had, till very recently, a low arts profile and limited support for and education in the arts. There is still no designated public art gallery, even in the capital, Noumea, and France has had virtually no interest in fostering Indigenous artmaking in New Caledonia. Government and Christian missionary policy was, historically, to suppress such expressions of local culture. In any case, art and craftmaking played a somewhat smaller role in the island's culture than in many Pacific societies, so its survival and revival is doubly laudable. It is, in part, the current efforts to confront and correct these problems and paradoxes that make the New Caledonia arts scene interesting.

A highlight for me was a visit to the small, new Noumea School of Art, Ko We Kara (established 1990), with its energetic *directrice*, Sophie Boutin, who provided me with a thorough picture of its aims and intentions, its curriculum, its student population and its difficulties both financial and logistical. Most of the arts events held in the country are jointly run by the School, the Kanak Cultural Development Agency and the regional governments. At the time I was there, they had combined with a local agricultural college to fund a teaching residency by the New Zealand sculptor, printmaker and papermaker, Michael Tuffery.

The school's entry pre-requisite is third-year high school and its students undertake a two-year certificate course. This is because, in the mainstream school curriculum, music, drawing and 'manual arts' combined receive barely six hours teaching time per week. Students do not, therefore, usually have highly-developed artistic sensibilities. For Melanesian students, this is compounded by not speaking French prior to commencing school, and few receive any exposure to Western art. The school encourages talented students from these *defavorisé* backgrounds and integrates traditional motifs, subjects and techniques into the work produced. They have a full, challenging curriculum and are very keen to build upon new collaborative relationships with institutions such as the Queensland College of Art, to foster exchanges and joint projects.

On completing their courses students are equipped to enter the work force (particularly in design fields), to continue their own arts practice or to study abroad, within the region, or in France. The school is also planning to introduce a degree course in South Pacific Arts and Culture.

As Sophie Boutin explained, Noumea's small population limits its artistic possibilities. There is a core of Sunday painters all over the island, who work with traditional motifs and who are much more likely to take—or make—opportunities to show their work than their counterparts in Australia.

There are several Kanak craft co-operatives. One of the most prominent, Batefo, provides well-made items for local souvenir shops and the regular town market also sells Kanak craftwork. The group

Fluctua is composed of European artists (generally) temporarily based in New Caledonia but their work does not usually have many links to the territory.

The second Biennale de Noumea was held last year. Sophie Boutin was one of the main organisers. Judging by its catalogue and the comprehensive photo-documentation I saw, the Biennale was a well resolved project which attained a level of originality and sophistication far beyond its modest origins.

Along with invited exhibitors from the Pacific, notably Juliette Pita from Vanuatu and Peter Robinson from New Zealand, Australia's Gordon Bennett was a highly regarded participant. The show featured the work of two dozen other local and French artists. I particularly liked the feminist canvases of Paula Boi, the minimal sculptures of Marie Charandak-Pehau and Daniel Maillat's surrealist installations. The Biennale is set to be a highlight of the country's artistic life and should provide opportunities for further Australian participation, particularly for Indigenous artists.

There are several commercial galleries in central Noumea. They provide a showcase for original works—mostly prints and paintings. These tend to be traditional, figurative works with some venturing into tentatively experimental styles.

I visited two printmaking shows. Both were basically modernist works by Tahitian artists, along with some historical pieces, etching from voyages by French scientists in the 1700s. These were engaging shows and I found them novel, partly because they were so different from the printmaking I usually see.

As regards popular culture, the contradictions continue. Reggae music is clearly very popular. It provides the background music in many of the shops and sells like hot cakes at the new CD Megastore. Bob Marley T-shirts dominate the clothing stalls and souvenir stands. Yet this is barely echoed on the airwaves of the four main radio stations which concentrate on adult-orientated rock and the usual golden oldies in English and French. As for film, the multi-screen cinema complexes were showing almost a dozen commercial films between them. But it was perplexing to find that there was only one film screening that was not an American offering with French subtitles or—even worse—dubbing!

On the other hand, the third Festival of Australian Cinema, organized by the Australian consulate, was being held in late June. A well balanced program of nine mainly recent films (including, inevitably, *Shine*), its accessibility was hampered by the fact that only *Shine* was available in French subtitled format. Nevertheless, the program was welcomed by local cinéphiles.

The local mainstream French theatre is strong enough to support local amateur companies and import major performers and events from France and French-speaking countries. I attended two outstanding performances. The incisive humour of a popular satirical duo from Paris contrasted well with the extraordinary Ymako Teatri, a performance company from the Ivory Coast whose combination of oral history, dance and mime, *The Legend of Kaidara*, was accessible, at least in part, even to non-French speakers. *Legend* was part of the 1997 cultural program of the Agence de Développement de la Culture Kanak (ADCK).

The ADCK operates as a *préfiguration* of the Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Centre, opening next year and named for the assassinated Kanak independence activist. The ADCK's thriving Department of Contemporary Kanak and Oceanic Arts is headed by Dr. Susan Cochrane, an expatriate Australian and is staffed by a number of noted Melanesian artists and craftspeople such as the painter Denise Tiavouane. The ADCK aims to preserve and

promote Indigenous culture and traditions, not only from New Caledonia but also from further afield. It maintains gallery and workshop spaces, a bookshop and an impressive 'médiathèque', a sort of high-tech library. For 1997 it has in place a comprehensive program of exhibitions, musical performances, theatre and dance. I heard enthusiastic reports of a season of ADCK concerts, held in May, featuring contemporary Australian, Pacific and Islander musicians including Christine Anu. Forthcoming performances sounded intriguing, particularly the Maori Black Grace Dance Company and *The Cry of Despair* a tragi-comic Kanak exploration of "power relations between young and old and the affirmation of Kanak identity within the tribe and the town".

More Kanak art and culture can be found at the Musée Territoriale which houses a huge Pacific collection. Its special exhibition at the time of my visit was the innovative *Kanak Plants Reveal their Secrets*. A magnificent carved and thatched tribal house, the 'Grande Case', is set among the Musée grounds. The Musée de Ville (Noumea's City Museum) presents long-running exhibitions, generally on the history of the French presence in the city. It incorporates some art work into its displays if only in an incidental manner. It is housed in a beautiful colonial building. The town's administration is becoming aware of the need to preserve and protect these heritage buildings, especially in the Latin Quarter.

But, not surprisingly in a country with no specific urban planning policy, there is very little art in public places. The memorial to the Pacific-based American troops is a

striking semi-circle of columns. But their red, white and blue stars and stripes are used excessively decoratively—like something from a souvenir shop. Located directly across the road from the town's only McDonald's, the monument inevitably assumes an unintended, trivialised context.

The beach-front gardens of the new Le Meridien hotel contain clusters of human-sized carved totems, magnificent, fierce-looking creations, arranged to maximise their impact on the viewer. However, they are installed in a far-flung spot where guests rarely venture.

Still, there are real signs of concerted efforts to address oversights and shortcomings and to promote a variety of arts projects throughout the country. There are certainly going to be more and more opportunities for reciprocal collaborations between Pacific countries and for Australian artists, Indigenous and European, to undertake residencies and joint projects with Noumean artists and arts promoters. Interested visitors might want to time their Noumean vacation to coincide with the Biennale or some of the other arts events that are in the planning stage. The New Caledonia tourist office in Sydney—which is not yet particularly geared towards promoting the arts—could look to emphasising this aspect of its service, as the country sets the scene for a thriving, cross-cultural artistic future.

Diana Klaosen is a Hobart-based writer and curator. She recently curated the photography group exhibition Pivot: Off the Wall which is currently touring Tasmanian venues.

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Performance palimpsests

Shane Rowlands on the pleasures of *Chinese Take Away* and *Marble* in Brisbane's Stage X festival

In *Chinese Take Away*, performer and writer Anna Yen embodies her grandmother's stories of survival in 30s China and Hong Kong; her mother's dislocation, disillusion and despair in 60s white Australia; and her own grief, confusion and eventual peace-making with her family's silenced and encrypted histories. The transitions between direct address and the becoming of various personae in this (auto)biographical telling deftly position the audience as confidante, eavesdropper, voyeur and witness. I felt honoured by the generosity, humour and courage of Yen's performance.

Working with a movement vocabulary drawn from circus tumbling and balancing, tai chi, martial arts, Feldenkrais and popular dance, Therese Collie's direction was deceptively simple. The repetition of movement sequences throughout the performance—enacted with a different emotional energy and in the evolving contexts of grandmother, mother and daughter—had complex resonances and functioned as a gestural version of the children's game called "Chinese whispers". A stately martial art and sword sequence, conjuring Chinese ancestral traditions, is reconfigured as the feisty self-defence manoeuvres of a 'modern' woman and then becomes a grief-stricken attempt to ward off feeling the pain of loss.

Encapsulating the lingering mood of bitterness, Glenn James' set design was both spartan and sensuous: a slack wire strung between two metallic trees; a brilliant red silk backdrop featured high-set slide projections; a mound of rice sat lonely under a blue light; and a long bolt of pale blue silk became the sinuous journey-work of rivers and oceans.

In many ways, *Chinese Take Away* staged the poetics of remembering, including the sensory nature of memory processes. The performance space became an enchanted place with smells of incense



Anna Yen in *Chinese Take Away*

Reina Imer

burning and food cooking with Yen delighting in peeling and eating an orange as well as in the tactile pleasures of fabric. After their incarnations, she discarded costumes and props on-stage, rendering the space as a palimpsest of these lives.

This notion of palimpsest was explored further in *Marble*. The Suzuki-inspired choreography traced the physical story of sharing cramped space and the ways in which experiencing close-quarteredness—such as the magnification of minor irritations and the strained familiarity of knowing someone's every move—are inscribed as body memories.

Blackout. A menacing thundering begins. The atmosphere builds to an almost suffocating claustrophobia. Suddenly, lights go up on the surreal vision of performers, Lisa O'Neill and Christina Koch, costumed in electric blue crinolines (designed by Sandra Anderson). They move—as if on rollers—continuously up and down the length of the space. We are unnerved by the thundering made by these blank-faced zombies. With their legs, feet and movements concealed by their enormous hooped skirts, their stomping remains an "open secret".

With crinoline as metaphor and sweat as evidence of the enormous energy required for this sort of containment and repression, the breath-taking score by musicians Kerry Joyce (percussion) and Trent Arkley-Smith (cello and guitar) worked to unlock emotional sub-texts. The musicians became sculptors, sensing the figures (and their forgotten kinaesthetics) trapped in the cold, hard marble.

Chinese Take Away, Cremorne Theatre, Queensland Performing Arts Centre, Brisbane, August 26-30; *Marble*, Metro Arts Theatre, August 27-30 and September 3-6.

Shane Rowlands is a Brisbane writer. Her latest publication *rear vision*, an artist's book produced in collaboration with Susi Blackwell, will be launched later this month.

Slicing through the everyday

Caitriona Murtagh sees *Scar* at La Boite in the Stage X festival

Comprising five monologues by two writers, *Timothy*, *Simon* and *Jane* by Stephen Davis and *Nina* and *Nell* by Maryanne Lynch, *Scar* explores an intricate network of physical and emotional cuts inflicted by the brutal edge of daily life. Here the shroud of apparent normality that usually conceals the interior of the urban landscape is rent. Subjects are exposed, torn and quivering from outrages and assaults that pervade the apparently safe and familiar. The seeping wounds glimpsed through the tears are discomfiting—all the more so for the black humour with which they are presented.

Situated within the familiar private spaces of daily life, bathroom, bedroom, kitchen and lounge room, the protagonists could be next door neighbours, friends, acquaintances...none is superficially distinguishable as marked by, or likely to mark others by violence. There are no physical scars for the naked eye to read as signs of outrage or trauma. The characters read, on their surface, as examples of the median, the unexceptional. Tim dresses from *Country Road*, Nina wears

cottontails under her frilly graduation dress. Nell cooks in T-shirt and jeans. Jane, in cardigan and knee length skirt, brown and black, could be standing next to you in the dole queue. Yet the set, the supporting structure beneath these safe, familiar places is unforgiving industrial steel. As the saccharine, soothing familiar strains of Burt Bacharach's *I'm in Love With That Guy* fill La Boite, similarities with the abbatoir and the operating theatre are set to become painfully apparent. The secure and safe disintegrate, revealing brutality at the heart of the mundane. These are the places where the cuts are made. Steel is good for mopping up blood when normality disintegrates into a series of spectacularly messy and unpleasant explorations of violence.

The multiple and complex expressions of violence in *Scar* are manifest just outside the usual line of vision—around the corner, under the table, beneath the usually inviolable membrane that protects the banal. Behind the ritual of dressing, after the morning shower, Timothy's

repressed trauma surfaces and, physically carved below Simon's flannelette shirt, is a text of self loathing. Nina, closeted in her bedroom, away from the questions of her family and their friends, spits desperation and resentment against the crushing weight of their expectations. A pet-torturing, infanticidal necrophile bids time in a family restaurant. Violence that is not so much unseen as un-noticed is revealed as omnipresent. In *Nell*, monstrous cultural tyrannies pervade the petty clichés of the cooking class and the grinding weight of racism with its assumption of Western cultural superiority explored.

Common themes emerge, tracing the patterns that violence leaves behind it. Jokes are shared between pieces—Mrs McDonald (*Timothy*) shares a name with Simon's pre-suicidal one-night stand, Lily McDonald. Food emerges as a weapon and a barrier. In *Nell*, tomato puree hand prints are smeared across the chef's uniform, marking him with an echo of the Indigenous culture crushed by the comfortable assumptions of his class.

Nina uses slices of bread as a barrier between her and the reality of her excruciating situation, while Jane considers cooking a last meal for her victim. Across these commonalities, everyday rituals—cooking, dressing segue into sudden spasms of violence—Timothy's motor skills diminish, he trembles, puts two socks on the same foot, hurls a chair across the stage; Nina collapses physically; the sadistic delight Jane takes in her threats climaxes in orgasmic, body-shaking laughter. Juxtapositions of horror with wicked humour—"I've killed a few cats in my time—not a lot but enough to respond to the allergy..." (*Jane*)—highlight the gap between the casually observed surface and the damage beneath it and makes examination of the ugly cuts bearable.

Scar writers, Stephen Davis and Maryanne Lynch; directed by Sean Mee, La Boite Theatre, Brisbane August 28-September 20.

Caitriona Murtagh is a freelance writer based in Brisbane.

Open the X-File

Mary Ann Hunter responds to a long awaited Queensland youth arts policy and initiatives including the Stage X Festival

The Queensland government's first Youth Cultural Policy, *Your Culture Your Move*, was finally launched in July after six years of concerted lobbying from the youth arts sector. It wasn't until early 1996 that Arts Queensland (under the former Labor government) made a serious attempt to articulate its support for young people in the arts. Prior to that, young people had been a vague social justice priority within the grants program and the occasional topic of research.

In the view of many youth arts workers, this effort was long overdue given the meteoric rise of culture-market imperatives that were leaving young artists and arts participants in a nebulous position. But just as the Australia Council had done five years earlier with its report *Ideas, Facts and Futures*, Arts Queensland (now The Arts Office) had firstly to acknowledge that the term 'young people in the arts' signifies an amorphous mass of cultural practice representing a diversity of interest, experience and taste—not to mention a wealth of innovation, attitude and community pre(mis)conception. Hardly the conveniently categorical stuff of policy.

This principle of diversity seems to have remained intact through the policy making process, surviving the changes in political and administrative leadership during that time (from Labor to Coalition State government in February 1996 and a much publicised dismissal of Arts Queensland CEO Greg Andrews in March 1997). Even the policy's eventual launch profiled a broad spectrum of activity and captured some nice paradoxes to humour both the sceptical and the supportive.

Your Culture Your Move outlines three sets of strategies to promote the contemporary arts of under-26ers (a contentious category in itself), and to support the needs of young artists, youth arts workers and youth-orientated organisations. These strategies are being incorporated into the existing industry development activities of the Arts Office and, according to project officer Natalie Cook, will demonstrate a greater commitment to prioritising arts for, by and about young people.

The Information and Promotion strategies aim to promote young people's involvement in the arts through the Arts Office's programs, the cultural industry and the media. The first practical application of this is the *Your Culture Your Move* document itself which includes a 22 page insert providing youth-relevant information about arts service organisations and the government's cultural portfolio.

The Access and Individual Assistance strategies target the development of young professional artists and young audiences through existing Arts Office funding programs. These strategies also aim to increase the representation of young people on arts decision making bodies, such as Queensland's locally-elected Regional Arts Development Fund Committees which decide on community-based arts funding.

The Youth Arts Infrastructure and Industry Development strategies look to fostering partnerships with other government and non-government organisations. Education, training and employment feature in this set of strategies, positioning the Arts Office as an advocate of interdepartmental cooperation on youth cultural development matters. Youth Arts Queensland has been identified as a peak body for youth arts and cultural development and is promised greater support for expansion.

But what of the realpolitik? Where is the new money going and who will it benefit?

The biggest recipient of new funds so far has been the Stage X Festival, an initiative of the Queensland Performing Arts Trust, which was launched simultaneously with *Your*

Culture Your Move. A total of \$500,000 was committed to this festival which, before its actual occurrence, may have been read as another powergrab by this juggernaut statutory body. But Stage X was a welcome opportunity, particularly for young audiences over 15, and for young professional performing artists in South East Queensland who benefited from the focus on local content.

Another \$100,000 of the *Your Culture Your Move* deal was allocated to the development of a Mentor Program. This program aims to support "emerging artists and artworkers on their path to a professional career" and is being piloted by the Arts Office with an advisory committee of young people and industry representatives. This program seems to have strong support, as it enhances the informal initiatives already being undertaken by a number of arts organisations and individuals. It may be said that those established in the arts have a responsibility to emerging artists and artworkers. This program is potentially an effective way to exercise that responsibility by sharing philosophies and work practices in professional relationships that are defined outside the competitive 'market' paradigm. That is, if it does not lapse into a token work experience or employment substitute program.

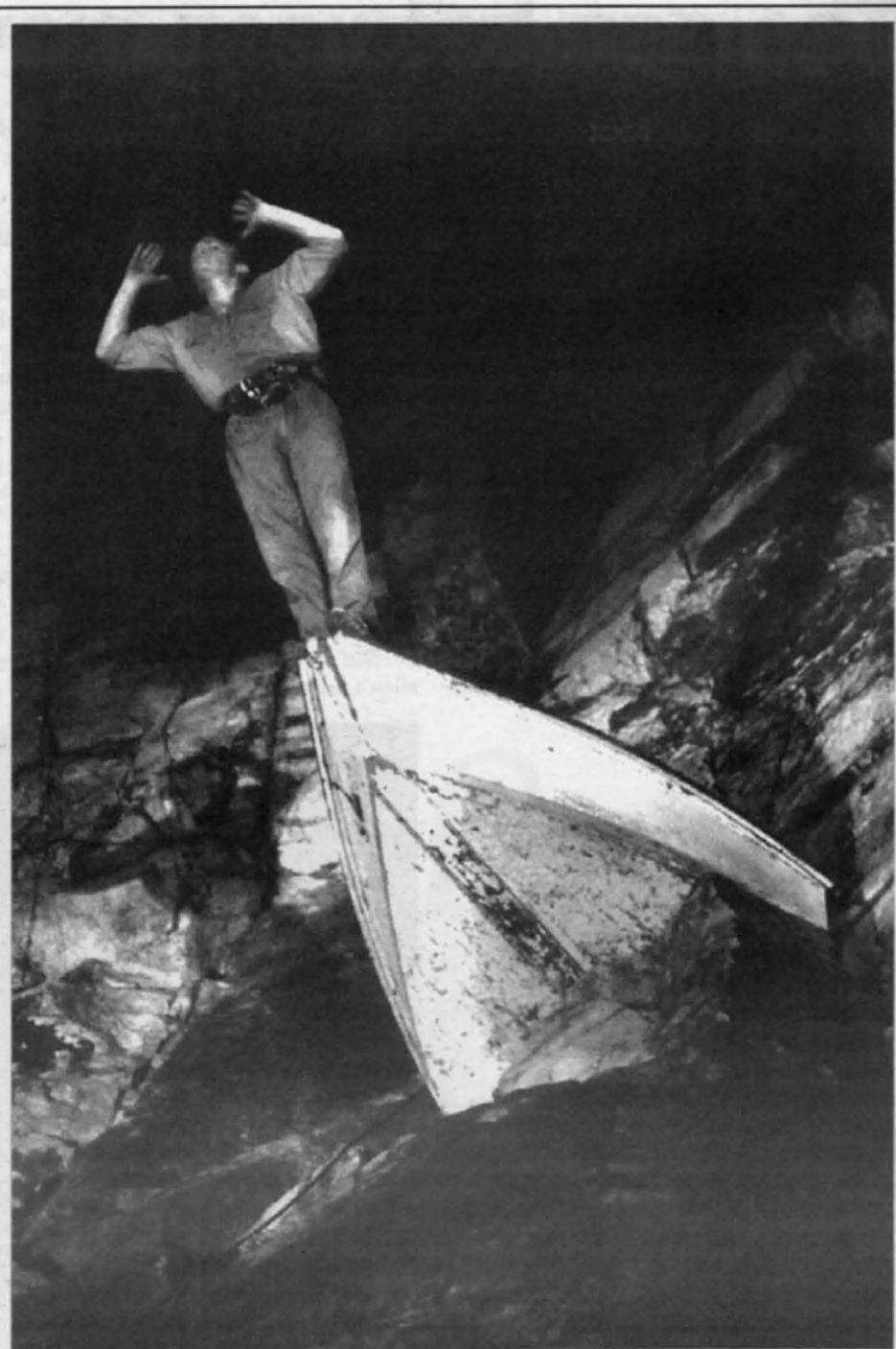
Other policy initiatives include an annual Digital Media scholarship worth up to \$5,000 of studio time and training at QANTM, business opportunities for young designers through the BIZARTS program of the Queensland Artworkers Alliance and new forms of support in contemporary music which are currently being devised.

In the absence of an explicit state cultural policy (such as the previous government's *Building Local Going Global*), *Your Culture Your Move* has had to create its own context, and has begun by conveying its principles through the design of the policy document itself. But the very broad range of strategies have to straddle issues of access, equity and participation with various age-specific and artform-specific concerns, alongside wider cultural industry development and 'whole of government' priorities for social and economic development. All this under the banner of the Arts Office's revamped mission statement "to ensure success for Queensland's cultural industries".

The complexity of prioritising and addressing these aspects of the youth cultural agenda has necessitated a framework which seeks to enhance rather than determine developments in youth cultural participation; an approach which has been supported by the youth arts sector, but cautiously so. Susan Richer, chair of Youth Arts Queensland is concerned, "Now that it's down on paper, well and good, but the danger is that youth culture will now just remain a tick-a-box priority without any real long term effect or development".

The effectiveness of *Your Culture Your Move* will be administratively measured by the bureaucracy's predetermined performance indicators. But ultimately the policy's capability will depend on how its principles are embraced by the cultural industry, how individuals and organisations actively use it to lobby and support their own activity and how the strategies are implemented across the Arts Office's areas of responsibility. As the Arts Office's Manager of Strategic Development, Janice Besch Minson, puts it, "we have an enormous amount to do".

Mary Ann Hunter was Arts Queensland's research officer for the initial development of a youth cultural policy. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of that organisation.



Mat Wilson (The Explorer) 15 metres up the cliff wall in *Under the Big Sky*

Sam Charlton

A white woman clad in a white nightgown struggles against a gale-force wind on a cliff top. In her hands a garment twists and turns. The woman fights each step towards the drop clothesline, only to find herself just as helpless as the garment she is holding, clinging for dear life to the line, feet lifting off the ground, the roar of a tempest filling her ears...

Is this the pioneer wife of Lawson or McCubbin? The other who does not, cannot belong (a nod to Hewett?). The lost soul of white culture in a landscape that is all soul (Stow?). Brink Theatre's *Under the Big Sky*, a visceral cacophony of sound, vision and monumental scale set in a cliff face on the Brisbane River, gestures towards all of these possibilities in its exploration of the cultural, social and emotional landscape of white Australia.

Citing Stow, Hewett, Malouf, Boyd and Nolan as influences, Brink inhabits the white Australian position as it comes face to face with the question of its own identity. Archetypes—the Explorer, the Woman, the Water Diviner, the Bird Watcher—clamber here and there with futile purpose in a landscape that changes and changes again as each is drawn further into unknown terrain.

Although a dramaturg or writer could trim the fat, this work explores a meaty idea—one apt for the Age of Howard. Brink's work speaks of the difficulty of constructing a white Australian identity in a land where whites are essentially not at home. And so...the Explorer is marooned on a useless boat, the Woman spirals down into ghostliness, the Water Diviner finds no water, and the Bird Watcher sees nothing. Maryanne Lynch

Under The Big Sky, Brink Theatre, Howard Smith Wharf, Brisbane, Stage X Festival, August 26-30

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The gap between moves

Eleanor Brickhill discusses a new dance and film project, *Premonition*, with choreographer-performer Sue-ellen Kohler, writer-dramaturg William McClure and filmmaker Mahalya Middlemist

Remember *Hybrid* (The Performance Space, 1991)? A woman falls...slowly...her weight shifts...her naked body begins...to slip...frame by frame...she...falls...out of sight.

I thought I saw someone shake my body from a sleep/ of death, but I could not swear to it.

SK *Premonition* is about dance history. William talks about it in terms of creating a space between two moves. One move, and then the decision—what comes next? And in the gap between the moves, is the premonition. Waiting for the next move. You don't know the next move until...

•••

EB *Why is film such an important part of this project?*

SK Certainly the ideas for this project have come out of the past work Mahalya and I have done together, even if it hasn't happened in a logical way with *Premonition* as the next step. For instance, Mahalya couldn't have made the film *Vivarium* in 1994 without the particular way that I moved my particular body. And neither would I ever have imagined *Vivarium* the way Mahalya did, but somehow the two visions went together well. When you put movement on film, something happens which you can't necessarily predict. The results come through an intensely creative process, and that for me is the best thing about it.

MM We've been talking about the multi-screen set-up for a long time, three full-sized screens, side by side, showing simultaneous but variant images of Sue-ellen's dancing body. The camera is straight on and fixed, so the perspective is the same as you would have of the performing body.

In the end, due to budgetary constraints, we had to shoot one screen on film, and the other two on video. So we'll have those three different textures: two video bodies, a film body, and a real body. And we've also got the *Falling* film from *Hybrid*, very large in space, and we'll bring that in at the beginning.

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In the daytime, I can see things very clearly./ I know just the right moves for the right moment./ It is as if all my training directs me down a path that I have walked before./ This is a path that I know very well. So I lie down and go to sleep.

SK I've encountered so many different kinds of movement in my training and performing. *Premonition* is about past and future understandings of my body; my past body informs my future body; and those understandings can get mixed up, squashed together. *Premonition* is about a feeling of how things are, and on that feeling rests the possibilities for how things might be.

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SK We both originally wanted the work to be all on 16 mm film rather than video because of the better quality of resolution. And certainly for both of us, film in performance is actually about light. Using video can bring in a whole lot of other things.

MM Film technology is not so laden with

ideas, and it's so accepted that you hardly think about it. And it's more elusive, ephemeral, because it's made out of light beams. There's a sense of the photographic image being projected on screens but travelling further than the screen. And an important part is the way Sue-ellen is lit, floating in space, not bound to the ground, with the screens like doorway-shaped pools of light.

We worried that video might force people into reading the work in unintended ways, imagining that Sue-ellen is talking about some kind of body mediated by technology, when she's not at all. We're really just interested in Sue-ellen's body and images of it, not in

comfortable. It's hard to feel authorised, confident as a creator of new dance; I often feel like I can't do anything original. And it's also about not being able to succeed in any kind of dance structure, because all setups are about not succeeding.

There is an inherent failure in being placed in Australia as a dancer. It doesn't matter what you do, you're never the original article and your referents are always somewhere else. Your judges can never be pleased with what you do, because Australian identity is bound up in mimicry of the rest of the world. And the perceived failure lies in failure to be the real thing.

kept on moving in precisely the same way as I have always done. /But only now, my body smelt of putrid flesh/ and the movement itself seemed to rise up before me as tombstones.

WM *Premonition* is about exploding the reality of the moment, the reality in what you can pin down in an accepted format. So it tries to hollow that out, and to give access to something built of the limitless possibilities of choice. It's a piece about many voices.

EB *The way you describe screens and images makes it seem very vertical.*

MM Yes, the vertical screens suit that constrained, frontal, upright, balletic kind of presentation that we are very much talking about.

EB *The Falling film is something I remember vividly from Hybrid. How does that relate to what you're doing in Premonition?*

MM I've always like the idea of starting this work with *Falling*. It was a good ending for *Hybrid*, that falling away right out of frame at the bottom of the stage so that there's nothing there. Now we want to start again with that. It has a link with that verticality which is so balletic. The structure seems to make a lot of sense.

SK But there's no sense of a resurrection of the fallen body. I don't especially want to make that kind of statement, even though I know that some people will want to see that. *Falling* was originally set on top of the proscenium arch—the epitome of female presentation and ballet presentation. That little balletic dance that I did in *Hybrid* across the stage underneath *Falling*, I never knew what it was then. But now I can bring it back into this work, showing how so much of my training is implicated in the way I am, and how unable it is to be extricated from anything that I or anyone might want to say about dance. I'm trying now to speak about that in a more conscious way.

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WM There's an uncivilised part of a person which cannot accept the seductive power of tradition and the kinds of decisions made from that stance, without testing them. So, it's in the testing, the evolving relationship you have to those decisions and those traditions. That's important, not the traditions themselves.

Premonition is about a playfulness in and around the choices from one moment to the next. It's an attempt to reach a non-apologetic place in the world.

There is now a convulsion and a deep agitation going on in my limbs./ They are stretching—as if they want to speak in phrases not seen before./ I am out of myself and running away and a body is now moving in a very dark place./

Can you see this body?

Premonition, choreographed and performed by Sue-ellen Kohler; assistant choreographer Sandra Perrin; filmmaker Mahalya Middlemist; writer-dramaturg William McClure; composer Ion Pearce. The Performance Space, Sydney, October 8-19. Bookings 02 9319 5091



Sue-ellen Kohler in *Premonition*

Marie Ngai-King

highlighting the technology that creates those images.

•••

Now, in my dreams, I still keep on moving and in the same way that I have always done./ I meet my balletic body and we dance together./ I meet all my modern and postmodern bodies and we all dance together three times./ or is it five, around in circles. I can't be sure right now./ but neither does it seem to matter.

SK I'm not a dancer who's been totally codified and rigidly formed by some particular style. There's a lot of slip, and within that slip I often feel quite at sea. Being at sea is not always very

None of this seems strange, rather it all seems perfectly natural./ so I continue on in the same way as I have always done.

WM Often people look at dance in terms of where it has come from, but that way of seeing is questioned here. *Premonition* is engaging with the fact that its sources may lie somewhere else, but what we end up with in the here and now is what is important.

SK Still, there is something I do that is different from anyone else.

Then—but it wasn't really a 'then'—as if from nowhere, a flash./ a disgusting premonition of my present state was given to me./ And in this state, all the while, I

Free from steps

Anne Thompson interviews choreographer and artistic director Meryl Tankard

This is the first of two articles on dance companies based in Adelaide as indicative of a range of dance discourses in Australia. In this issue, Anne Thompson interviews Meryl Tankard who, subsequent to this interview, won the Mobil Pegasus Award for her choreography of *Inuk* for the Meryl Tankard Australian Dance Theatre at the 14th International Summer Theatre Festival in Hamburg. In *RealTime* 22, Anne Thompson talks to Sally Chance, Artistic Director of the Restless Dance Company who will be shortly working in Melbourne with CanDoCo, a British company which also features disabled members. CanDoCo are guests of the newIMAGES exchange program between Australia and Great Britain.

I am interested in articulating the discourses now available to dancers and choreographers. This interest is linked to my belief that the way we live and give meaning to our work and lives as artists depends on the range and social power of the discourses to which we have access.

I want to challenge the idea that there exists a universally understood truth about the nature of dance and dancing. I believe Australian dance culture to be a plurality of competing subcultures. I want to acknowledge the range of discourses now being used by Australian dancers and choreographers. I want to encourage the view that the use of a discourse can be a strategy.

This interview with Meryl Tankard raised many questions for me: What happens to the notions of "expression" and "originality" if an individual's dancing is understood to be marked by aesthetic and cultural codes? What use is the concept of national identity for dancers? In what ways could this be defined as linking to birthplace, as Aboriginality, as a conscious representation of cultural plurality? Is the dance we recognise as a representation of a culture or inner feeling, what we classify as authentic? How can we acknowledge our fascination with "other" cultures in dancing? What ethical frameworks can inform our use of the art of "other" cultures? How is the task of promoting dance on the national and international dance market shaping the way Australian dance artists think about dance?

AT How do you understand the mix of classicism/classical ballet and expressionism/modern dance in your work? Are these two dance traditions connected for you?

MT My training as a dancer has been in both classical and modern dance as I danced in the Australian Ballet and with Pina Bausch. In some ways they feel like the opposite extreme of each other. I always felt as a ballet dancer that there was something missing, that there was something I couldn't get out because I was too worried about getting the technique right.

But then on the other hand there is an amazing similarity of rigour and devotion required by the ballet and Pina's dance theatre. The ballet was a sheltered world and we never saw or thought of anything else. When I entered Pina's company I thought, "Great! Freedom at last!" And it *was* freeing to do her work. Yet there was, as with classical dance, an almost religious devotion to the art of dance. There couldn't be anything else in your life. You could never say Pina was hard. She never yelled at anybody, but we were like monks. Giving up everything for dance was expected and we lived up to that expectation.

AT Does that drive inform your work?

MT I can't watch work that is superficial.

AT What do you mean?

MT Work that doesn't have a depth that comes from within. There is something that comes from inside and goes out through the body when we dance. So much dance-works-



Meryl Tankard Regis Lansac

the other way. Dancing can be about vanity. "I'm so cute. My body is gorgeous. Look at me." It can become vulgar. Movement, for me, has to be honest, truthful. If people have never experienced that way of dancing, they are free to work in other ways. Sometimes I find it aggravating that I can't just indulge in movement. It might bring something else out in me. But I can't just go into the studio and work on movement alone.

AT How would you explain what drives the creative process when you are making a work?

MT I feel fortunate to have worked with Pina, although at times it was hard. I will never find anyone like her again. I learned from her to ask questions of the dancers, to get them to contribute using their own creativity. They are, after all, human beings not objects. I learnt not to get dancers to just copy a step I can do or to move the way my body does. I think those days are gone. Dancers are creative. When the dancers use that creativity there is a commitment in the performing that is different from when dancers just do steps.

AT How do you select an answer? Is it to do with a dancer connecting to the question in some way?

MT I think so. When you see honesty it touches you. Sometimes I can't even work out why I am touched. When a response is truthful, that dancer has a special energy that communicates. This dancing has nothing to do with the toe being pointed or the leg turned out. It's so much more interesting. The voice is also interesting. You can't lie with the voice. I don't really think you can lie with movement either. You are totally exposed and vulnerable.

AT How do you then shape a work or put it together into its final form?

MT It is always scary and I go in there totally empty. It's only when I'm watching that I can say "That goes with that!" You have a feeling for form but it is something subtle. I can't express it in words.

But I do love the space. I've always loved space. Loved using every bit of it. In Pina's work I would always run around the space. In *Furioso* the ropes allowed me to use space in a new way. That was exciting for me.

AT Surely this feeling for form is a product of your own dance history.

MT Discipline and a strong foundation in a dance style is important. It doesn't have to be classical ballet. It may be something you reject but it will still be important.

AT But where would you place yourself as a choreographer?

MT Just before a show opens I always think, "I am not a choreographer". I associate choreography with steps. I think that in Australia you are called a choreographer if

you keep the dancers bouncing around to the music, jumping up and down, turning and twisting. If you sit in a dark corner, people ask, "What's that?" I'm not talking about audiences. I'm talking about critics. I'm not going to move just for movement's sake.

AT How do you understand the relationship between the choreographer and the dancer?

MT I feel like I've gone through what they are going through. I've been guided and now I can guide them, unlock their creative powers, push. Some people resist this. Once you uncover their artistry a door is opened and they go through it. You can see them become so much more confident.

AT What are the ideal conditions in which to create dance?

MT Pina Bausch took three months to make a piece. Ideally it would be good to work, have time to think and then complete the work.

the piece. The last scene shows a Maori boy wanting to know about his background and his father laughing at him. It is quite hard.

A white girl plays the Maori boy. It ends with Sean, a white Australian, and Rachel, a beautiful, tall, Aboriginal girl, singing an Italian aria, "Give Us Peace!" For me, *this* said everything I wanted to say.

AT What have the company's travels taught it about dance and its identity as an Australian dance company?

MT The promoter from Brooklyn Academy of Music said, "This work is not Australian. I refuse to promote it as such. It's universal". But when we took *Furioso* to Europe it was perceived as Australian. And it is. We are all Australians who create the work. It is hard to define what that is. Our last European tour was sold out and we've been invited back to Hamburg. So we must offer something different from what they are used to in Europe. That's why they are excited by it. In Australia they say the work is very European.



Sarah-Jayne Howard and Peter Sears in *Inuk*

Regis Lansac

AT So what about training? How do you view classical technique?

MT I don't mind the technique. But I see no point in doing 19th century ballets. The ballets change when the choreographers are no longer around. They just get watered down. They've lost the choreographer's inner connection with the movement. Ballets should also express what is happening now. When I created *Aurora*, I came to love and respect the story. The critics went berserk because I tap-danced to Tchaikovsky. I wasn't sending it up. I was really trying to work out how to tell that fairy tale.

I'm in a position now where a number of dancers I have worked with for four or five years want to leave and go to Europe. We constantly lose dancers from Australia to overseas. This means we don't have a pool of dancers to choose from. I really think that Australia should allow foreign dancers to work here. There are many dancers in Europe who want to work with me and I think it would enrich the culture here if they could. It would give Australian dancers so much to work alongside them.

AT Do certain themes/concerns recur in your work?

MT Oh, life, love! Pina always said that all her pieces were about love. Though in the last piece I made, *Inuk*, I felt a need to talk about the environment and Australia. Most of the critics didn't see this and so didn't know what the piece was about. I thought I was making a pretty obvious statement.

AT What were you saying?

MT When I came back from Europe, Australia seemed...vast. I was aware of the lack of support for the arts here. I felt alone. Pauline Hanson was on the scene! Racism was rife! There are quite a few sections in the piece which comment on this situation. I had two Aboriginal dancers and a Maori boy in

I think that's why I did this last piece. I had to ask, "Where is home?" "Where is my home?"

AT What draws you to the song and dance of different cultures?

MT When I first arrived back from Europe I felt a need to understand this culture. Now I look to other cultures. They seem to have a reason for dancing. We've lost that.

AT You perceive there to be a connection between dance and social life in other cultures.

MT I think dance is a very natural activity and we should all be involved in it. Greek and Italian migrants brought a different relation to dance to Australia.

AT Did you feel there existed a relationship between dance and social ritual in Europe?

MT I felt it when I left Europe. These rituals don't necessarily occur there anymore. A beautiful Bulgarian artist said of *Songs For Mara*, "It has taken an Australian to remind us where we have come from."

AT Would you like to raise anything?

MT I think it's a pity that more people don't write about dance. In Europe dance has more of a connection with other art forms. Australia is young and people are starting to write. I just wish more people would write. It is only then that a history will exist. I was cleaning out my book shelves the other day and found seven books on Pina Bausch, written from very different perspectives.

Anne Thompson is a freelance director and choreographer based in Adelaide where she is completing an MA. She taught movement for many years at the VCA Drama School.

Too many cooks?

Erin Brannigan talks with choreographers from the *Microdance* series

Microdance is an initiative of the Australia Council and the Australian Film Commission. Funded by these two agencies, 13 projects from a field of 62 submissions were shortlisted for further development. In August 1996, four projects were selected for production by the ABC. They will be screened as part of Steps#3—Intersteps, The Performance Space on November 8, followed by discussion with the artists.

Film has been fascinated with the moving body since the first "moving pictures" harnessed light through technology to give motion to images. Filmic studies of human movement such as the work of Eadweard Muybridge late last century are seminal examples of this obsession. Trevor Patrick would appear to revisit these origins of the cinema in his short film, *Nine Cauldrons*. Nine pools of light illuminate nine encounters between camera and body, the body becoming the site and geography of the filmic journey. The notion of 'journey' and its narrative implications, whether explicit or implicit, is at the heart of the series of four short films that constitute *Microdance*.

Another significant issue became apparent in discussions with three of the choreographers Matthew Bergan, Kate Champion and Sue Healey, along with a faxed response from Trevor Patrick; the role of the choreographer within the cinematic process. Trevor Patrick describes the historic role of the choreographer as being "functionary—someone who came in, put the steps or movement sequences together, then left the director and the producer alone to get on with realising their artistic vision". We must go back beyond the musical genre to understand current dance/film practice, or alternatively to the *avant garde* film movements of the 50s and 60s when experimental film techniques escaped the trajectory of the classic fiction film genre.

Recently, dance maker Lucy Guerin spoke of the effect that the human figure has upon performance, describing it as being "one of the most loaded sites for a narrative source". This function of the human figure, the narrative history of cinematic practice and the often problematic relationship between dance and narrative, emerged as a framework for creative considerations. Matthew Bergan posed the question that we had

been circling: "How do you bring movement to film and film narrative—whether it be just movement for movement's sake, the lusciousness of it, or whether you try and present a narrative within that?" Bergan also spoke of "the linguistic matter of using dancers and bodies as opposed to the textual matter of story and narrative". The choreographers found themselves negotiating a medium which had its own indelible history of storytelling, a point compounded by the application process which demanded written synopses and storyboards or shot-lists. Bergan felt compelled to "make it read on paper" and Healey found she "rewrote it as if it would be a straight literary narrative".

The challenge that Bergan articulated was met by each team in varying ways that constitute a kind of map of the interface between film and dance. Trevor Patrick chose a metaphoric journey made up of iconic moments "inspired by a series of drawings by Robert Longo; *Men in the Cities*", and Taoist mythology concerning alchemy. His simple approach to the film as "a trio for camera, sound and dancer" is reminiscent of Muybridge; in this case the science is absorbed into the expression, the relationship between body and camera becomes the storytelling mechanism, and the alchemy resonates in the mixture of body, light and film.

Sue Healey, like Patrick, indulged in the writing stage of her project *Slipped* and, like Patrick, moved far away from literal interpretations towards what she referred to as "a very clear physical narrative". With the basic metaphor of a staircase and the journey of the climb being representative of "memory, ancestral past and looking back at the past", ultimately for her "the movement is the drama". The use of a strong and simple metaphorical image that acts as a "spine image" allows the dance to occur along and around the stairs, fulfilling a narrative-like function in elaborating upon the basic premise.

Matthew Bergan approached his film, *The Father is Sleeping*, from the linguistic problematics of a film/dance collaboration, stating in his proposal that his agenda for the film was to look at "narrative and developing an area that combines movement and drama". Bergan developed a process in which "a scene happens quite naturally and out of that comes a physical



Kate Champion and John Leatheart in *The Changing Room*

Ben Brett

gesture...a casual approach to movement". His theme of "the symbolic father" was approached as a "realistic portrayal" complicated by the effects of memory.

The concept of memory is common to three of the four projects and offers a device for the type of magical transformation of events with which

contradicted in the stage work of all four choreographers.

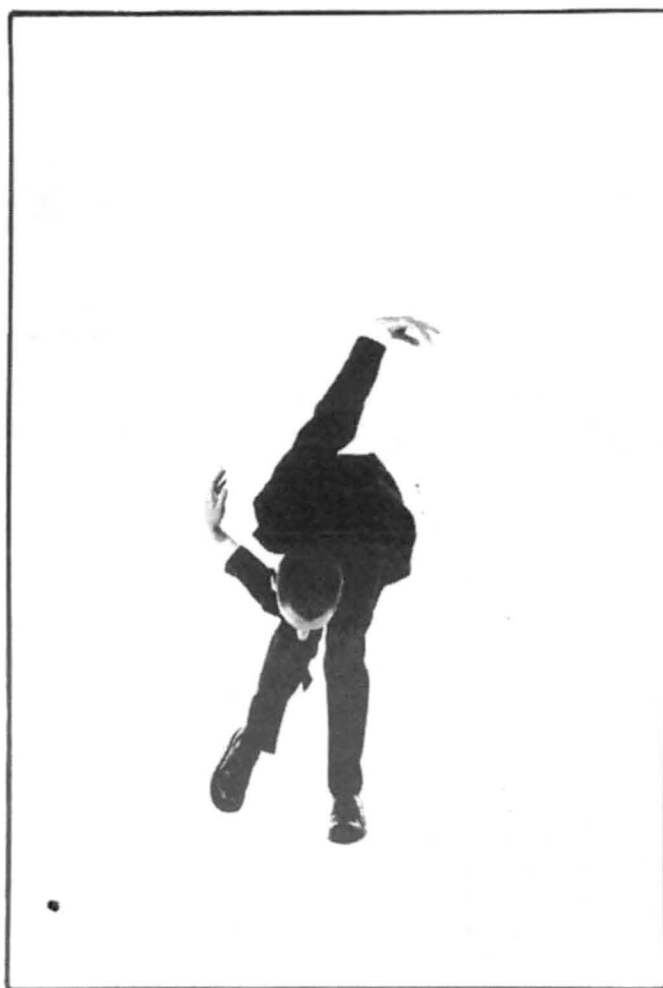
This opposition seems more attributable to a power struggle which developed out of disciplinary traditions. Patrick describes "the independent dance maker who writes, performs, directs and occasionally produces his own work." This central authority figure is in direct contrast to the team work that creates films, a methodology Patrick refers to as being from "another culture". This new territory was alternatively daunting and comforting for the choreographers. There was a sense of relief when the delegatory system of film production seemed to support an artistic vision, and frustration when this same process left the choreographers feeling "out of control". As all of the choreographers came up with the original concepts, many felt like Champion when she said that the collaborative process is "like making a cake and someone puts orange rind in and you didn't want to put orange rind in".

Perhaps we must look at the notion of the film auteur, the central artistic force who first appeared in theory surrounding the *avant garde* film movements. If new dance film/video practice relates more to this type of aesthetic, as opposed to the aesthetic of the classic narrative fiction film, then the auteur is an obvious role-model. Problems arise then when this figure comes in two parts with two different crafts; two different cakes with two different recipes.

The technology and language of filmmakers can be alienating and the industry structure of film is ever-present in the shape of producers and financial pressure. The choreographers' concerns seem understandable when you place the power of the film industry beside the relatively marginalised dance community. Matthew Bergan's studies in the area of film gave him the confidence to state that he felt "100 per cent confident to direct and choreograph" next time, and, with Champion in agreement, there are precedents set where a cinematographer has been a sufficient co-worker on such projects. I would like to see the choreographers in the editing suite succumbing to the "seduction" Patrick described, indulging in a choreography of the image that this technology makes possible.

Dance writer and former freelance dancer Erin Brannigan is currently working on an essay on dance and film for *Writings On Dance and acting as contributing editor.*

Matthew Bergan, *The Father is Sleeping*, director Robert Herbert; Trevor Patrick, *Nine Cauldrons*, director Paul Hampton; Sue Healey, *Slipped*, director Louise Curham; Kate Champion, *The Changing Room*, director Alyson Bell.



Trevor Patrick in *Nine Cauldrons*

Ponch Hawkes

both film and dance have long been enamoured. Kate Champion's *The Changing Room* is explicit in taking memory as its subject, the idea that "you can't go forward if you are attached to your memories...until you've completely confronted them". Again there is a strong visual metaphor—a room that tilts and diminishes in size, eventually filling with water and forcing Champion's character out. Like Healey, the movement is dictated by the central physical image with the drama growing out of Champion's desire to explore the kind of "visual effects" that only film can offer.

In Healey's description of her project, theatre and dance are opposing forces and the struggle to insist upon the work as "a dance project" where "the actual guts of the work had to exist in movement", required that her director Louise Curham "give over" the work. The creation of a binary opposition where theatre, drama and film came down on one side with movement/dance on the other, persisted throughout the discussions. The assumptions this promotes are odd; that dance and theatre are discrete disciplines is a point



Mathew Bergan and Stephen Leeder in *The Father is Sleeping*

Elise Lockwood

US award for choreographer Lucy Guerin

The Australian choreographer Lucy Guerin has been awarded a Bessie—an annual award for dance and performance events in New York—for her production *Two Lies*. She has been living in the USA since 1989 and is currently working with the One Extra Dance Company in Sydney on a new piece for the season entitled *two*, which also features new work by Garry Stewart.

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Power Institute Public Education

The *Power Lecture in Contemporary Visual Culture* will be given by **Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe** on 23 October at 6:30pm at the American Express Foundation Hall, Museum of Contemporary Art. In his not-to-be-missed lecture, "Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime", the US based artist and writer touches on a wide range of subjects including the relationships between art and technology, photography and painting, and between the ideas of "beauty" and "the sublime". Presented in conjunction with the Museum of Contemporary Art. Cost: MCA Members and Power Foundation Members \$10, non-members \$15, student rush \$5, bookings on 9241 5876.

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Tanne: Episodes from the Life of Karen Blixen

As part of the Denmark Meets Australia program presented by the Royal Danish Ministry of Culture, New Danish Dance Theatre is presenting their work *Tanne: Episodes from the Life of Karen Blixen* choreographed by NDDT's artistic director Warren Spears and performed by six dancers from the company with music by Jens Wilhelm Pedersen at the Newtown Theatre 16-18 October. The NDDT season dovetails into the 1997 *Bodies* season at the same venue from October 22 to November 9. Producer Mark Cleary's *Bodies* count this year numbers around 20 dancers including Elizabeth Dalman, Susan Barling, Virginia Ferris, Rosetta Cook, Norman Hall, Paulina Quinteros, Bernadette Walong and Patrick Harding-Irmer. There's also a special youthworks program produced by Julianne Sanders on November 1 and 8.

The Denmark Meets Australia program also includes the stunning production of *Orfeo* by Hotel Pro Forma, a visit by the 20 piece Danish Radio Jazz Orchestra with jazz bassist Niels-Henning Orsted Pedersen, a program of contemporary Danish cinema and a tour by Danish writers (Ib Michael, Carsten Jensen, Vagn Lundbye and Solvej Balle) with actors from the Danish People's Theatre. Parts of the program are touring Sydney, Canberra and Barossa Valley, South Australia. All Denmark Meets Australia details on website www.denmark.com.au



Tuula Roppola

Alan Cruickshank

The annual independent dance showcase, *Steps* is an eagerly anticipated forum for new work and debate around issues of physical performance. The third *Steps* program (*Inter-Steps*) will run throughout November at The Performance Space in Sydney. There's always a sense of performance as event in the *Steps* program along with serious explorations of space. As well as providing a platform for independent artists, *Steps* offers dancers and physical performers an opportunity to reflect a personal style as distinct from their performances within companies. This year's featured artists are Brett Daffy, Meredith Kitchen, Claire Hague, Trevor Patrick, Brian Carbee, Beth Kayes and Tuula Roppola. As well as the main program, *Studio Steps* features one-off performances by Martin del Amo, Jeff Stein, James McAllister, Lisa French, Lisa Freshwater and Brett Heath. Premiering at *Steps* is a new 13 minute dance on film, *Touched*, choreographed by Wendy Houston of DV8 fame. There'll also be an intimate exhibition of images by Heidrun Löhr. A special focus of *Inter-steps* will be dance on video. Michelle Mahrer has curated a program of recent award winning films from Europe and North America including *Vertigo Bird* (33 mins) featuring Slovenia's En-Knap Company choreographed by Iztok Kovac and from the UK, *Boy* (5 mins) choreographed by Rosemary Lee and directed by Peter Anderson. On November 8 following the screenings of the Microdance films, there'll be a discussion on the vexed process of creating dance on film with film-makers (Robert Herbert, Paul Hampton, Louise Curham and Alyson Bell) and choreographers (Matthew Bergan, Sue Healey, Kate Champion and Trevor Patrick).

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OnScreen

film, media and techno-arts

Feature

Hybrid ways of making sense

ANAT's CODE RED speakers McKenzie Wark and Geert Lovink debate the implications of an English language dominated internet

The conference component of CODE RED will take place at The Performance Space, Sydney, Saturday November 22 - Tuesday November 25, 1997. It is being curated by Julianne Pierce (Project Co-ordinator at The Performance Space and new media artist) and organised by the Adelaide-based Australian Network for Art & Technology (ANAT). CODE RED will include highly regarded specialist Australian and international speakers who will debate and discuss media power, communication and information technology. CODE RED will investigate how artists are shaping communication and the vital role which artists can play in developing the future of the new media. (See page 28)

Geert Lovink is an editor of *nettime* which declares itself "a semi-public, collaborative text filter for net criticism, cultural politics of the net and international coordination of meetings, conferences and publishing projects; it started in June 1995 after a meeting at the Venice Biennale and functions as an exchange channel between media activists, artists, theorists, philosophers, journalists, technicians and researchers from all over the world with many European and East European subscribers."

nettime <http://mediafilter.org/nettime/>

On 'Netlish'

McKenzie Wark

You taught me language, and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language.

Caliban, Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

On the net, one is forever coming across versions of English written as a second language—Euro-english, 'Japlish' etc—that are at once charming and strange. It's a temptation, as a native speaker, to think these usages are 'wrong'. But I think there's a better way of seeing it. What the net makes possible is the circulation of the very wide range of forms of English as a second language that have existed for some time, and which are, via the net, coming more and more in contact with each other.

When non-English language speakers start writing in English, elements of their native grammar and style come into English. This enriches English immeasurably, I think, so long as the way in which English is being used in a given non-native context is reasonably coherent.

Take the notorious 'Japlish'. At first sight, it's extremely strange. But after a while, it makes sense. And you can start to see it as a distinctive kind of writing. A fantastic hybrid of ways of making sense and making a self in language. A wacky footnote to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

This was the idea that each language makes possible certain conceptual structures, and makes others most unlikely. For example, ancient Greek was a language extremely rich in articles, so it lent itself to the formation of the discourse of philosophy. What is being? It's a thought that Greek—and English—can express easily, but that can't occur in certain other languages. Those other languages, needless to say, are no doubt rich in other kinds of thought.

What happens when non-native writers use English is that the reader sees the shadow of another way of thinking, as it meets the ways of thinking that English shapes. One sees the English shape, and beyond it, the shadow of another shape. Even better, one sees a third shape, not belonging to either language, emerging at the point of contact of the two.

All of this is more obvious in netwriting than in printed matter. On the net, nobody pays too much attention to grammar and style. On the net, one sees the shape of language through the little mistakes and fissures that in printed texts editors remove. What emerges is a whole range of ways of writing 'Netlish', where non-native forms of English writing come in contact with each other, and with native forms, without being passed through a single editorial standard.

Which leads me to the question of how Netlish should be edited when net texts are published in printed form. Perhaps editing has to be looked at from two sides. On the one hand, it helps to think about it from the point of view of kinds of native English use (of which there are several). It matters that English has conventions, so that it is clear to readers what a writer intends.

But that doesn't mean there has to be one convention of usage—be it Oxford or Webster. As a speaker and writer of a minority English, I'm all in favour of recognising distinct forms of the language. Australian-English is different. We have our own dictionary, our own style guides. So too does Indian English—and there may be more people speaking English as a first language in India than in the whole of the British isles. I think this principle can be extended to the various emerging kinds of Netlish.

Print is the place to codify things like language usage, so print can become a device for propagating not just writing's content but its forms, including forms of Netlish once

they become relatively stable and recognisable. This is not as easy as it looks. I've struck a similar problem with Aboriginal English in Australia. You can translate it into standard Australian usage, but then you lose sight of the otherness of the shape of thought behind it.

English was always a bastard language. It's a bastard to learn—for every rule there seems to be a swarm of exceptions. But there's a reason why it is so: it's the mix in it of everything, from Pict to Pakistani. Its prehistory in the British isles is a small scale model of what's happening to it now on a global scale. The Romans, the Saxons, the Normans, the Norse—everybody came and brought something to the mix. "We will fight them on the beaches"—pure Saxon. "We will never surrender"—Norman and abstract. Different shapes of thought, superimposed, making something else. As Saxon becomes Norman, Norman becomes something else—English.

Language is a machine that produces, as one of its effects, subjectivity. As the philosopher Gilles Deleuze said, "what is the self but this habit of saying 'I'?" The net makes English habits of writing one's self come in contact with other habits of self, making them become something else. And making English—as it proliferates across the net—Netlish. Adding a richness to the language of potentially Shakespearean proportions. That is more a blessing than a curse.

Language? No Problem.

Geert Lovink; edited by McKenzie Wark

Have you tried to discuss recipes with friends, feeling socially disabled because you never learned the English names for all those kitchen garnishes, deluxe herbs and flamboyant birds? For gourmets, language can be a true obstacle in the enjoyment of the self-made *haute cuisine*. The careful pronunciation of the names is a crucial part of the dining pleasure. Naming is the social counterpart of tasting and a failed attempt to find the precise name of the ambitious appetiser can easily temper the mood.

McKenzie Wark has introduced the term 'Euro-english', being one of the many 'Englises' currently spoken and written. It's a funny term, only an outsider (from Australia, in this case) could come up with it. Of course, it does not exist and Wark should have used the term in the plural, 'Euro-englises'. The term is also highly political. If you put it in the perspective of current Euro-politics in Great Britain. Is the UK part of Europe, and if so, is their rich collection of 'Englises' (Irish, Scottish etc) then part of the bigger family of Euro-english 'dialects'? That would be a truly radical, utopian European perspective. Or is 'Euro-english' perhaps the 20th century Latin spoken on 'the continent'?

Continentalers can only hear accents, like the extraordinary French-english, the deep, slow Russian-english or the smooth, almost British accent of the Scandinavians. It seems hard to hear and admit one's own version. One friend of mine speaks English with a heavy Cockney accent (not the Dutch one) and I never dared ask him why this was the case. Should he be disciplined and pretend to speak like they do on BBC-World Service? I don't think so. What is right and wrong in those cases? Should he speak Dutch-english, like most of us? Switching to other Englises is a strange thing to do, but sometimes necessary. If you want to communicate successfully in Japan you have to adjust your English, speak slowly and constantly check if your message gets through. Mimicking Japlish is a stupid thing to do, but you have to come near to that if you want to achieve anything.

• continued page 16



nettime

Hybrid ways of making sense

• from page 15

BBC World Service is my point of reference, I must admit. The BBC seems to be the only stable factor in my life. It's always there, even more so than the internet. In bed, I listen carefully to the way they are building sentences, and guess the meaning of the countless words with which I am not familiar. A couple of years ago they started to broadcast *Europe Today* where you can hear all the variations of 'Euro-english', even from the moderator. Sometimes it's amusing, but most of the time it is just informative, like any other good radio program. Would that be the 'Euro-english' McKenzie speaks about, beyond all accents and apparent mistakes, a still not yet conscious 'Gesamtsprachwerk'?

According to McKenzie, within this 'bastard language' one can 'sometimes see the shadows of another way of thinking.' This might be true. We all agree that we should not be annoyed by mistakes, but instead look for the new forms of English that the net is now generating. But for me, most of these shadows are like the shadows in Plato's cave story. They are weak, distorted references to a point somebody is desperately trying to make. We will never know whether the 'charming' and 'strange' outcomes are intentional or not. Non-native English writers (not sanctioned by editors) might have more freedom to play with the language.

Finding the right expression even makes more fun, at least for me. At this moment, I am writing three times as slow as I would do in Dutch or German. Not having dictionaries here, nor the sophisticated software to do spell checking, one feels that the libidinous streams are getting interrupted here and there. On-line text is full of those holes. At sudden moments, I feel the language barrier rising up and I am not anymore able to express myself. This is a violent, bodily experience, a very frustrating one that Wark is perhaps not aware of. He could trace those holes and ruptures later, in the text. But then again we move on and the desire to communicate removes the temporary obstacles.

How should the Euro-english e-texts be edited? At least they should go through a spell-checker. Obvious grammar mistakes should be taken out, they should not be rewritten by a naive English or American editor. If we are in favour of 'language diversification', this should also be implemented on the level of the printed word. 'Euro-englishes' or 'Net-englishes' are very much alive, but do they need to be formalised or even codified? I don't care, to be honest. At the moment, I am more afraid of an anthropological approach, an exotic view on Net-english, that would like to document this odd language before it disappears again. But our way of expression is not cute (or rare). It is born out of a specific historical and technological circumstance: the Pax Americana, pop culture, global capitalism, Europe after '89 and the rise of the internet. Globalisation will further unify the English languages and will treat local variations as minor, subcultural deviations.

McKenzie Wark didn't want to speak about the right to express yourself in your own language. He agrees with this and I guess we all do. His native language is English, the lucky boy. But we do have to speak about it. Especially US-Americans do not want to be bothered about this topic. I haven't heard one cyber-visionary ever mentioning the fact that the net has to become multi-lingual if we ever want to reach Negroponte's famous "one billion users by the year 2000". It is not in their interest to develop multi-lingual networks. OK, the marketing departments of the software houses do bring out versions in other languages. But this is only done for commercial reasons. And the internet is not going to change so quickly. Still 90 per cent of its users are living in the USA. Rebuilding Babylon within the Net will be primarily the task of the non-natives.

Of course, many of us have found our way in dealing with the dominance of the English language and think that newbies should do likewise. But this attitude seems shortsighted, even a bit cynical. If we want the net to grow, to be open and democratic, to have its free, public access & content zones, then sooner or later we have to face the language problem. Until now, this has been merely one's own, private problem. It depends on your cultural background, education and commitment whether you are able and willing to communicate freely in English. This 'individual' quality goes together with the emphasis on the user-as-an-individual in the slogan of cyber-visionaries about the so-called 'many to many' communication. But the language from 'all 2 all' remains unmentioned... "Translation bots will solve that problem", the eternal optimist will tell you. Everything has been taken care of in the Fantasy World called internet. But so far nothing has happened. At the moment, the amount of languages used in the net is increasing rapidly. But they exist mainly separately. It can happen that a user in Japan or Spain will never (have to) leave his or her language sphere, or is not able to...

Languages are neither global nor local. Unlike the proclaimed qualities of the net, they are bound to the nation state and its borders, or perhaps shared by several nations or spoken in a certain region, depending on the course history took in the 19th and 20th century. Countless small languages have disappeared in this process of nation building, migration and genocide. But in Europe we still have at least 20 or 30 of them and they are not likely to disappear. So communicating effectively within Europe through the net will need a serious effort to build a 'many to many' languages translation interface. A first step will be the implementation of unicode. Automatic translation programs will only then become more reliable. At this moment, French and Hungarian users, for example, seriously feel their language mutilated if they have to express themselves in ascii.

But let's not complain too much. Once I saw a small paper in a shop window in Amsterdam, saying "English? No problem". Rebuilding the Babel Tower together should be big fun and I am ready to spend a lot of time in the construction of a true multi-lingual net.

Anyone using the awful phrase 'global communications' without mentioning the multi-lingual aspect of it, seems implausible for me. Let's change this and put translation on the agenda. Separated, bi-lingual systems, though, remind me of apartheid. The linguistic islands on the net should not become closed and isolated universes. Our own cute bastardised Englishes have no future either. There will never be one planet, with one people, speaking one language. 'Das Ganze ist immer das Unwahre', and this specially counts for all dreams about English becoming the one and only world language for the New Dark Age. Still many netizens unconsciously do make suggestions in the direction of 'One language or no language' (in parallel with the eco-blackmail speech 'One planet or no planet'). The pretension to go global can be a cheap escape not to be confronted anymore with the stagnation and boredom of the local (and specially national) levels. Working together on language solutions can be one way to avoid this trap.

Editor's note

McKenzie Wark

I was tempted to change "flamboyant birds" in the first paragraph, by substituting in its place either "exotic birds" or "exotic fowl". Flamboyant connotes showy and ornate—it's something one would say of a Las Vegas stage show. Exotic connotes rarity of occurrence, as well as a less specific quality of unusual appearance. The justification for making the change would be that, as the editor, I am getting closer to the 'author's intention'.

It's worth noting that "bird" is also unusual in this context. It's used colloquially in Australia for a fowl meant for the table—but I don't know if the expression is so used anywhere else. The OED is not enlightening on this subject. 'Fowl' is more correct, as the term fowl includes chicken, duck, geese, turkey and pheasant—but not quail. But 'fowl' sounds no more natural. So while "exotic fowl" seems to me to be both a correct expression and closest to the author's intention, it isn't something that looks quite natural—hence I see no net gain in such a change.

I've left "flamboyant birds" because, quite simply, there's nothing grammatically wrong with it. It's just an unusual usage. But this often happens in Euro-englishes: neglected areas of connotation for particular words get reactivated, or extensions of connotation that don't yet quite exist in English-english come into being. I think that is, historically, how English develops and changes—just look at the remarkable richness that's crept into standard English-english through Irish-english. The example here may seem trivial—all editing decisions are in the end trivial—but I've expounded on it in order to show the kind of things that happen.

The editorial solutions can head in one of two directions—the instrumental or the formal. Geert's preference is instrumental—the text is a means to an end. I'm inclined to a slightly more formal approach—the surface of the text, as a distinct artefact in its own right, ought to be respected.

I've made minor changes elsewhere in Geert's text. With one exception, sentences ending in prepositions have been recast. Possessive apostrophes have been added. Spelling is now more or less OED, except of course the 'net-neologisms' that don't yet exist in any recognised dictionary. For example "newbie". Here one follows standard net-usage. If I was editing for printed publication, I'd be inclined to eliminate unnecessary net-speak—but that's another issue.

The netletters were originally written 'live' for the listserve group nettime: <http://www.Desk.nl/~nettime/> These are the edited versions.

Lovink received two responses from Japan on *Language? No Problem*, one comes from a Japanese book editor, the other from an American translator involved in video activism and documentary film. The first commented: "Japanese are always frustrated by English in Net (reading, writing, sending mail) and this situation divides people. When I sent mail to my Japanese friend in London, I used English-Japanese like 'konniwa, Yano desu'; because his internet server didn't accept 2 byte characters." He added, "But Japanese never questions this problem. There is the situation which push us not to think about that." This was a theme explored by the second writer:

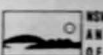
"I got your piece on the English language problem, and enjoyed reading it. We have been faced with some of the same issues at Yamagata since we established our www site. As a rule, we put everything in English and Japanese, but we seriously realize that to fulfil our role as a promoter of Asian documentary, we have to also start putting out some of the information in Korean and Chinese (at least). For that, however, we have no money.

It was hard enough just producing everything in Japanese and English. The people who ran the site insisted we could just have Japanese volunteers translate material into English because in their own "cyber-visionary" fashion they insisted that internet will give birth to a diversified English no longer controlled by white Anglo-Saxons. I sympathise with their goal, but at the same time, their statements can be easily co-opted within various ideologies about the Japanese language. The feeling that Japanese do not need to learn to be fluent in English, to produce it on their own in a communicative situation, but only be able to read it, has been central to state education policy and reinforces the construction of the Japanese nation through the language. Japanese have been crucially defined through their language, to the degree that Japanese children raised abroad who speak fluent Japanese and English are somehow considered 'non-Japanese'. The inability or lack of necessity to produce good English then provides the insulation through which the discursive 'community' of Japanese can articulate an homogeneous national identity. I sometimes then wonder what would happen if more Japanese could speak and write 'good' English."

Geert Lovink (Netherlands) is an editor of nettime; a writer and critic who specialises in developing media in Eastern Europe; McKenzie Wark (Australia) is a writer and cultural theorist specialising in the media and emerging technologies. His new book, *The Virtual Republic*, will be launched in October.

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Essaying the filmmaker

John Conomos surveys the history of feature and documentary films about filmmaking

Films about filmmaking and filmmakers have become, during the last decade or so, like films about music and musicians, an emerging festival/TV 'genre' around the world. However, it should be noted at the outset, that feature and short films about the cinema, its past and more recent auteurs, its complex aesthetic, cultural and technological facets, its histories, stars, genres etc, range from the more customary celebratory examples to the more reflexive personal and/or essay-films. In the wake of cinema's centennial status of evolution as a popular medium, we are now apparently inundated with such varied examples (both artistically and generically) on television.

Truth be told, fiction films about the cinema have been with us since the silent era. Cinema about cinema is not such a new phenomenon. A more recent development is the documentary or fiction film made for television about the cinema and the literary arts. Further, museums, festivals, archives, and funding agencies are starting now to commission artists, writers and filmmakers to look at their craft.

Consequently, as with any other film genre, these particular films can be either dull, exciting, informative or quite engaging about filmmakers, their movies, and the formative influences on their approach to the medium. Such films, along with inventive, self-questioning film criticism (emphatically not the kind that is daily regurgitated from the publicist's kit), the personal essay (such as Mark Rudman's 1993 meditation on his B-movie director uncle Herbert I Leeds in *Realm Beyond Knowing, Realm of Un-knowing*, Wesleyan University Press, Hanover, 1995), and the memoir (Italo Calvino's evocative piece, "A Cinema-Goer's Autobiography" in *The Road to St Giovanni*, London, Jonathon Cape, 1993), or Geoffrey O'Brien's prose poem *The Phantom Empire* (W.W. Norton and Co., London, 1993), are crucial creative nourishment for our own cinephilic needs in an era where the expressions 'film criticism' and 'cinephilia' are like four-letter words.

Hollywood filmmakers who have made films about cinema—as satire, melodrama, film noir, and screwball comedy—include Buster Keaton, *Sherlock Junior* (1924); Robert Aldrich, *The Big Knife* (1955); John Cromwell, *The Goddess* (1958); Vincente Minnelli, *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1953), and *Two Weeks in Another Town* (1962); Preston Sturges *Sullivan's Travels* (1941); George Cukor, *A Star is Born* (1954); and Frank Tashlin, *Hollywood or Bust* (1955), to name a few. More recently, staying with American directors who are independent/maverick figures, we have, amongst other examples, Robert Altman, *The Player* (1994); the Coen Brothers, *Barton Fink* (1991); Alexandre Rockwell, *In the Soup* (1992); and Tom DiCilli, *Living in Oblivion* (1995).

I will include here, of course, the promethean presence of Orson Welles as someone who contributed several extraordinary essay and documentary fiction films on filmmaking, art and forgery, and the 'exilic' sensibility of the nomadic filmmaker. These include *F for Fake* (1975), and *Filming 'Othello'* (1978). The latter self-exegetical work was described by Welles himself as a "conversation" on Shakespeare and the play itself, with his actors/collaborators Michael MacLiammoir and Hilton Edwards and a Boston audience as well. According to Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Filming 'Othello'* was the first of a series of films that Welles planned to address his early works; he actually started his second item in this incomplete series dealing with his version of Kafka's *The Trial*.

In *F for Fake*, Welles deploys first-person narration and self-reflexivity to explore his own "magician-Prospero persona" (William Lopate) and the complex interplay between cinema and magic, fiction and non-fiction. The Montaignian emphasis of the essay as an open-ended composition that highlights knowledge as a dynamic construction cuts across so many of the non-fiction films in the Wellesian canon. Welles appreciated the timeless first-person authorial and camera-style immediacy of the essay form. As he indicated, "The essay does not date because it represents the author's contribution, however modest, to the moment at which it was made" (quoted in Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Placing Movies*, 1995).

The European art-cinema, the arts documentary and the non-fiction film/personal essay film have become favourite genres for a number of European filmmakers who have been germane to the French New Wave (and after), the New German Cinema, and contemporary British and Italian cinema (both narrative and avant-garde), amongst other recent national cinemas. The most prominent figures to have contributed to the European personal essay film are certainly Chris Marker and Jean-Luc Godard.

The latter's oeuvre is notable for its cubist-mosaic, writerly features and personal non-fiction shorts and essay films which look at cinema, its intertextual links with literature, the visual arts and music, and most decisively with its processes of genre, performance, spectatorship and its own history. Take for instance Godard's boldly coloured *Contempt* (1963) with its Cinemascope shaped *mise-en-scene* influenced by Antonioni and Minnelli's films and loosely based on Alberto Moravio's novel *The Ghost at Noon*. It depicts the relationship between Paul Ravel (Michel Piccoli), a scriptwriter, and his former typist wife Camille (Brigitte Bardot) and the American producer Jeremy Prokosch (Jack Palance) who hires Ravel to doctor an international blockbuster script based on Homer's *Odyssey*. This production is to be shot by the director Fritz Lang who plays himself. *Contempt*, which delineates the multifaceted nature of cinema, commodification, myth and personal deceit is staged in the ruins of a studio which was once Cinecittà and is located on the island of Capri.

Besides Godard's allusive features, which all represent a metacommentary on cinema itself, we have his numerous personal essay works including diary films and video shorts which also deal specifically with complex questions concerning cinema, art, culture and the necessity to find a path to a new language. No other filmmaker is, as Serge Daney once reminded us, "so dedicated to the present" and the fate of the image. Godard's "inbetween method" (Deleuze) of imagemaking is predicated on analysing the cinema, video and television as a reflective form of creative thinking and writing with images and sounds. Films like *Here and Elsewhere* (1974); *Scenario du Passion* (1982); *Soft and Hard* (1986); *The Power of Words* (1988); and *Historie(s) du cinema* (from 1989 on), all display the filmmaker's consummate Montaignian capacity to interrogate the fictions of cinema.

Another critical figure in the European context is Wim Wenders whose oeuvre is also relevant because of certain works that specifically address cinema, American and Japanese filmmakers and the American colonisation of postwar German culture. Certain short films like *Room 666* (1982), illustrate interviews with filmmakers about the destiny of cinema, others like *Lightning Over Water* (1979) depict the cancer-stricken Nicholas Ray during his last days in a hospital and Wenders' own homage to Ray's angst-ridden cinema of frailty and redemption. Others still, like the part travelogue/homage essay-video *Tokyo Ga* (1985), explore Wenders' auteurist meditation on Ozu and the image.

This year's Sydney Film Festival presented a number of films about filmmaking: George Miller's *40,000 Years of Dreaming* (1996) defined Australian popular cinema as an expression of universal archetypes; Kevin McDonald's BFI-commissioned *Howard Hawks: American Artist* (1997) presented the American filmmaker as a proto-modernist story-teller of narratives concerning grace, professionalism and male camaraderie; Emilio Mallie's absorbing *The Arruza Years* (1996) assisted those amongst us wondering whatever happen to Bud Boetticher after he completed the stylish and influential gangster film *The Rise and Fall of Legs Diamond* (1960); and Keith Fulton and Louis Pepe's *The Hamster Factor* (1996) chronicles Terry Gilliam working on *Twelve Monkeys*.

Two other films in this category stood out at the festival: Olivier Assayas's dazzling *Irma Vep* (1996), a feature film which deals with a director (Jean-Pierre Leaud) who is remaking Louis Feuillade's 1916 classic silent serial *Les Vampires*—a favourite of the Surrealists and filmmakers like Jacques Rivette and Alain Resnais, amongst others—with Hong Kong star Maggie Cheung (as herself) in the film. It is an exhilarating cinematic experience that gives you a sense of hope in the future for an intelligent poetic cinema that is alive to its own processes of creativity. It is a disturbing, challenging and exuberant comedy about low-budget filmmaking and its unpredictable perils. Though it has been compared to Truffaut's *Day for Night* (1973), *Irma Vep* with its anagrammatic title, feverish playful stylistics and multilayered allusive conclusion that jumps at you, makes the comparison arguably a forced one. The film has much to offer to us: it shows that a cinema incorporating narrative and experimental filmmaking can have the same freedom as literature or painting.

Thom Andersen and Noel Burch's deftly constructed video documentary *Red Hollywood* (1995) is an economical and engaging examination of the Hollywood blacklisted filmmakers of the 40s and 50s. Andersen and Burch argue that although we may know the names of the filmmakers, screenwriters and producers who were blacklisted by Joseph McCarthy and his senate associates, rarely do we know their films and the social and political ideas they express in them. Comprising many film clips and interviews with the relevant figures *Red Hollywood* poses new ways of looking at Hollywood cinema. Structured into seven main sections—"myths", "war", "class", "sexes", "hate", "crime" and "death"—this highly engaging critique of the existing Hollywood canon (as primarily defined by Sarris's 1969 auteurist catalogue-styled *The American Cinema*) covers a vast terrain of complex thematic, cultural and moral issues. One of *Red Hollywood's* highlights is Abraham Polonsky, the director-writer of the noir classic *Force of Evil* (1948), attesting in a recent interview that "All films about crime are about capitalism, because capitalism is about crime. I mean 'quote unquote', morally speaking. At least that's what I used to think; now I'm convinced".

Films about film and filmmakers are markedly varied in their critical and formal configurations as they attempt to address the myriad complexities of the medium, its formations, audiences, myths, histories, auteurs and genres. Hollywood fiction films about Hollywood have been around since the 30s; the newer varieties (the non-fiction documentary and the essay-film) addressing filmmaking and its creative processes are a more recent cultural phenomenon.

Kim Machan **ĀRŤ**

At Interact Asia Pacific Multimedia Festival Stand No.114

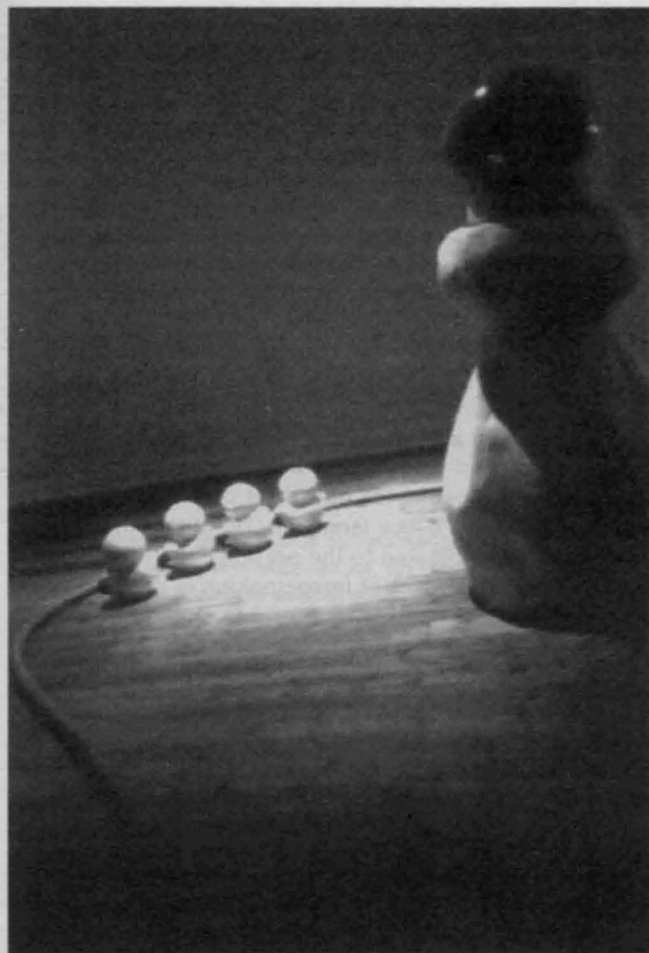
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Between media living and the dead

Darren Tofts does *Trick or Treat*

If popular culture has an afterlife, I imagine it would look something like *Trick or Treat*. *Trick or Treat* is a kind of spectral limbo for pop ephemera. You know, like those "where are they now" shows. Mummified daleks, kewpie dolls, backyard swimming pool accessories all suggest themselves in what at first glance appears to be a perverse discotheque of the anthropomorphously challenged. The organic, lava-lamp shapes on the walls receive the projected images of ghoulish forms, in the process becoming smears of ectoplasmic residue. The spare use of the gallery space creates the impression of a 70s minimalist sculpture, though Carl André



Martine Corompt

never dreamed of anything like this.

At an even deeper level (the spectral world is an n-dimensional space), *Trick or Treat* shores up the detritus of even older, dead media. 19th century slide and magic lantern shows, automata, phantasmagoria, the gothic novel. In this *Trick or Treat* is a timely reminder of the historical association of projection technologies and the spectral. It subtly demonstrates the intimate links between the supernatural, the paranormal and animation technologies, such as film, which are, in every sense of the word, mediums, bridges, or conduits between the living and the dead (the ectoplasmic splatter suggests a recent paranormal irruption).

One of the main themes of this installation is animation, the

breathing of life into the inanimate. The space is alive with movement and sound, yet there are no people (apart from you, the spectator), only three aloof sentinels and what appears to be their brood, all indifferent to your presence. Philip Samartzis' spooky, "granular soundscape" sustains an ongoing ambience of mechanism and process, of invisible yet immutable goings-on behind the scenes. The impression of things seen but not heard, of the order of things hidden from view, brings to mind the concept of "occultation", which is particularly appropriate in this environment of shades and sprites.

More specifically, *Trick or Treat* is a canny exploration of the ways in which new technologies are conceived and interpreted in human terms. Anthropomorphisation, animation, personification, these are the categories that have come to dominate our engagement with projection technologies from the 19th century onwards, and more recently with cybernetic and information technologies. Artificial reality is just the latest manifestation of an urge to recognize human qualities in the technological, and a desire to witness signs of autonomy and life in the machinic. However, it would be folly to get too serious about any perceived meta-qualities in *Trick or Treat*, to see it as an installation-essay theorizing the techno-animus. This strange, mystifying space undoubtedly comments on dead media and on the anthropomorphic terms of reference through which we speak of them. However everything about *Trick or Treat* is suffused with irony. Martine Corompt's chunky, beautifully sculptural neophytes stand in virtually mute dependence, linked to the life-giving matrix by preposterous, alarmingly high-bandwidth hose, pumping who knows what into their diminutive, pupal forms. Far from being life-like, these forms have an oppressive tactility about them, you feel their bulbous inflation visually. You need to get down close to them to hear their chirps and strains, though you can't be sure if they are noises of satisfaction or protest. Ian Haig's screaming, Münch-like effigies fly around the walls and over the bodies of spectators, looking all the time 'like' mutant, Halloweenish ghouls.

Irony morphs into satire in Philip Brophy's catalogue essay, the exhibition's screaming skull, with what's left of its tongue in its cheek. Far from being a commentary on the exhibition, just another medium, Brophy's essay is in fact an extension of the exhibition, since it interpolates a context against which *Trick or Treat* exerts an abrasive force. The essay's title, "Digital Art: Four Manias", is suggestive of its import, though any visitor to the gallery could well be forgiven for wondering what, if anything, *Trick or Treat* has to do with digital art. But herein lies the art of *Trick or Treat*. It is a space in which you have to do, literally, nothing. Except, that is, walk around, look, listen, consider, reflect etc. In other words, not a mouse in sight. This is an active, rather than interactive space, which is entirely out of the sphere of our influence. Everything happens despite you, and you'd better get used to it. Better leave your twitchy fingers at the desk.

Visually, the architecture of the work is suggestive of a matrix, a network of communications between nodes. This conceit subtly invokes the abstract nature of the digital realm, its otherworldliness ("there's no there, there"). Electrical switches, Brophy reminds us, "are so inhuman and uninteractive". *Trick or Treat* plays with the idea that sound and projection technologies, like 19th century phantasmagoria, present immersive experiences which demand that the spectator give up

presumptions of interaction and succumb to the transfixed experience of the haunting, the manifestation.

This is not to say that *Trick or Treat* is a reactionary work. Far from it. *Trick or Treat* is a humorous intervention into the ongoing artistic and critical exploration of the relationship between art and its audience in the age of digital reproduction. Digital imaging undoubtedly has its place, as does the principle of interactivity. But there are clearly types of aesthetic experience that are best encountered actively, rather than interactively. Who on earth would want

to interact with a ghost train, or a splatter movie? Here comes the blood, quick, click to the next screen! Thanks, but no thanks.



Ian Haig

Trick or Treat, Fibreglass forms by Martine Corompt; digital images and rotating slide projectors by Ian Haig; Granular soundscape by Philip Samartzis, 200 Gertrude St, Melbourne August 8-30.

Darren Tofts is Chair of Media, Literature & Film, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne. His book *Memory Trade, A Prehistory of Cyberculture* (with artist Murray McKeich) will be published by Craftsman House in February, 1998.


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AUSTRALIA'S INNOVATIVE UNIVERSITY

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Report

Virtually as natural as breathing

Stephen Jones takes a brief look at several issues which might have arisen (had there been time allocated for debate) at the *Consciousness Reframed* Conference in Wales, July 1997

Consciousness Reframed at the CAiA institute of the University of Wales was convened in July of this year to open up research and discussion of issues in interactive arts and "to examine what might be described as the *technoetic* principle in art". (All quotes are from the *Abstracts* of the conference.) That is, how the technological is changing our consciousness of the world, our perceptions and our productions, our knowledge of and modelling of the world.

Setting up the framework, Carol Gigliotti (Ohio State University) suggested that our consciousness of cyberspace is a function of our understanding of how navigating through our own domestic worlds informs "our involvements with contemporary interactive technologies". She asked, "Why construct virtual environments? Why do we feel the need to create something when we have so little understanding of why the natural world exists?" This question is often asked in relation to technological activity, usually in the following way: look, all this technology is doing terrible things to our environment, so isn't it time we stopped and let the 'natural' world have ascendancy again?

I'm never sure what I think about this, being so heavily involved in technology myself. The activity of cultural production is an ancient and deeply human function in which we engage with the world in order to understand it. Even some animals make and use tools, and language and counting are technologies. We need to pay deeper attention to the impacts of our activities on other systems, and it is here that we can work multimedia towards more acceptable ends. We can use the theory behind multimedia, the notions of interactivity and feedback, complex systems and self-organisation to recast our frameworks so as to look carefully at and acknowledge the consequences of what we do.

Another way to change thinking is in the re-mythologisation of the technological. For many people involved with VR (Virtual Reality) it seems to have acquired characteristics of dreaming, because one is removed from the world in wearing the helmet and harness of the VR installation. Canadian VR producer Char Davies notes that one experiences her work *Osmose* as though removed from the everyday world and 'immersed' in some environment which doesn't behave according to known rules. One navigates *Osmose* by breathing; breathing in one rises through the virtual worlds and breathing out one sinks slowly into deeper realms, descending to the core machine-code world. The immersant dives into the transparency of the virtual world, breaking habitualised perception, leading to altered states of consciousness.

Davies spoke of *Osmose* as being a kind of poiesis, un-concealing our being in the world. Immersion brings with it a realm of the emotional. She comments that "...by re-conceiving humans as beings 'within' the world, as participants among the world's temporal becomings" we may be able to subvert the rationalist view, revealing new perceptions of our relations to the world, re-invoking the sacred. Thus, response to the experience of *Osmose* is often of its ineffability, its indescribable nature, "an unfathomably poetic flux of comings-into-being, lingerings, and passings-away within which our own mortality is encompassed".

Davies' discussion also opens up issues of what cyberspace actually is. Is it a dream world or a trance space? Margaret Dolinsky (University of Illinois, Chicago) spoke of VR as being active or "lucid" dreaming. In her work *Dream Grrls* designed for the Cave (an immersive, stereo-graphic virtual display theatre), she provides active dreaming spaces where we can explore dream versions of the self. The cyberrealm becomes differently valued, the source of an experience of substantial otherness from our regular in-the-world being.

Is the producer of cyberspaces a shaman? Kathleen Rogers has been exploring Mayan shamanism in the mythology of the snake, using multimedia to emulate and bring on these trance states. The snake represents spiritual energy in many cultures and Rogers' intention "is to re-activate this complex model of Mayan consciousness" as a kind of cognitive archeology. The snake represents spiritual energy as well as the cyclical notion of time held by the Maya. She aims to get to some sort of essence of this mythology using immersion as a tool for inducing spiritual states in the VR adventurer.

The Brazilian artist Diana Domingues also spoke of the potential for shamanistic states in VR and likens the screen of VR to the desert as a device for the projection of desires and dreams. She suggested that creative production is a way of losing ourselves, offering "interactive installations for people to experience conscious propagation in an organic/inorganic life. Electronic interfaces and neural networks provide intelligent behaviours, managing signals of the human body in sensorized environments", providing electronic ritual and trance interfaced with electronic memory as "virtual hallucination" producing a shamanic experience.

Mark Pesce (the inventor of VRML) also takes the line that cyberspace is ineffable, mythological space, "dream-time" or "faerie", a space of magical reality. "The forms of magical reality, ancient to humanity's beginnings, shape our vision in the unbounded void of electronic potential". It is as though cyberspace provides an hallucinatory configuration of our perception, becoming a screen for the projection of our spiritual desires and interests.

More generally, the question becomes just what is "immersion"? How do we define it and how can we distinguish it from other mental states such as being absorbed in a book or the cinema? What degree of suspension of disbelief is needed, what agreements with the artist do we make in entering "cyberspace" so that the artist can bring a version of their conceived experience to us?

Osmose in many ways provides the paradigm example of the truly immersive space; one dons the helmet and harness and enters a world where everything is translucent, floating, jungle-like—an enveloping world of the artist's imagination. For Joe Nechvatal (an American artist living in France) immersion is containment, a 360 degree surround, physical rather than cognitive, different from the absorption we have in a book or the cinema. For Nechvatal immersion in a VR work implies a unified total space, an homogeneous world without external distraction, striving to be a consummate harmonious whole. He identifies "two grades of immersion... (1) cocooning, and (2) expanding within, [in] which, when these two directions of psychic space cooperate... we feel...our bodies becoming subliminal, immersed in an extensive topophilia...an inner immensity where we realise our limitations along with our desires for expansion".


In the cyberjungle, hearing becomes primary, vision is downgraded. In the VR world hearing and vision are continually re-calculated placing us at the centre of polar coordinates. As art historian Suzanne Ackers suggested, Renaissance perspective is displaced and we learn new ways of seeing, navigating in new kinds of conceptual space. Point of view no longer operates in its traditional manner: it now alters over time, and our perception of time and space becomes a virtual knowledge, no longer fixed to the Cartesian frame, mutable, always recalculated, determined by our progress through the environment.

The suggestion is that the experience of VR is one of omni-perception transcending formerly known territories, launching us into dreamspace and the worlds of the shaman. As Davies amply demonstrates in *Osmose* the world visually perceived becomes one of multiple layers as well as one of fluid viewpoint, worlds layered as sheets of knowing through which we navigate, each sheet providing its own enveloping omni-projective space as though we had torn away at the veils of perception alluded to in so much early western mystical literature.

But to what extent can this really be happening given that most VR work is simply re-calculated perspectives of thoroughly well-defined visual productions? Shamanism and dreaming both suppose a disruption of the consciousness of the viewer wherein recombination of thoughts and images can freely occur. I don't feel that any of the work reviewed here manages this but I suspect that there is other work, for example Bill Seaman's, where the seeds of such a process are being planted.

Stephen Jones is currently exploring issues of consciousness in a website called The Brain Project http://www.merlin.com.au/brain_proj/. He was able to attend Consciousness Reframed and present a paper there with travel funding from the Australian Network for Art and Technology.

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Respect and Indigenous interconnectivity

Mike Leggett reports from the Fullbright Symposium in Darwin

"I thank the organisers of the Fullbright Symposium for the invitation to speak, and I pay my respects to the Larrakia people of whose land we meet...", stated the first speaker. This was an acknowledgment picked up and repeated by each speaker that followed, by Indigenous and non-Indigenous representatives alike, from all the five continents. It set the tone for four days of entwining dialogue, exposition and revelation that celebrated the Indigenous cultures of Australia in an interconnected world. It was about Respect...respect amongst a world community of cultures who have survived the onslaughts of colonisation.

Sitting in the tranquil gardens of the Art Gallery and Museum of the Northern Territory in Darwin breathing the pungent tropical air cooled by winter breezes, the Arafura Sea a backdrop to the proceedings and cultural expression happening all around as the talking continued, the sense of an eventual positive outcome for Aboriginal communities was irresistible. The political realities for Indigenous Australians, however, are another matter, reflected within the Symposium itself—conflicts over Aboriginal representation and the professional ambitions of academics and anthropologists; conflicts over the objectivity of a session on mining sponsored by Rio Tinto; and doubts even about the productive outcomes of such an event.

As a briefing for the non-Indigenous the outcome was palpable. The complexity of describing land and country and its centrality to the culture—without the land there is no culture—came from many viewpoints, and most convincingly from Indigenous speakers. Kinship and Community, Law and Knowledge unify the custodians within egalitarian principles long regarded as sacred. These are principles that challenge the basis of non-Indigenous society, politicians, miners, pastoralists, artists and cultural workers alike. The flourishing of visual arts throughout the communities which have secured the stewardship of their traditional lands demonstrate these principles. The richness and variety of work not only in the Museum's collection but in the tourist shops in town testify to this.

The interconnectiveness of the communities and the continuing embrace of technological means to develop that sense of 'communi(ty/c)ability' was the broad emphasis given to the symposium. The implications of cyberspace and digital media were only occasionally, but tantalisingly, amplified, and this I outline in this short report.

David Nathan from the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Studies (AIATSIS) gave a succinct but dense account of the issues and outcomes of the adoption of the internet by many communities, in particular the innovations that have occurred. There are approximately 60 websites now related to Indigenous-related matters, 40 per cent of which are run by Indigenous organisations—these are all linked at www.ciolek.com/WWWVL-Aboriginal.html.

Prime amongst these is the site run by the community at Maningrida in Arnhem Land for more than two years now (www.peg.apc.org/~bawinanga/welcome.html). The site is designed to make visible to the rest of the world

the full range of public cultural tradition found in the clan estates that comprise this 'country' through a catalogue of visual works and essays.

Whilst this has been useful for the direct marketing to a world-wide audience of cultural artefacts, Peter Danaja and Murray Garde from the community described some of the drawbacks of being so available—even at the end of a 400 kilometre line from Darwin. For instance, electronic colonisation-by-response from New Agers seeking instruction for the purposes of establishing their individual spiritual needs through the borrowing of Indigenous cultural knowledge and skills (particularly in the playing of the didjeridu, "the mother of all flutes" amongst northern hemisphere groupings), has created demands quite impossible to meet. However, as access to the internet spreads across Arnhem Land and beyond, it is regarded in a more positive way as being like a linked kinship system, with allied projects such as the building of an oral history data base being part of a long term project for later use by families. As Kathryn Wells observed in an early session: "Indigenous art and culture is re-shaping and re-claiming a subjective identity for Indigenous people in a global context and is thus re-defining non-Indigenous cultural definitions of 'authenticity' in terms of Indigenous definitions of authorship".

Chris 'Bandirra' Lee has been establishing cultural recognition, knowledge and respect for the communities of Queensland through the Indiginet project attached to QANTM Cooperative Multimedia Centre based in Brisbane (also with an office in Darwin). Digital networks are being integrated with the more traditional networks with an emphasis on access and training for these communities. Wider access will be given to the global community when the time is right.

The network metaphor also extends to off-line formats. *Moorditj*, one of the DoCA funded Cultural Expressions on CD-ROM Projects is due for completion in 1998. Under the direction of Leslie Bangama Fogarty and Richard Walley ("...we're fed up with teaching without having control..."), the CD-ROM examines the work of 200 Indigenous artists through interactive linking in relation to four themes: land, law and language; cultural maintenance and ceremony; the influence of other cultures; and social justice and survival.

The Jurassic technologies of phone, radio, television, satellites and, more recently, the Telstra planned ISDN links, were referred to by many speakers, all extolling the benefits enjoyed through the adoption of these technologies (in particular Kevin Rang from Aotearoa National Maori Radio). Some pointed to the dangers to communities of half-resourced or incomplete projects—"Well the cable wouldn't quite reach...". Whilst the symposium progressed, papers and interviews were broadcast across remote communities in Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific and Asia by third year Broadcast to Remote Area Community Services (BRACS) students of Batchelor College.

Copyright reform and intellectual property rights in the digital age were referred to by many speakers. Terri Janke launched *Our Culture, Our*

Future, the principles and guidelines currently being submitted for adoption by the UN Human Rights' Sub-Commission. Michael Mansell questioned the collection of genetic property from the world's Indigenous peoples, and objected to non-Indigenous notions of ownership over culture. In a later session we were reminded of the trust that had been extended to scholars when collecting artefacts 30, 50 to 100 years earlier, and making sound and image documentation of Aboriginal culture. Many compromises have since occurred to this trust and with this material, including its exploitation on websites in a form unauthorised by its traditional owners.

The symposium had much vibrant activity at the edges including a French anthropologist demonstrating a digital archive of stories and paintings based on the dreaming tracks and song cycles of a desert community. Two Indigenous artists resident in Tasmania, Harri Higgs from Nira Nina Bush Place and Julie Gough of the University of Tasmania in Hobart, resolved Palawa Aboriginal law issues in Darwin around forms of representation that had been used in works exhibited in Hobart.

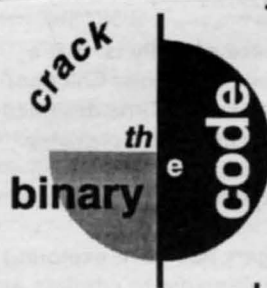
The symposium emphasised the many facets that comprise Respect. The final speaker, Galarawuy Yunupingu, spoke of the imperative to

respect the land as a living entity from which we are all born and with which Indigenous knowledge and the cultural basis of Native Title are intrinsically linked. The symposium showed that the resourcing and recognition of Indigenous skills, knowledge, place and their cultural practice within a global continuum is necessary if we are to survive in any meaningful way.

Within weeks, the Howard government's introduction of legislation based on the 'Ten Point Plan' (rebuffing the High Court Wik decision recognising historically proven joint custodianship of pastoral leases) represents a rebuttal of shared stewardship of the land and country with the country's Indigenous people.

Respect for land, law and country is a lesson still to be taught to the non-Indigenous policy-makers as we embrace an inter-connected world.

Mike Leggett acknowledges assistance from the Australian Film Commission for him to attend the Fullbright Symposium, offers thanks to the organisers and participants, and respect to the Larrakia people, on whose land we met.



The first symposium of multimedia criticism as part of Interact Multimedia Festival 1997

Saturday 1 November 1997

Melbourne Exhibition Centre Auditorium
Level One 2 Clarendon Street, Southbank

1. Multimedia as an 'add-on' to established art forms
2. Creative possibilities of the Internet
3. Appropriate critical language for talking about multimedia
4. Dissemination of multimedia in the art world

Speakers include: Kathryn Phelps, Antoni Jachs, Phillippa Hawker, Christina Thompson, Peter Craven, Bill Mitchell, Gary Warner, Peter Hennessey, Michael Hill, Justine Humphry, Morag Fraser, Geert Lovink, Steve Polak, Angela Ndalians, Mike Leggett, Shiralee Saul, Stephen Feneley, Stephanie Britton, Robyn McKenzie.

Coordinated by Kevin Murray through Centre for Contemporary Photography. Supported by the Commonwealth Government through the New Media Fund of the Australia Council, the Victorian Government through Arts Victoria - Dept of Premier and Cabinet, and Interact Asia Pacific Multimedia Festival 1997.



For registration forms call one of the Binary Code Hotlines
tel: (03) 9417 7466
<http://www.cinemia.net/CCP>
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Comment

The new age virus

Ian Haig does a new media freakout

A particularly virulent strain of the new age virus can be found spreading rapidly throughout digital media culture—from VRML 3D worlds of transcendental self-discovery, to the computer animation of the digital shaman, to interactive digital mandalas. While the current fixation with the new age is rife in rave culture, digital media's particular fascination is with mysticism. The new environments of online worlds and interactivity often go hand in hand with a new age, touchy-feely, cyber-induced hype.

Devoted followers of the cyber gospel, strung out on the flakey new technological Haight Ashbury, look to the likes of Timothy Leary, Mark Pesce, Howard Rheingold and Jaron Lanier to inform their own utopian-new age cyber sensibilities. The popular rhetoric of interactive media makes things worse, as it is viewed as opening the doors to a new paradigm, the ultimate democratic medium that truly delivers on that collective 60s dream of individual empowerment.

The Heaven's Gate cult fanatically build their web pages, seeing the internet as the delivery system to a new plane of consciousness, a new level of language, with virtual reality, artificial life and 3D space as the extensions of a new realm of human experience; while magazines like *Wired* and *Mondo 2000* tune in and drop out to a cyber-consciousness of alternate realities, avatars, and 3D texture mapping of the mindscape...

Preview

Cracked codes and altered states

In an alliance between the multimedia industry spin doctors and the cultural interpreters of new technologies, the forthcoming *Interact Asia-Pacific Multimedia Festival*, to be held in the Melbourne Exhibition Centre, October 30-November 2, features two key arts-related events.

Coordinated by Kevin Murray for the Centre for Contemporary Photography is the *(Crack the) Binary Code* symposium, a one day event scheduled for 1 November. The conference promises to 'put the big aesthetic questions to multimedia'. Critics from a range of disciplines including literature, visual arts and film, will aim to appraise the 'cultural worth' of the new medium. As the information on the symposium correctly points out, in the political sphere information technology has universal support. The appointment of a Minister for IT is testament to this fact. However, while digital technologies are increasingly a key medium for many artists and cultural workers, this development is not reflected in the representation of the multimedia art in the conventional media, and in cultural institutions such as galleries. In inviting 'cultural gatekeepers' to evaluate the role of multimedia in the arts, the symposium promises to ask a range of important questions: Is the exclusion of multimedia from the fine arts a generational lag or a matter of principle? If multimedia were to be reviewed in the arts pages instead of the computer pages, what language would be employed to evaluate it? Speakers include leading practitioners well versed in the medium and its cultural impacts: Michael Hill, former new media coordinator for the AFC and now independent producer; Mike Leggett, curator of *Burning the Interface*, the first large scale exhibition of international CD-ROM held in Australia at the MCA in 1996; and Gary Warner, long time media artist, producer and curator, now at the Museum of

Digital art in particular picks up on the more obvious 'transcendental' elements of 60s mysticism in its notions of 'immersive worlds' and interactivity, but with none of its psychedelic freakishness and weirdo graphic sensibilities. Instead what we're left with is the reshaped, predictable and clichéd new age icons of crystals, magick, Buddha, mandalas, digital dreamscapes and never ending Mandelbrot sets. Such graphic icons are so culturally loaded with a fuzzy 60s alternative consciousness that redefining them as models for the digital age is nothing short of depressing. The strong smell of incense hangs over new age cyberculture like a critical cloud. Just plug into the headspace and trip out.

Historically, computer graphics has always had a thing going on with the daggy elements of early 70s graphic sensibilities, from Roger Dean and Hypnosis album covers to Pink Floyd. Just look at any Siggraph animation collection from the late 80s with their computer generated images of pyramids, unicorns, and strange uninhabited lands—all testament to a culture out of step with the graphic pulsations of the time. By far the worst example of new ageism in cyberculture would have to be the annual San Francisco Digital Be-in; depending on where you stand you either go with the flow and paint your face and celebrate the dawn of the new age or run screaming for the nearest exit.

Sydney. These digerati will be mixing it with those more attuned to the analogue print media: Christina Thompson of *Meanjin*, critic Peter Craven, and Morag Fraser of Eureka Street, as well as arts specialists such as Robyn McKenzie, editor of the journal *Like*. Leading international speakers include Geert Lovink, Netherlands-based net activist and moderator of the international online new media discussion group *nettime*, which boasts contributors like Mark Dery and John Perry Barlow; and Bill Mitchell, expat Australian dean of Architecture at MIT and author of *City of Bits*.

Running for the duration of *Interact* will be *Experimenta - Altered States*, a multimedia arts exhibition designed to 'explore artistic expression in the age of the digital revolution'. Curated by Helen Stuckey and the director of *experimenta media arts*, Shiralee Saul, the exhibition will be housed in a 270 square metre purpose built space designed by Drome in the Exhibition Centre. Together with a video wall continuously displaying new media works, the exhibition features a program of interactive environments, video installations, and computer based interactives. Exhibiting artists include Troy Innocent, Christopher Langton, Peter Hennessey, Jon McCormack, Rebecca Young, Lindsay Cockburn and Tina Gonsalves. A special issue of the *experimenta media arts* publication *Mesh*, with profiles of the featured artists, will be available in conjunction with the exhibition. On November 2, a screening program of digital animation and special effects and a series of artists' talks will conclude *Altered States*. AMJ

For details of the *Binary Code* conference, call the hotline on 03 9417 7466, or visit the CCP website <http://www.cinemedia.net/CCP>. For more information on *Altered States* visit the *experimenta media arts* website <http://www.apc.org/~experimenta>

experimenta
media arts

altered states

curated by
HELEN STUCKEY & SHIRALEE SAUL

@ **Interact**
Asia-Pacific Multimedia Festival 1997
Melbourne Exhibition Centre
October 30–November 2

Jon McCormack, Tina Gonsalves, Chris Langton,
Troy Innocent, Peter Hennessey, Rebecca Young,
Psychotropic visions and the
Installations digitally-corrupted gaze...
and Interactive multimedia: Norie Neumark, Lindsay Colborne, Mindflux,
Naomi Herzog, Dorian Dowse,
Psy Harmonics and Tim Gruchy.

Lynne Sanderson, Alyson Bell, Chris Newling,
Alan Dorin, Troy Innocent, John Brigden,
Altered States Screening Program
2-3p.m. **November 2**
Auditorium Misako Sugiyama, Adrienne Patrick,
John Tonkin, Tina Gonsalves, Ian Haig,
Laurens Tan, Lindsay Colborne
and Mark Power.

Articles by: Adrian Martin,
Kurt Brereton, Amanda King,
Mike Leggett, Helen Stuckey,
MESH 'Altered States'
Kathy Cleland, Chris Gregory,
Darren Tofts, Catriona Murtagh,
Deborah Durie, D. J. Huppatz,
Ann Morrison, John Conomos,
Shiralee Saul, Adrian Miles, Benjamin
Brady, Christine Adams, Jackie Cooper,
Jane Leonard, Emily Clarke, Sophie Hansen,
Belinda Barnet, Taylor Nuttall, Suzy Morton,
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Peter Hennessey. Edited by Shiralee Saul

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Cross-cultural camera

Terri Janke on recognising Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights—issues for film and multimedia producers

Indigenous culture is becoming increasingly popular for use and dissemination in the film and multimedia industry. Since colonisation, Indigenous cultural material has been the subject of many films ranging from ethnographic films to fiction and feature films such as Charles Chauvel's *Jedda* and Peter Weir's *The Last Wave*. In the age of new technology Indigenous cultural material now finds itself as subject matter for CD-ROMs and online services. Whilst Indigenous communities are keen to participate in the new technology industry, they are also concerned about the current use of their cultural material by non-Indigenous multimedia industry producers. Inadequate protection under existing laws is one of their main concerns.

The nature of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property

A great number of generations participate in the development of an item of knowledge or tradition. In this way, Indigenous cultural heritage is collectively owned and socially based. It is continuously evolving. Only the group can consent to the sharing of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property. Although cultural heritage is collectively owned, often an individual or group might be responsible for a particular item of heritage. Such people are custodians. They are empowered with the right to use and deal with the particular item of heritage

only in so far as their actions conform to the best interests of the community as a whole. There are many Indigenous groups within Australia and each has its own customs and laws. Despite the difference one major commonality is that Indigenous cultural heritage can never be alienated, surrendered or sold except for conditional use.

Inadequacies of Intellectual Property Laws

The ownership of items of Indigenous cultural material such as stories, songs, dances and knowledge which belong to the cultural heritage of a particular Indigenous group is not recognised or protected by copyright for the following reasons:

Many Indigenous cultural works are oral and are not recorded in material form. Now as these stories, songs and information are being recorded for the first time, the person putting the story into material form is recognised as the copyright owner. Indigenous rights to own, use and control that story or knowledge are not recognised by intellectual property laws. For instance, a filmmaker who records an Indigenous story is recognised as the creator by the Copyright Act and is thereby given the exclusive rights to sell, reproduce and deal with the film as he or she sees fit.

Furthermore, copyright law is based on the notion of the individual creator of a copyright interest having a property right

in such interest. Hence, an individual person or persons must be identifiable. This is not always possible in relation to Indigenous cultural works because a great number of people have contributed over the generations to the development of a particular item of heritage. Copyright does not recognise the notion of ownership of rights in Indigenous law, which is based on collective rights that are managed on a custodial basis according to the relevant Indigenous tradition.

Issues of cultural ownership

The recognition of cultural ownership is extremely important to Indigenous people. Whilst the copyright legislation is based on the rationale "that the Act should guarantee protection to the creators of works in order to encourage literary, artistic and musical production and to guarantee creators a fair economic return", protection for Indigenous people is linked to identity and cultural maintenance and strengthening. To take their cultural property out of context or use it inappropriately in some cases is more offensive than denying Indigenous people economic rewards from exploitation of their culture.

One recent example concerns the story of Burrimindi from the Injabandi people of Roeburn, Western Australia. This group spent five years working with a white filmmaker, Frank Ridjavick, recording their stories and histories. The result was a film called *Exile and the Kingdom* which the Injabandi owned copyright in. One of the stories from the Injabandi concerning the creation story of the Fortescue River was used verbatim in a subsequent television series but applied the story to Mt Augustus. It was not the story from this region.

The Injabandi felt outraged that their story had not only been stolen but reproduced as if belonging to another part of the country. While the filmmakers of the series were of the opinion that it doesn't make a difference because most people viewing wouldn't know this, what is effectively occurring is a denial of their ownership rights to the story. The linking of the story with another area could muddy the waters and make it difficult for Injabandi to use the story as evidence of their cultural ties with their land when making a claim under Mabo or for future generations. The AFC, as part copyright owners of the film, were able to assist the Injabandi negotiate with the series producers and the footage reproducing the story was taken out of the film.

Other problems include filming for commercials or movies in the Uluru/Kimberley region sacred sites which are not supposed to be seen by people outside of a certain initiated group. Filmmakers may be taken to sites by people in a particular group claiming to have authority when they do not.

Advice to filmmakers working in this area:

- Consult with the relevant Indigenous people.
- Find out the correct cultural protocols of the particular group.
- Get permission from those with the appropriate authority.
- Contact Indigenous media organisations such as the Indigenous Branch of the Australian Film Commission Tel: 02 9321 6444; National Indigenous Media Association of Australia Tel: 07 3876 3200; Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association Tel: 08 8952 3744

10,000 online cameras in Homebush Stadium

John McConnchie on net possibilities

I once heard a colleague (Dave Sagg from Visual Artists, in fact) invent a scenario for the 2000 Olympics: thousands of people at the opening ceremony capturing the event with digital cameras hooked into their mobiles, feeding the images onto the web; people around the world, in front of their computers, with access to images from *anywhere* within the stadium. Visual Artists have been instrumental in creating web 'events', getting Womad on line, creating the Cyberfringe during Adelaide's festival of Arts. I like the context behind this story as well. We were in a meeting that included local representatives of television, an industry which has invested millions in the Games. It is economic, not technical limitations, which ensure Dave's Olympic vision will fail to materialise by 2000 because it poses the question of just how to generate capital out of the new technology and, equally importantly, who would control that capital? But, 10,000 cameras? How would you find the best vantage point? What if you found it just at the point when the child with camera grew tired and handed it back to her inept father? In other words, how do you *read* a medium like that?

But of course, I'm thinking of television. I love watching diving, as well as television's solutions to the search for that 'best' camera angle, catching scant seconds of free fall: the introduction of overhead cameras; the underwater camera that stretches the brief moment of spectacle just that little bit longer; Atlanta's addition of a tracking camera to follow the diver's fall; the director who, by selecting angles, weaves each dive into its semi-narrative context. In other words, these are solutions to problems (what is the best angle?) posed by the medium itself. So what happens with an interactive medium where the reader, not

the producer, gets to write the script? When an interactive media allows the viewer to become the director?

Perhaps this article should be titled *Towards a Critical Theory of New Media*, or something of the sort. For several reasons: we are still in an era where our ability to formulate a critical response is as much in its infancy as interactive technology itself, heavily dependent on concepts formulated for 20th century media and culture, and because our attempts in dealing with interactivity at a critical level are, to date, marked by a certain utopianism, as befits any 'infant'. Of course, utopias are unrealisable fantasies (and reason to distrust any essay with 'towards' in its title). It is, as also befits any infant, coloured by a now traditional fear of technology, expressed through anxiety about the presence of pornography or build-your-own-bomb instructions on the web. (These anxieties are also linked to real infants, children's access, which I'll touch upon later.)

Still, this is a hot topic. For example, research in education is onto it. The Adelaide group Rosebud and Ngapartji CMC commissioned a brief paper on work being undertaken on audience engagement with interactive multimedia. Researcher Sal Humphries concluded the over-riding issue was still one of 'literacy', with researchers monitoring user engagement (the interface between the technology and the user), in order to understand how cues are presented and how the reader's response determines outcome. This isn't far removed from most digital art that I've seen, where artists still determine the parameters of how the text is to be experienced, how its interactive content is to be 'read', inviting a kind of reception theory. Regardless of the aesthetics of the new medium, we are still in

the domain of 'author' and 'reader'.

But other aspects are emerging, particularly on the web, and certainly on those sites which are, more rather than less, 'written' by their 'readers': chat rooms, palaces, muds and moos—all multi-user virtual environments. Perhaps these activities are better thought of as *performances* rather than texts, in which case we can include Cyberfringe and Womad experiments. It may also be that the prototypes for such sites predate the web as we now know it, once accessible only to programmers or specialists exchanging information. What happens, however, when multi-user sites become accessible to a 'popular culture'? Some observations.

As an ordinary web surfer I am struck by the way the potential for my own interactive 'writing' is marginalised: guest books, graffiti walls and the like. I'm invited to write, yes, but as an adjunct to the main event of the web page itself. This reflects what appears to be happening on the web generally; for example, there are 'official' sites and 'unofficial' ones (no more so than where entertainment franchises such as *Star Trek* are concerned). This tension serves a purpose in that it distinguishes between a product (official, copyrighted) and a fan. It can invite a kind of Derridean reading, the margins against the centre, where we write in the margins in order to circumscribe an official content, one defining the other in a symbiosis that actually structures meaning on the web despite the fact that anybody with access to the technology can participate in it.

If this is the determining structure, it is a self-determined and regulating one, not generated by conscious intent. This seems to worry conventional mass media as well as our political representatives, hence their

continual carping about porn, and terrorism on the web. But this stems from the fact that because the web is unfettered and its participants are happily scrawling away in its margins and back alleys, pushing gender boundaries and expounding their most loved fetishes to the world, it is in accord with Bakhtin's concept of the Camivalesque, that night-time revelry that suspends the daylight of social law. On several conditions: notably that the temporary suspension of these laws is a condition of their stability.

Online porn may drive the web's technological development in interface design and financial viability. Right-wing racism may find in the web a means of dissemination (never forget the Camivalesque has a grotesque downside). But the web is actually a pretty safe place, including for children as most liberal parents have found. Its final collective face is not so much transgression but a consensus, in that what is played out, virtual utopic sex and all, manifests an underlying phantasmic structure. In other words, those 10,000 cameras could well reach a consensus on what to film, rendering the need to choose between them unnecessary because, as 'virtual subjects', we will have already determined our own position within the vast exchange of digital information. I'm borrowing here from Slavoj Žižek's conclusion to *The Metastases of Enjoyment* where he discusses the West's response to Sarajevo, phantasmically bound in the figure of the victim. Victimization is universalised, he writes, "from sexual abuse and harassment to the victims of AIDS...from the starving children of Somalia to the victims of bombardment of Sarajevo..." What has this to do with the web as a multi-user, writerly environment, home of the virtual subject? Go to a search engine and type in 'Diana'.

bit.depth

New CD-ROMs prompt thoughts on interactivity and the critical act from Jonathon Delacour

Metabody: CD-ROM by Gary Zebington, Jeffrey Cook and Sam de Silva, Merlin; Planet of Noise: CD-ROM by Brad Miller and McKenzie Wark

If "the purpose of good criticism is to kill bad art", as one of the screens in *Planet of Noise* asserts, then the good critic faces a Herculean task—particularly now, when so much art springs from theoretical imperatives rather than love or passion, or both.

Still, I doubt that bad art needs to be killed, since most of it will die of natural causes. McKenzie Wark's hanging judge, his killer of bad art, runs the risk of matching my favourite definition of a critic: someone who strolls around the battlefield when the war is over, slaughtering the wounded. As Anne Lamott points out in her book on writing, *Bird by Bird*, "you don't always have to chop with the sword of truth. You can point with it, too".

In any case, the best art renders criticism superfluous since it performs a dual function: engaging and delighting our senses, intellect, and emotions while simultaneously laying down a rigorous critique of the medium and its possibilities. Jean-Luc Godard started out writing film criticism and in 1962, having made four films in two years (including the sublime *Vivre sa Vie*), he wrote: "Today I still think of myself as a critic,

and in a sense I am, more than ever before. Instead of writing criticism, I make a film, but the critical dimension is subsumed. I think of myself as an essayist, producing essays in novel form, or novels in essay form: only instead of writing, I film them".

Interactive media desperately needs work like this, work that blends art with critical discourse, particularly now, when CD-ROM has failed commercially and the hype machine has turned its attention to DVD-RAM ("ten times more storage must be the answer because more is necessarily better") and internet push channels ("we failed to make books or movies interactive but we'll succeed in making the net like television"). But we don't need six or eight or ten gigabytes of storage or 50 or 500 push channels. What we need right now is work that explores the nature of interactivity itself.

In *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*, Janet Murray identifies four principal properties "which separately and collectively make (the computer) a powerful vehicle for literary creation. Digital environments are procedural, participatory, spatial, and encyclopedic. The first two properties make up most of what we mean by the vaguely used word *interactive*; the remaining two properties help to make digital creations seem as explorable and extensive as the actual world, making up much of what we mean when we say that cyberspace is *immersive*".

Using as its foundation the work of the performance artist Stelarc, *Metabody* explores digital self-representation and the human-machine interface by examining golems, robots, automata and cyborgs—past, present, and future. Using as its foundation the ironic moralism of the aphorism (with a particular debt to

Adorno), *Planet of Noise* explores a world "where all things lie, in exile from their future; where stories burn, and spaceships, on re-entry, jettison all desires". That *Metabody* satisfies all of Murray's criteria while *Planet of Noise* meets few of them goes a long way in explaining why I prefer the former to the latter.

"The computer is not fundamentally a wire or a pathway", says Murray, "but an engine. It was designed not to carry static information but to embody complex, contingent behaviours". *Metabody* is procedural because it is, above all, besotted with the rules through which one might create a digital being.

"Procedural environments are appealing to us not just because they exhibit rule-generated behaviour", writes Murray, "but because we can induce the behaviour. They are responsive to our input". In other words, they invite participation. On every level *Metabody* invites us to participate in the ongoing creation of meaning: constructing our own 3D golems; uploading them to a web site where they are grafted onto an evolving assemblage; exploring the relationship between the sovereign individual and the collective democracy of the internet.

"The new digital environments are characterized by their power to represent navigable space." *Metabody* uses VRML (Virtual Reality Modelling Language) to represent not just the 3D avatars or golems but the spatial relationships between avatars and the world they inhabit.

Digital environments are *encyclopedic*: simultaneously offering and inducing the expectation of infinite resources. *Metabody* is dense and coherent: its images, texts, audio, and digital video working in concert to invite us to explore

the present, reflect upon the past, and attempt to imagine the future.

In all these ways, *Metabody* is exemplary in mapping out the territory that, inevitably, we must explore over the next few years: 3D space, the human-computer interface, digital representation via avatars, and the integration of CD-ROM with the internet.

Planet of Noise, on the other hand, is not procedural, since it appears to embody no rules other than the one that clicking on a 3-dimensional sphere causes the next aphorism to appear. Nor is it participatory since it eschews any kind of real interactivity. It is indifferent to spatial exploration, constraining the viewer to the flat plane of the computer screen. But it is however—in the range, depth, and quality both of the ideas and their (written) expression—encyclopedic. As well as maddening. And fascinating.

The graphics and audio are superb, as is the writing. And the underlying idea—to use digital media to reinvigorate the aphorism—is startling and original. But it seems, to me, that the *Planet of Noise* team members laboured in isolation, combining their efforts at the last moment, since the images and sounds appear to bear, at best, only a tangential relationship to the texts.

Parading these (perceived) flaws with almost reckless indifference, *Planet of Noise* is still—because of the quality of its ideas and its ambition—preferable to most CD-ROM titles: whether the usual commercial dreck or the earnest, well-meaning outpourings of the *Australia on CD* program.

It might be best to finish by giving McKenzie Wark the last word. In an aphorism titled *Review* he writes: "At least he did me the honour of taking the trouble to misunderstand me."

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Cinesonic

Philip Brophy: *Face Off* = Peking Opera + Dolby Stereo

One of the mechanical charms of cinema is its simple ability to track from right to left and vice versa. The dialectic between movement within a fixed frame and the motion of a moving frame pinpoints the kineticism at cinema's historical heart—a will to move which has excited everyone from Abel Gance to Busby Berkeley to Michael Snow to Sam Raimi. Surreptitiously evoking a beautifully designed antique instrument, the pan-and-track still seduces cinema patrons as they surrender their ocular mechanics to the shifting frame. Despite the lubrication required for the camera's laid tracks and the projector's threaded film, there is no singular well-oiled machinery that defines cinema. Instead, the cinema (as an animatic apparatus) generates the dynamic resolution of the vertical with the horizontal—of the vertical strip of still images passing down in front of the projector lens, while each image incrementally shifts sideways. This is an oft-ignored feat by which we remain blindly seduced.

This is especially so when one notices that such movement is physiologically impossible. Look out your window or around your room and try to 'pan' your eyesight. The best you can do is a series of montaged focal points or arcs as your eye uncontrollably locks onto anything your brain presumes to be the subject of your vision. The cinematic track-and-pan is thus a wonderfully mechanical and proto-robotic effect to which the human in us all thrills. Apostles of computer animation gorge on the accelerated track-and-pan as they deliriously speed along an X-Y axis. Tourists track-and-pan their future memories on tiny camcorders with onanistic repetition. Wannabe directors fix on 'tracking shots' as signifying embodiments of the artistry they will never produce. All testify to the base power of cinema's kinetic flow.

However, in this très-modern ultra-schizophrenic world, the flow of time and space has to be fractured and folded into a

rhythm of ruptures. Here, then, is one of cinema's many fruity contradictions. It is already granting us a gorgeously inhuman, out-of-body experience simply through its cascading pans and tracks, yet it must then destroy that sensation lest we become addicted to its flow (hence the conservative fear of computer games which do not interrupt flow). The interruption effect has been incessantly and superficially celebrated in the modernism of montage and the postmodernism of MTV, both of which lay claim to inventing the effect when in fact they only disorient because they break up something that already was doing a fine job in re-orienting our ocular experience. Worse still, scant theoretical regard has been given the audiovisual ramifications of this conflation of optical effects which effectively cancel out each other's purported visual narratological meaning.

The simple question to be asked is: what do you hear at the moment of the cut? What does sound do at this point? Does it continue or recommence? Does it run counter to the edit, flow with it, cover it, rejoin it? Simply, sound is operating in ways here that demonstrate exactly what is happening: the sound you hear during the shots either side of the edit is often not only the sound of those images, but also the sound of all that has disappeared between those images.

The technological and structural dilemma briefly outlined above is evident mostly in 1930-40s Hollywood musicals and 1970-80s Hong Kong kung-fu movies. Both involve moving/performing bodies which must move across visual edits. The space between Busby Berkeley's astounding editing in the camera (he usually filmed his amazing set pieces in sequence) and Gene Kelly's canny editing for the camera (he choreographed on set in anticipation for shifts in camera perspective and location) is traversed and transgressed by the accelerated staging of the modern kung-fu fight. Moreover, in kung-fu one is dealing with body movements designed to be too quick for the eye to see, requiring cinema mechanics to then disrupt the posthuman abilities of the martial artist, reconfigure it into a digestible physiological spatio-temporal continuum, and edit it so that it appears to be happening at an inhuman rate. The jump cut in Hong Kong action cinema (and its current repatriation

in Hollywood) is predicated on this bizarre two-steps-backward/two-steps-forward conundrum of depiction.

John Woo's *Face Off*—continuing over 20 years of a Chinese refiguring of so-called American action cinema—stands as a contemporary landmark in grabbing those sonic moments between the cut and exploding them into the cinesonic ether sphere. *Face Off* boasts two Hollywood stars riotously mimicking the other—as well as some of the worst body doubles committed to the big screen. (Digital effects can do anything these days except make a good wig.) No matter: the pleasure of watching flabby Scientologists and balding bad dudes in action movies is scoffing at the preposterousness of their implied physical prowess. John Woo may be playing with at least three levels of irony by pushing this to the hilt in having Travolta and Cage be totally unconvincing in any physical action they perform short of turning their head to face a low-angled camera track. Shot after shot after shot, Travolta and Cage exit the frame only to re-enter the frame in the next shot in a manner that even Jackie Chan would find difficult to execute. But at these precise moments the soundtrack blasts one with a whole artillery of orchestral, synthetic and incendiary sound effects. They shoot across the surround sound space, creating breathtaking maps of plotted action which confuse one into feeling that the screen bodies have in fact performed the feat your eyes do not believe. It's like accidentally swallowing a gulp of water while swimming: you maintain your rhythm of breathing while conscious of the fact that one breath was replaced by an entirely separate physical action and sensory experience.

Just as 70s kung-fu movies traditionally supplant raw objective acoustics (flesh hitting flesh) with brute subjective sonics (flesh hitting *your* flesh), post-80s Hong Kong urban action movies made in America exploit the clarity, definition and sheer volume of full-frequency surround sound to create spectacular sonic fireworks that dazzle one in synch with the on-screen 'sleight-of-body'. This is an apt fusion of culture (Peking Opera) with technology (Dolby Stereo). While Hong Kong action aficionados bemoan the Americanisation of its great stars (most of whom would love dearly to break into and exploit the American market anyway), the shifting of

Hong Kong sound post-production off-shore is enabling its action and fantasy genres to develop advanced audiovisual forms based on a more detailed and multi-dimensional approach to sound design which home-grown Hong Kong cinema has been renowned for ignoring.

In some respects, the sound of *Face Off* distracts one from the visuals in a rush of milliseconds where theatre-space—the sculpted sound field which you inhabit in the cinema—becomes a sonar hall of mirrors, refracting sound effects, aural devices and musical conventions. Raimi-esque bullet-cam shots are matched by booming tunnels of wind rushes which soar to the rear of the cinema like jets passing overhead at an aviation pageant. Grossly clichéd slo-mo hugs of children on sepia-toned carousels are matched by syrupy stings of glockenspiels which reverberate the whole auditorium. Obligatory Tex-Mex church shoot-outs and stand-offs are matched by diffused swirls of pigeon flaps and digital choirs. And—best of all—guns fired in aircraft hangars and metallic prison halls are matched by high-transient full-impact bullet ricochets which punctuate the side and rear walls of the theatre with such velocity that one flinches and ducks.

Yet in other respects, the detachment of these sounds from the image track—the ways in which they tend to *create* the moment for an on-screen occurrence rather than follow one—posits them as cornerstones in a scene's audiovisual narration. Each of these moments is the result of extensive post-production labour and a purposeful use of psycho-acoustics, combined neither to enhance visuals, disrupt space, nor synchronise action. Rather, the sound design in *Face Off* is appositely engineered to compensate visuals, conjure space and generate action. Following the logic of cinematized kung-fu (rendering the impossibly real as impossible realism), the film's momentum of sound is a hi-tech rush of Chinese circus music: crashing cymbals and swelling gongs, sparkling fire crackers and booming fire-balls, swishing blades and clanging metal sheets. *Face Off* embodies much that destabilises cinema while exposing its unending attraction. Never forget who created gun powder. Never presume action cinema to be American. And never believe in the primacy of visuals in an audiovisual medium.

Review

By popular demand

Vicki Englund overviews this year's Brisbane International Film Festival

Any discussion of the Brisbane International Film Festival seems destined to be laden with political overtones, it being the subject of disparate debates since its 1997 season, July 31-August 10.

BIFF enjoyed very substantial, unforeseen success this year, but it was precisely this upsurge which caught organisers unawares and caused ticketing problems and delayed screenings, resulting in enormous queues. Another misfortune was clashing with the Melbourne Film Festival which, having overlapped with Sydney previously, moved its dates. This prevented some artists from visiting and caused unavailability of films.

Negotiations might elicit a change in the Festival's timing to June, but one is moved to ask why it is that Brisbane should reschedule. Is it a tacit opinion that the burgeoning "Sunshine State" event should bow to its culturally superior relative? Parochial indignation and paranoia aside, it does raise the question of the perceived 'difference' of Brisbane. Some criticism has been evident that BIFF is overly populist and screens too many films which soon have general release, but this approach is also lauded as sensible in

a city with relatively inchoate specialist cinema culture.

Is the utilitarian approach any less worthy than the elitist? Speaking to film-goers, I found a large percentage attended a small part of the Festival. Thus, the 1996 change enabling a one-ticket purchase at least encouraged those with time or inclination for only one cinema experience during the period to see something possibly outside their usual realm. Could this then place BIFF in a mentoring position? If people are given the option to attend one or two 'alternative' films this year, then maybe they will spread their wings next time (angel's wings, incidentally, being the visual image for this year's Festival) and venture further into exotic or rarely seen product.

But on to the actual films, and limited space prevents any detail of the 70-odd features, but the five voted most popular by patrons provide an enlightening representation. No.1 was Trevor Graham's documentary, *Mabo: Life of an Island Man*; followed by Kevin Spacey's *Albino Alligator*; *When the Cat's Away*, a French comedy/drama by Cedric Klapisch at No.3; No.4 was Bill Bennett's visceral thriller *Kiss or Kill*; and an Australian film

with Aboriginal central characters, *The Life of Harry Dare*, directed by Aleksis Vellis, came in at No.5.

There has always been a strong Asia-Pacific focus at BIFF, but the absence of Asian product in the top echelon might reflect the audience's desire for something a little different this year. At the very least, it would appear Brisbanites are appreciative of Australian output (three of the five are local), and indeed receptive to Indigenous issues.

Interesting too, that *Mabo*, *Albino Alligator* and *Kiss or Kill* were soon commercially released, and presumably many knew they would be. One could postulate their sell-out crowds were simply because it is a "thrill" seeing a film pre-release, and in an atmosphere of celebration of film—there are fewer potato chip packets crumpling than at your average multiplex. Throw in an appearance by the director and it's likely an irresistible combination in a city devoid of high-profile celebrities. Incidentally, BIFF's vote-counting doesn't include retrospectives so the two delightful silent films by Herbert Brenon, for example, couldn't register—this despite BIFF Artistic Director, Anne Demy-Geroe, informing us before Brenon's *Peter Pan* that his *A Kiss for Cinderella* had so far been the festival's most popular work.

The opening night screening was *The Full Monty*, starring Scottish actor Robert Carlyle. An apt choice, it had the ideal combination of heartwarming humour and

social commentary on the disenfranchisement of industry workers to please the audience, who, a couple of years ago, looked twitchily at their watches during the dour *Carrington*, wondering how long before the champagne started flowing. An admirable film, yes. A pre-party film, no. *Doing Time for Patsy Cline* on closing night was also received well, with introductions by actors Miranda Otto, Matt Day and Richard Roxburgh. It was another safe choice and left people elevated, although the film, as deft as its jocose commentary on living the country and western dream/nightmare was, certainly dragged in parts. John Seale, the Queensland-born, Academy Award-winning (*The English Patient*) cinematographer, was presented with the annual Chauvel Award—a small controversy because of its \$100 black-tie dinner, and, as usual, there were ample seminars, "Meet the Filmmaker" sessions, and shorts.

So, assuming organisational hiccups are righted, it will be interesting to note the future of the continually expanding festival now that it's under the banner of the Pacific Film and Television Commission since the early September merger of all of Queensland's film-related bodies. But that's another story.

See Robyn Evans' update on the merger of the Queensland film bodies in this issue on page 26.

Review

Nice Boop!, Nice Boop!

Ric Mason on skadada's latest multimedia performance work

skadada goes Boop! is the second performance piece of skadada's I have seen following the very successful and impressive debut shows last year. *Boop!* represents a new body of work, the result of what must have been close to twelve months of development and rehearsal at PICA where the group was in residence last year.

Boop! continues a format established in the debut shows where the performance includes a series of routines, very much along the lines of the 'routines' William Burroughs talks about and uses in his writings. A 'routine' is a little story or anecdote, which in skadada's case is often presented in a cool, inner city, deadpan, streetwise vernacular. It's very much, "so there I was...", and while the US accent is not there, sometimes you think you can almost hear it. It was of interest to me that while these routines formed a part of the debut skadada performances, in *Boop!* they come to almost dominate the show. In addition, it's not just John Burt effecting it, everyone is having a go. And indeed why not. This form of stylised delivery was obviously very popular with the audience, adding as it did to the 'entertainment' aspect of the show.

The opening routine focuses on Perth and how 'nice' it is to live in Perth. Plenty of ironic material here. What a strange word 'nice' is. It always reminds me of the sweet pink stuff atop cup cakes. As John Burt expands on this theme we are taken on a flyover tour of Perth's endless suburbs, freeways and housing developments via video footage of aerial views of the Perth metropolitan region projected in large scale behind him. These sweeping aerial views grab our visual attention while John continues his casually humorous and deadpan delivery. I must admit here that I am a sucker for aerial shots of cities, maps, charts, satellite photographs etc. This strategy worked effectively as a foil to the developing theme of how 'nice' Perth is. Perth, in fact, is a slowly creeping, constricted suburban nightmare. A quick geography lesson: the city is trapped in a twelve mile wide corridor of ancient, sandy plain between the low hills of the Darling Range and the Indian Ocean. This corridor extends north and south from Perth for what seems a very long way. Consequently, suburbs spread out along this channel in both directions at an alarming rate like some ravenous, foaming fungus.

The other most notable feature is that it is so incredibly ordered and 'nice'. All nicely uniform. All neat nicely matching and mostly brand new. Thousands upon thousands of brick and tile leggo box houses arranged in galaxy patterns of inwardly spiralling loops and cul de sacs, occasionally dotted with shopping centres, carparks and ubiquitous recreation areas bordered with toxic green copper logs. The mandatory lawns are neat and dotted with plastic looking conifers. Some of the more northern 'pioneer' suburbs are encircled by walls (often incomplete) to protect them from some as yet indeterminate menace. Building regulations in some of these outlying settlements dictate a choice of two colours for roofing tiles and stipulate mission brown for all property fences for all good citizens. Peanut and kidney shaped patches of bright blue—swimming pools—dot the landscape while on the other side of the 'range' similar but more irregular white patches of salt dot the terrain, the result of another aggressive monocultural activity.

And John is right, Perth is 'nice'. Perthites are also a little self-conscious

and make a point of dosing each other up with positive affirmations on what a great place it is that they live in. All of this came to a head a few years ago when all the local TV stations were carrying soporific self-congratulatory promos like "We Love You Perth" and "Perth, You're the Best." Sick bags became essential items while watching television.

In any case, as you can see, this is a theme that I could expand on and I personally wish that skadada had. Unfortunately for me they did not and this section of the performance was over before any important damage had been done. Instead they moved on to other 'routines' with more generalised themes surrounding modern urban living that could apply anywhere including consumerism, materialism, banality, superficiality, alienation and interpersonal tension (in the supermarket!). These, incidentally, are many of the themes covered brilliantly in the American sitcom *Seinfeld*.

Some of these pieces were accompanied by some basic 3-D models simply animated and somewhat reminiscent of Troy Innocent's totemistic androgynous 'bot' figures, as seen in his *Psyvision* video collection. No sooner had I thought these things when someone pointed out that they were in fact the work of Troy Innocent in collaboration with Katie Lavers. For me they served as a welcome visual distraction but I was unable to interpret their significance in the overall scheme of things. One

element that did strike me as intriguing was the use of a computer visualisation of sound waves during a musical segment featuring the wonderful singing of Rachel Guy. I understand that the visual sound wave was intended to have a voice activated real time interactive element. However, as is so often the case with

'nervous' computer equipment, the gear refused to perform on the night.

The performance I attended was the opening show of a season of dates at PICA and while I enjoyed its snappy pacing and amusing comment couched in sassy streetwise cool, overall it still left me somewhat unengaged. I am perfectly prepared to accept that I am out of step here, because the rest of the audience seemed completely engaged and, for the most part, in a state of high hilarity. In fact a general atmosphere of bonhomie reigned.

But for me the beautifully poetic dance pieces seen in the debut performances were sadly missing. Also absent to some extent were the innovative and hypnotic dance pieces incorporating John Patterson's well crafted interactive sound elements. In fact dance was surprisingly scarce in the whole performance, unfathomable when you have talent like John Burt in the side. However, for pure entertainment value *Boop!* stands up well, and, in a tongue in cheek sort of way, I believe this was skadada's target.



skadada goes Boop!

Katie Lavers

While I was invited to write mainly on the visual aspects of the show I found I couldn't really do that without letting a bunch of other cats out of the bag. skadada are an important company nationally, particularly when seen in the context of this sort of interdisciplinary performance work. They are an extremely professional group whose engagement with new technologies and challenging interdisciplinary collaborations set them apart from the field. The fact that the group has risen to such a high professional level whilst still in Perth is a credit to their own standards and to the highly supportive role played by PICA over the past two years.

Boop! is a slick, well produced and entertaining work that is worth seeing. It represents a progression in skadada's work where they have focused on one main structural element (the routines) and sought to develop them into a whole performance, sometimes in the name of entertainment and other times in a parody of it. It will be interesting to see where further developments will take them.

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Faulding Award for Multimedia

The South Australian Government through Arts South Australia has extended its prestigious Festival Awards for Literature to include writers working in multimedia.

The inaugural Faulding Award for Multimedia, valued at \$10,000, is for works of fiction and non-fiction which seek to use the full potential of multimedia.

Judges will not only be seeking examples of outstanding writing integral to the work, but works which show a command of the potential of multimedia in the writer's/writers' use of interactivity, music, graphics and moving image. Works which are collaborations between writers and other artists (visual, music, graphics, moving image) are sought, along with works by individuals.

Works produced to be delivered solely on-line or via CD-ROMs will in general be given preference over adapted works previously published in print, performed on stage or radio, or released on film or video.

In the case of non-fiction works preference will be given to works exploring cultural life including the arts, social and cultural history and literary and artistic criticism. Works which are primarily educational or promotional in their orientation will not be considered.

Writers must be Australian citizens or resident in Australia. In the case of collaborative on-line writing projects, at least 50% of the writing will be done by Australian writers.

Entry deadline: 5 pm, 31 October 1997.

The Festival Awards for Literature will be announced during the Adelaide Festival's Writers' Week in March 1998.

For Festival Awards for Literature guidelines and nomination forms, please contact Arts SA, telephone (08) 8207 7100, facsimile (08) 8207 7159 or email departs@webmedia.com.au

The award is proudly sponsored by the South Australian Government through Arts SA and F.H. Faulding & Co.

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Essay

TV vérité

Judith Hewitson examines the rash of DIY documentaries on TV

"The show you help produce."

Real TV

The ever more prevalent phenomenon of the camera revealing the audience to the audience is moving TV into the role of therapist, unravelling the shifting identity of Australians. Increasing globalisation has brought fundamental challenges to our fragmenting and notional sense of identity. No longer just 'multicultural Australians'—we are now international citizens. The term *local*, then, cannot be understood generically as meaning *Australian*. The question becomes, what is the local in the context of internationalisation? Programs such as *Moment of Truth* and *Real TV*—"The show you help produce"—search for local identity by scouring the personal with an almost perverse intimacy. In the ABC's *Race Around the World*, this process is extended into an examination of Australians' identities as global citizens.

How does our sense of belonging to the globe interact with localism? In *Race Around the World*, globetrotting amateur filmmakers take their local identity and throw it into comparison, and, sometimes, interaction with the *other's* identity. They reassure the audience that our local identity is secure, no matter whose world one is in. "I'm a simple Australian lad", declares Scott Herford, immersing himself in the foreign and exotic as he keeps the camera firmly centred on himself. The filmmakers represent an audience point of view: they deliver programs which are an outsider's experience of the globe. They contextualise our local identity, safely locating the audience's position in relation to the much larger global 'family'.

The home judges' comments also affirm the audience's local identity. Generally their responses reflect a conceptualisation of the globe as a foreign entity which may be either assimilated and homogenised ("I want to see Father Pino take over from Molly Meldrum"); or kept separate from the local (as in "I can't believe what she's

eating!"). However, sometimes we are allowed to sit and appreciate diversity, and, to this extent, *Race* is an opportunity for audiences to test the incorporation of global diversity into their sense of local being and belonging.

Just as the world generally represented by *Race* becomes a foreign-eccentric, exotic universe, this is also the case in *Real TV* and *Moment of Truth*. Social and psychological experiences such as the debutante ball, the psychological journey of looking for the remains of one's sister, stillborn 60 years ago, or the near-death experience, are all somewhat foreign, somehow other. In all of these cases, the audience is vicariously experiencing a personal engagement with an unknown world—a kind of exoticism, a different sense of being and identity. Geography, in other words, is never the only determinant of the foreignness of identity, global or local.

Cinema vérité TV has become a tool for exploration and reflection of shifting identity. This TV genre is just a stage, a step towards the marrying of local and global identity. On this point, futurologist John Naisbitt comments: "...as we get economically interlaced and economically interdependent in the world and yield a little more of our identity in that process, we get very interested in our identity and asserting our identity and holding onto our identity, we get very interested in our culture" (John Naisbitt in *Millennium Shift*, video by I. Lang and J. Hewitson, 1996).

With this impulse towards diversity and hybridisation, we cannot retain our current definition of *local* identity. And with the redefining of the local, the programs referred to here will not endure. The sudden upsurge in vérité TV reflects Australians coming to terms with new permutations of identity and culture. These programs are a step towards accepting diversity and the formation of hybrid identity—not just in terms of the mass phenomenon of nationality, but deeply in the individual psyche. The same impulse is demonstrated in other aspects of contemporary Australian culture, in which an anxiety and an attempt to cling to an outmoded definition of localism are evident. The Hanson agenda is a reflection of this contestation over identity. This phenomenon too can appear like a

"home video with attitude" (*Race Around the World*).

Here Today, Gone Tomorrow?

My assumption that we will outgrow this transient genre does not of course take into account its economic attributes. Budget cuts and resultant structural changes such as outsourcing makes low budget programming, as in guerilla production and home video, very desirable. *Real TV's* content is supplied by the audience. The cheap option—"we'll pay for it, you supply it"—can be disguised as a democratisation of the medium: Warhol's 15 minutes of fame, a great opportunity to gaze at ourselves. However, the mainstream is inevitably the mainstream, a bureaucracy, and "...[bureaucracy] has no intellectual, political or moral theory—except for its implicit assumption that efficiency is the principal aim of all social institutions...and now claims sovereignty over all of society's affairs" (Neil Postman, *The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, New York, Vintage Books, 1993).

Audience-supplied content reflects an economic consideration or efficiency principal—it's a low budget format assured of a captivated audience. Undoubtedly, too, the mainstream is representing our social and personal affairs, styling TV as the therapist. It offers a vicarious engagement with the process of formation of shifting notions of identity, as the boundaries between the local and the global dissolve. So when we as a nation have 'absorbed' the diversity, married local with the global, will TV programming change? Can TV afford to leave behind the vérité exploration by the amateur, the notion of audience as subject, the vicarious living in other people's identities and cultures, and the exotic worlds of the other?

Economically, it is desirable for certain aspects of this format to be maintained—especially the small digital camera, the tool which allows these programs to exist. It is this factor which suggests guerilla and amateur productions are a genre which will continue to find a place in the mainstream. As a corollary, other aspects of the guerilla style production will also continue: hand-held vérité style, single person crew, multiskilled personnel, low budgets, mobile and flexible production units, location orientated production and accessibility.

But these are economic and operational parameters rather than philosophical considerations. Philosophically, the mainstream is different from the guerilla or home movie genres. For example, a guerilla filmmaker is often an agent of change. Their programs are often confronting, challenging the status quo, and are hence regarded as high risk productions. The fundamental difference is that a guerilla outcome is dependent on process, whilst the process is subordinated to the end product in mainstream filmmaking.

The mainstream, in other words, may assimilate the tools of the guerilla, but not the production philosophy. Access and risk taking (demonstrated in the 'game' construct of *Race Around the World*) are part of the content rather than the production structure. Philosophically, the production is still mainstream, however disguised. Hence, as the mass audience moves on from the dilemma of hybrid identity, the subject matter and social thrust of mainstream cinema vérité programs will change. Programs philosophically based on the guerilla genre will be targeted to ever increasing niche audiences, and home movies will return home.

The current trend in cinema vérité is temporary: it exists at the whim of mainstream bureaucracy and market demand. TV programming will not always be in the hands of the amateurs. As the audience's identity moves beyond the reassuring attachment to the old sense of *local*, and personally integrates the *global*, programming demands will change. Hopefully, talented filmmaking will supplant the current trend of talented TV programming.

The effects of digital technology on audiences and program formats will be addressed as part of the New Frontiers component of the 5th International Documentary Conference to be held in Brisbane, 20-23 November.

Judith Hewitson is a Brisbane based international guerilla documentary maker, with ABC and SBS screen credits. She has worked throughout the Asia Pacific, also commissioning Asian independent producers for Millennium Shift, and is currently developing a children's documentary series in Asia.

Report

Queensland reeling over film body merger

Following her previous reports, Robyn Evans updates developments in Queensland's film industry restructure

Rumour and suspicion continue to haunt the Queensland government's restructuring of its support to the film industry. In late August, Cabinet endorsed a merger which will see the Pacific Film and Television Commission (PFTC), Film Queensland (FQ) and Film Events Queensland (FEQ) merged into one organisation which will retain the name the Pacific Film and Television Commission.

Since the announcement earlier this year that the government intended to merge the PFTC (responsible for attracting off-shore productions to Queensland) and FQ (responsible for developing local industry), industry practitioners have fought to ensure the continued promotion of a strong local industry in Queensland.

The government initially proposed that the 'commercial' activities of FQ be taken on by the PFTC, with its development and cultural activities to be handled by the Arts office. Local industry felt this artificial separation between various aspects of the industry would diminish recent gains in local production. They lobbied for, and won, a consultation process between government and industry, electing a

working party to represent the interests of local industry.

From the beginning, the working party was confronted with persistent rumours that the consultation was a facade, and that the government intended to go ahead with their plans to subsume FQ's activities into the PFTC. They ignored the rumours, and outlined five key recommendations which were endorsed at both a state and national level by industry. Things came to a head in April when, as recorded here previously (*OnScreen*, RT#18 April-May), the Chair and CEO of the PFTC reportedly told members of the industry working party that the Minister had accepted that the PFTC would incorporate the activities of FQ under its current structure.

The government acted swiftly to reassure industry that this was not the case, releasing an issues paper for response by interested parties, and appointing Ray Weekes, the Chair of FEQ, as an independent consultant on the merger. In response to the issues paper, the working party continued to put forward its proposal that the result of the merger should be a new entity, under the direction

of a new board whose membership reflected its mission, and that the CEO position be widely advertised. However, suspicion remained that the PFTC had the ear of the government.

Much of the industry's position was endorsed in Ray Weekes' report to government, and when the structure of the merged entity was first announced, the working party felt that they had 'gained some ground', despite the fact that Joan Sheldon's statement to parliament focussed almost entirely on the commercial aspects of the industry. However, the appointment of the new organisation's board created controversy, with the ill-feeling fuelled by suspicions about the surprise inclusion of Film Events Queensland, the organisation responsible for presenting the Brisbane International Film Festival, in the merger.

While Deputy Premier Sheldon is on record as having made the decision "after additional consultation with all parties" on the issue, it is unclear who those parties were or, indeed who proposed that FEQ be included in the merger. Certainly it formed no part of Ray Weekes' brief as

consultant, and is not included in his report, which was handed in just weeks before Cabinet's decision. The industry working party was not consulted.

A working party member, director Jackie McKimmie, has publicly criticised the government saying the restructuring made "a mockery of the promised consultation process". Despite her eventual inclusion on the board of the new Pacific Film and Television Commission, industry practitioners still hold grave misgivings about the restructuring.

At an industry meeting in early September, local filmmakers endorsed the continuation of the working party, which will be seeking to keep a dialogue open between the new organisation and industry. The working party has already recommended to government that the appointment of the CEO be, and be seen to be, "a fair and transparent process", following the standard procedures for senior government appointments, as a way of allaying some of the suspicion.

Chris Houghton, a member of the working party commented, "there has been at least one positive outcome out of this process and that is that the local industry is more unified now than ever in the past, and we are committed to building a strong future for the film industry in Queensland".

Film reviews

*from page 27

aiming for a WP (women's picture) classification, Craig Lahiff says this is largely Midori's story, "her meek exterior belying an inner strength". Again, though I liked this clever film, I can't see it. I remember when the real woman went missing in Sydney. A friend was called out by police in the middle of the night to translate for her and there's certainly more to her story than meets the eye here. But ORMs have a way with women and of all the iconic characters in *Heaven's Burning*, I thought Midori lost most to the road. Australians have 100 words for Cam's silence. Even at speed, we can read depth into the taciturn Colin. Midori seems all icon, lacking materiality. Another alien adrift in the Australian landscape, she is greeted with ambivalence from Cam (Ray Barrett), and acceptance from a blind shopkeeper (Norman Kaye). The film has secured the involvement of a major Japanese distribution company, it'll be interesting to see how the Japanese read the image of Midori in a blonde wig shouting from the car "I'm free!".

Virginia Baxter

Date: Blanchett and Richard Roxburgh in *Thank God He Met Lizzie*

Thank God He Met Lizzie
director Cherie Nowlan
writer Alexandra Long
REP Distribution
release: TBA

Here's an interesting example of social class portrayed in an Australian film: retiring lower middle class boy, Guy (Richard Roxburgh), falls in love with an exuberant working class girl, Jenny (Frances O'Connor), who is too much for him to handle, emotionally and sexually, and swaps her for a calm upper middle class girl, a doctor (Lizzie, played by Cate Blanchett), whom he doesn't really love, but might come to. I'm exaggerating the class status of the characters but it's close enough. It's not class that makes Guy change partners, it's what he can handle in a relationship. But there's no doubting that the makers of the film see the Jenny-Guy relationship as the more authentic and Lizzie as a pragmatist, her family as morally shallow and their wedding guests as cynics. This is a film about loss and compromise as Guy, about to be married to Lizzie, finds the past visiting him in neat narrative flashes of recollections of his life with Jenny. Beneath his gentle character is a tight, nervy perfectionist who virtually plays housewife to Jenny—we invariably see him in the kitchen preparing meals, he cleans up after her and, as the break-up looms, he bitterly attacks her for "resting her clothes" rather than washing them.

The Guy-Jenny break-up is the film's most powerful scene, a sad embrace shot in a tight close-up, all helpless knowledge of a relationship failed, and in stark contrast to the honeymoon hotel room exchange between Lizzie and Guy, all physical distance and compromise ("Let's not try for a perfect marriage" she says, removing the tissues padding out her bra). The film is emotionally demanding but it is tempered by Guy's at times Woody Allen-ish emotional ineptitude and by the wedding reception dissolves into too many satirical and comic moments, the drama of a possible break-up of the newly weds is developed too slowly and held off for too long. (Blanchett handles this rupture marvellously with knife and wedding cake when it in fact appears about to happen).

None of this is enough to weaken the film too seriously; that prize goes to a simple, ineptly handled and morally-loaded plot device—a letter—but you have to see it to believe it, or not, and then it's best forgotten. Less worrying but awkward, the rhythm between the two narratives is uneven (especially in terms of duration of episodes) and it's only occasionally clear at the wedding reception why a particular episode of the Guy-Jenny relationship has been prompted.

Thank God He Met Lizzie is a film about love, about grieving for love lost, love compromised, love that is incomplete. It's also about motives, most evident in the hints of ambiguity in Lizzie's decision to marry. O'Connor has been rightly praised for her performance but, in some ways, Blanchett's growing air of moral obtuseness and private motivation requires just as much restraint as O'Connor has to give her role a naive, restless energy. The film ends on a morally and emotionally complex note, Guy's grief unmitigated, his life conventional. There's no moralising, nothing feel-good, rather a kind of sadness, a waiting for love, maturity as an acknowledgment of loss and just enough hope to run on. The strength of *Thank God He Met Lizzie* is the Guy-Jenny and Guy-Lizzie scenes with their fraught, carefully shot, richly coloured intimacy as opposed to the rather arch wedding reception, however suggestive that is of the shallow world the three live in. For a rare Australian film about male emotional disturbance... *Lizzie* is easily superior to *What I Have Written*, though some will disagree, favouring the latter's overt seriousness. However, in... *Lizzie*'s light comedy framework there are encounters that cut deep and a narrative that stays with you, yielding a reflective melancholy.

Keith Gallasch

Road To Nhill
director Sue Brooks
writer Alison Tilson
distributed by Ronin Films
release TBA

Here's an Australian road movie with a difference. Like Monica Pellizzari's *Fistful of Flies*, *The Road to Nhill* throws welcome light on the Australian character and Australian film-making and, in its way, provides just as unpalatable a vision. In Pellizzari's film, it's the distortions of adolescent sexuality in closed immigrant families at stake. Here it's a somewhat more familiar lack of affect in the Australian character, slowed sometimes to teeth-grinding pace. Occasionally it felt like we were watching a mob of aliens from the Planet Taciturn responding dimly to a car crash involving a group of lady bowlers. Was it something in the water that made every resident of Pyramid Hill as slow as a wet week? Couldn't we have had one gasbag, one busybody to interrupt the pace? As it is, it's one pulse all the way and sometimes no pulse at all. Whinge aside, this is a beautifully observed film, populated with some fine older Australian actors (Alwyn Kurts, Monica Maughan, Patricia Kennedy, Lois Ramsey, Terry Norris). It's great to see them given a chance to play the naturalism they've learned from decades of Australian television, here pared right back to poignant effect. It's stylishly told and simply, sometimes stunningly shot by Nicolette Freeman. There's a glaring fault in its laboured triple framing, however. We have God (who else but Phillip Adams with a head cold) who tops and tails the film in an irritating and fatuous voiceover accompanying some stunning aerial shots. Within this frame we have another frame: a narration from the stock and station agent, Bob (Bill Hunter). Then towards the end, out of the blue, another narration emerges from Jack (Alwyn Kurts), and then a flurry of dramatic codas—marriages falling apart, people dropping dead—adding nothing to a film whose natural end occurs in a conclusion to the parable delivered by Bob (that the story of the car crash and its consequences was funny because, in the end, no-one was hurt), as Kerry Walker places her stolen Scrabble letter back where it belongs. The end. Perfect.

Virginia Baxter

Video review

Suhanya Raffel in *Plane Torque*

Plane Torque
by Marilyn Fairskye
produced with ETV in association with the Centre for Innovation in the Arts, Academy of the Arts, QUT
Beta-cam video, 19 mins 26 secs

The idea that people sit in chairs at 3000 feet moving at 500 kts has always struck me as unbelievable. It hasn't stopped me flying but whenever I'm about to, I always prepare for the worst, alerting myself to the patterns of international accidents, taking more than passing interest in reports on the safety features of aircraft and the wilder predictions of clairvoyants. Since I saw Marilyn Fairskye's *Plane Torque* at Sydney Intermedia Network's *Matinaze* screening at the Art Gallery of NSW earlier this year, I've committed it to memory so I can call it up before my next foray into the third world. It elaborates an ordinary nightmare which, like the story of the stateless man who is forced to live out his days in a Paris airport, takes on existential dimensions. A woman on her way home to Australia is trapped in an African town. Overseas flights have been cancelled. Someone says it's because they haven't paid their fuel bills. She manages to get on a flight to Angola only to find the flights are off there as well and the roads blocked by the military. The humidity is 100 per cent. She joins endless queues, negotiates uselessly with travel clerks, subjugates herself to authority, assisted only by a vague acquaintance, a doctor, who translates for her. Flight after flight is cancelled. Her ticket runs out. She buys another. And another. She waits for hours. Someone says that waiting shows respect. She is told to remain calm or she'll get nowhere. She has too many tickets for flights that don't exist or that she can't get on. Fairskye avoids the clichés of film narrative by structuring this true story as a set of calmly shot, plainly spoken narrations for three of the participants in the scenario: the woman, the doctor and an airport official. Each of the speakers sits on a chair speaking directly to camera with a soundtrack of take-offs and birds. The viewer's anxiety builds in the accumulation of small detail. What slowly unfolds is the unbelievable heaviness of moving from place to place. Each speaker floats in space, joined by the story but each flying solo on a sea of aerial footage as coastline, bushland and city zoom and pan vertiginously behind.

Virginia Baxter

Plane Torque is one of a number of short beta-cam works by Marilyn Fairskye. As well as the *SIN* screening, it was shown last year at the *Sydney Film Festival*, *experimenta* (Melbourne), the *World Wide Video Festival in The Hague*, at the *Video Positive Exhibition in Liverpool, UK* and this year at the *Rotterdam International Film Festival*. Marilyn Fairskye's new two screen video work *Sleep* is a voyage into the turbulent nightlife of the unconscious. Each of the ten segments is a fragment of a dream—an apparently jumbled disorder of clashing memories, fears, inventions, echoes that really only make sense in the world of sleep. *Sleep* screens at the opening exhibition of the new *Stills Gallery* in Sydney in November.

Preview



Marko Peljhan

In the current climate of information and image overload, artists and cultural critics have a vital role to play in assessing and responding to changes in contemporary society and culture. *CODE RED* will bring together international and Australian artists, writers and theorists to debate and discuss strategies which create, shape and manipulate communication and information technologies. Participants are Jeffrey Cook (Aust) director of multimedia and communications company Merlin; Zina Kaye (Aust) artist working with online and communications technologies; Geert Lovink (Holland) media theorist and critic specialising as communications advisor in Eastern Europe; Brad Miller (Aust) multimedia artist; Marko Peljhan (Slovenia) performance and communications artist (Peljhan's sustained survival environment *Makrolab* which tracked satellite and radio waves across Europe, was recently part of *Documenta X* in Kassel); Cornelia Sollfrank (Germany) member of new media performance group Innen; Linda Wallace (Aust) new media artist and director of the machine hunger information art company and McKenzie Wark (Aust) cultural theorist specialising in the media and emerging technologies.

Some of the key issues to be addressed include:

- the technologies which form the infrastructure of the information culture (eg the internet, interactive television, world wide web)
- how these technologies are being utilised and their impact on society and culture
- how artists are responding to these shifts in culture
- how artists are creating work which critiques and/or engages in debate about information culture
- how information technologies have altered art practice and what sort of practices are emerging through these sorts of technologies.

International guests will tour to other Australian centres including Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (Melb) and the Binary Code conference as part of *Interact* in Melbourne. The main component of *CODE RED* will take place at The Performance Space, Sydney, Saturday November 22-Tuesday November 25. For further information please contact Lynne Mitchell at The Performance Space on (02) 9698 7235, fax (02) 9699 1503 or email tps@merlin.com.au. *CODE RED* is presented by ANAT and curated by Julianne Pierce.

Newsreel

AFC launches new website

The Australian Film Commission launched a new website on September 26, to enable easier access to its information resources. The new site will feature on-line access to all guidelines and application forms for downloading, publication lists and free publications available on-line, a new media gallery showcasing works funded by the AFC, a multimedia database on line, information about the AFC's co-production program and links to over 150 other organisations and sites. The site can be accessed via <http://www.afc.gov.au>

Women in Film and Television

The annual WIFT national conference will be held in Sydney on October 16 and 17. Winners of Venus awards will be presented with prizes at a special evening at the Hordern pavilion. Guests will include US producer/writer Lynda Obst, director Samantha Lang, ABC manager Penny Chapman and producer Sandra Levy.

The *Women on Women* Film Festival will tour nationally for the rest of the year, featuring film, video and multimedia work from Australian women. Valley Twin Cinema, Brisbane, October 25 - 27; Mercury Cinema, Adelaide, November 7 - 8; State Theatre, Melbourne, December 4 - 5; Film and TV Institute, Perth, December 13 - 14. For more information contact WIFT on 02 9332 4584.

The Edge of the World Film Festival in Hobart is seeking entries for its 1998 short film and video competition. Cash prizes will be awarded for competition winners. Guests for the 1998 festival include Gregor Jordan (*Swinger*) and Justin Case (*Final Cut*). Entries must be presented on either 35mm, 16mm or video. An entry form is available on-line at <http://www.tased.edu.au/tasonline/edge> or by contacting Brenton Venables on 03 6223 4930. Deadline: December 2

Artrage—Sydney Intermedia Network presents series 1 and 2 of 30-120 second art objects for television by leading Australian artists including: Linda Dement, Mikala Dwyer, John Gillies, Fiona Hall, Destiny Deacon, Derek Kreckler and Jon McCormack. Originally designed for the ABC's *Rage* program, the screening will be introduced by curator Kim Machan. Domain Theatre, AGNSW, Saturday October 4 2pm.

Metalux, a program of Western Australian experimental film curated by Jo Law will be screened by SIN at the Domain Theatre, AGNSW, November 1 and 8 at 2pm.

DIGITA presents *Screen Savers* two evenings of expanded experimental video, digital cinema, music and performance, featuring works by Steven Ball & Nicole Skelty, Zoe Beloff, Dirk de

Newsreel

Bruyn, Rob Howard, Mark O'Rourke, Paul Rodgers, Tony Woods, David Dangerfield & Chris Wilson, RMIT Animation and Interactive Multimedia Centre. Cyberfringe Binary Bar, 243 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, Melbourne Sundays October 5 and 19, 7.30pm, live on the www @ <http://www.cinemedia.net/digita/ssavers.htm>

Careering Queers

The *My Queer Career* Festival is calling for competitors in the 1998 Mardi Gras Film Festival. Along with cash prizes and facilities worth \$2000, Queer Screen will promote successful films to festivals and broadcasters both here and overseas. Entry forms are available from Queer Screen on 02 9332 4938 or on-line at <http://www.queer.screen.com.au>. Deadline: December 31

REvelations

The *REvelations* Independent Film Festival (RIFF) is a Perth-based touring program of local, international, contemporary and archival films. Programming themes for the festival lie very much in the spirit of counter-culture. The festival will feature classic *avant garde* films including Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* and Stan Brackage's *Desistfilm*, an animation program curated by David Nybeck, films from the London underground, archival teen health education films, and a program of films from independent women film makers. The Festival will be in Sydney Jan 17 - February 2 and Adelaide February 20 - March 15. For more information call Richard Sowada 08 9336 2482; e-mail: dakota@omen.com.au; <http://www.omen.com.au/~dakota>.

mdTV

Submissions are being sought from artists working in all areas of performance, technology, music and film, with ideas for one-hour music dramas created for television, to be screened on the ABC. For project briefs and submission inquiries contact Cherry Johnson, on 03 9685 3734. Deadline: October 17.

WOW

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festival
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festival
showcasing the
work of women
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Nice town/nice theatre: who could ask for anything more?

Sarah Miller surveys recent performances in Perth

Over the winter there has been a huge amount of theatre and performance work taking place in a variety of sites and venues throughout Perth and Fremantle. I certainly didn't see all of it but what I did see encompassed a diversity of styles ranging from the techno junkie approach of skadada, to the well-made play by the SA State Theatre Company, to solid small-scale work by Deckchair Theatre; the structured improvisation of independent deviser/performer Tony Osborne, and the rather more gestural work of Fieldworks Performance Group.

I may as well get it off my chest from the outset, but uncomfortably for someone whose life has revolved around contemporary performance work, probably my most satisfying night at the theatre was provided by David Williamson's, *The Club*. Omigod, it looks even worse when I write it down. Not only is it a play, it's a David Williamson play, albeit an early one, an Australian classic. This calls for some soul searching on my part. Is this an inevitable consequence of the aging process? Am I turning into a Giles Auty or even worse, a Bob Ellis, constantly harping back to the good old days when we knew what 'real' art/theatre was and what it should look like? What, why and how did this happen? Will it continue? What should I do? How do I feel?

How do I feel? Ah, now there's a question. In the context of a recent Playworks forum (*Found in Translation*) held in Perth, one of the participating speakers addressed the failure of mainstream theatre to acknowledge or utilise "the subjective experience of the performer". It took me some time and several performances to recognise what was most problematic for me in this statement. Autobiographical theatre abounds and it nearly always operates in the first person—in the "subjective experience of the performer" as it were. Some are good. Some (William Yang and Ningali Lawford come to mind) are fabulous, some are competent and some are just bloody awful. Why has there been a plethora of such shows? Is it simply financial—theatrical 'downsizing' as it were? Is it a rejection of theatre's historical preference for the universal over the individual experience, personal aggrandisement or the desire to make one's mark in our increasingly globalised and homogenised (sic) world. I'm not sure but it's reached phenomenon status.

Deckchair Theatre's *Sappho sings the Blues*, directed by Angela Chaplin and written by Robyn Archer, was a good and competent example of the genre. Tracing the life of Lee Sappho a working class girl, this is an unabashed celebration of the Aussie battler who, despite the odds, achieves her dream of becoming a singer. Great design by Trina Parker utilising a truly awful but emblematic '60s lounge suite and a pile of old television sets, radios and teak veneer furniture, this production was a horrible—perhaps timely—reminder of '60s suburban Australia. Does anyone aside from John Howard really want to return to those less than halcyon days? The question is something of a red herring. *Sappho sings the Blues* is not about the big issues. It's about everyday stuff; the familiar issues and problems of living in an imperfect but not too uncomfortable world. The production marked Sappho's stage debut as an actor, and as an actor she was convincingly and charmingly herself.

Towards the end of the show, the set revolves to reveal Sappho's band and the 'theatre' becomes an R & B pub with Lee singing, the audience singing along and, in

some instances, dancing. It's kind of comforting to know that there is still a place for the warm-hearted, feel-good kind of theatre that celebrates ordinary people doing real things.

Sappho sings the Blues is undertaking a regional tour and whilst it may sound patronising, I imagine that this is probably great work for country towns. The show presents a kind of modern (and modest) parable which is to do with getting over it and getting on with it and I suspect that there are many women in small country towns who could do with some positive reinforcement. A clear case of the personal being political.

Tony Osborne's one person show, *Reluctant Taboos* at Perth's Blue Room theatre was a rather more anxious show exploring the increasingly problematised relationship between fathers and daughters. Given the national obsession with paedophilia and incest, Osborne was concerned to address the shifting boundaries regarding permissible physical and emotional contact with his daughter at different ages: girl child, adolescent and young woman. While it was clearly autobiographical, Osborne's physicality and wit moved it out of the strictly subjective into more interesting theatrical terrain.

The show opens with an unnerving sense of voyeurism as audience and performer together watch the image of a young woman in bra and panties on a video loop, endlessly moving between two rooms. We

much of Osborne's performance is improvised, albeit within a structure, making it a riskier venture than most.

Later in the show, the daughter speaks from the video monitor about her frustrations at her father's inability to understand her, the inevitable changes in their relationship and the widening gap between them. Hard to know if it's intended or inevitable but she seems a bit of a whinger. Get over it. Get on with it I wanted to say. Do you have to be so goddamn earnest and self righteous (probably she does). I mean we're not exactly talking Bosnia or gross parental abuse here. We're talking about nice, ordinary, flawed people with an everyday kind of communication problem.

skadada's *BOOP!* premiered at PICA in August and will be seen at Sydney's Opera House in November. skadada's first season caught audiences by surprise. It was engaging, idiosyncratic and employed digital technologies much more successfully than many previous attempts. With *BOOP!*, skadada were in the position of having to come up with the theatrical equivalent of the second album and as is often the case with second albums, this season was much more elaborate and more predictable.



Claudia Alessi in skadada goes BOOP!

Fabrizio Lipari

are forced to inhabit the performer's neurosis and endure the deliberately unsettling shift into vaudevillian jokiness. Surely a young girl's budding sexuality is too tender, too serious (sic) to joke about and aren't all adolescents agonisingly self-conscious and earnest if not downright mawkish about their burgeoning sexual feelings, physical changes and hormonally driven sensations? The audience's discomfort is intensified by the fact that

Claudia Alessi—both amazing in their own very different ways.

Part of the problem lies in the extraordinary images, primarily but not solely on video, created by Katie Lavers with computer animations realised by Troy



Tony Osborne's *Reluctant Taboos*

Sanja Arambasic

Innocent. They are truly beautiful, yet it seems that the entire production revolves around getting the image just right—perfect in fact. The narrative (fragmented and episodic) and the performance itself seemed like an after-thought. It's a pity because the narrative which starts to unfold, a wry and ironic commentary on 'nice towns', towns like Perth in fact, tidy towns, towns renowned for their clean, law abiding citizens and pretty environs, was an idea that could have stood a more extended ironic treatment. In the end, *BOOP!* gives the impression of being rather more 2D than 3D. It suggests a 'new form'—a contemporary approach to the concert recital, with tenuous links between 'items'. Hip, urban, beautiful with flashes of brilliance but a bit too nice—a bit too polite. Dramaturgical support recommended.

Brecht's Women by Fieldworks Performance Group seemed to aspire to niceness as a condition. Comfortably ensconced in the plush environs of the Dress Circle Bar at His Majesty's Theatre with a nice glass of wine, anything less theatrically or politically provocative is hard to imagine. It was particularly odd to bear witness to what is presumably some kind of homage to Brecht but which lacked any overt recognition of the broader social and political concerns his theatre embraced.

Performers Melissa Madden Gray, Cathy Travers and Lennie Westerdyck present a limited series of poses and movement phrases whilst singing a selection of personal favourites by Brecht and Weill. As they had no names (no characters as such) it was hard to imagine why they were Brecht's women beyond the obvious fact that they were women and they were singing Brecht's lyrics. They could have just as easily been Weill's women or Jim Hughes' women. They certainly didn't seem to be their own women. Nice frocks. Nice wine. Nice music.

Which brings me back to *The Club*. Fabulous character parts played by Francis Greenslade, Don Barker, David Field, Tony Poli and Nathan Page. A blokes' show—full of stereotypes you love to hate. Issues—plenty of 'em. Loyalty, ethics, 'playing the game', self interest and greed, in a straight up, shoot 'em down kind of style. Rosalba Clemente's finely tuned direction situates this show as real comedy—the kind that makes you laugh even as it makes you cringe in recognition. It too is an everyday kind of play dealing with everyday kind of issues. It's not going to change the world. On the other hand, no-one in it is nice and in this nice town, full of nice people, all playing their different parts, a bit of honest ugliness is something to be grateful for.

Leaving mother

Meredith Rogers interviews Liz Jones about the range of and limits to La Mama's nurturing of new work in Melbourne

La Mama's robust survival into its 30th year, when ventures it has spawned like the Pram Factory and Anthill have flourished and died, is a conundrum. A lust to perform amongst the ever-increasing numbers of graduates from performing arts courses might have almost as much to do with the answer as Liz Jones' constant and careful stewardship since she took over from Betty Burstall in 1973. The relative modesty of its requirements also make it an unlikely target for economising bureaucrats. But now that so little else survives in Melbourne besides the casino, La Mama looks startlingly prominent. This is not to decry its continuing health as evidenced by the success of the recent anniversary season and the handsome publication of The La Mama Collection—six plays for the nineties (Currency Press, 1997) containing plays by Sam Sejavka, Elizabeth Coleman, Daniel Lillford, Julie Goodall, Raimondo Cortese and Ross Mueller. But in this climate, you'd be excused for being a bit scared to be the only tree still standing on the prairie.

Liz Jones wasn't and the subject didn't come up. We started talking instead about Melbourne spaces; the lack of venues larger than La Mama and smaller than the Merlyn; the 'sculptural' qualities of La Mama; the difference between La Mama at La Mama and La Mama at the Carlton Courthouse. Liz sees the Courthouse as a managed venue for people who want a different kind of space. La Mama has also begun to extend its support to site-specific work such as The Early Hours of A Reviled Man, written and directed by Daniel Schlusser and performed in a former futon factory, or Daniel Keene's Every Hour, Every Minute, Every Day, scheduled for The Warehouse at the Brotherhood of St Lawrence for November.

I asked her about the bias that histories of La Mama usually show for the well-known playwrights whose careers began there. We rattled off a list of the less lionised but probably no less influential work that has gone on there: Sid Clayton and Barry McKimm's musical experimentation, the La Mama poets, the group of artists I think of as the Melbourne Absurdist including James Clayden and Val Kirwan etc etc, until we came to the current crop of interrelated groups like Hunchback, Four on the Floor, Born in a Taxi, all graduates of the John Bolton Theatre School, all producing strong physical theatre with a Buffon background and an ensemble base.

At which point I conquered technology by remembering to turn the microphone on and asked Liz where the work goes after La Mama:

LJ Four on the Floor's *The Inner Chamber* is, in every sense of the word, poor theatre. It's the kind of work that you can just put in the car and drive to Geelong. In *The Belly of the Whale* has had about 20 seasons and it's about to have another. These groups don't actually aspire to create a standard play. They produce a very full-on, hour-long exploration of the material. Of course, that suits La Mama but then it also suits the Castlemaine Festival and the Blakiston Theatre in Geelong and it just travels. The work is very theatrically specific. It can't be duplicated in any other medium. But in saying that I don't want to do a disservice to say the main production at La Mama at the moment, *Some Mother's Son* or Danny Lillford's play before it. They are just good, straight, tough theatre.

MR *You've been talking about the text-based shows and the physical ensemble work. When you're setting up a season are you conscious of trying to balance things over a range of styles and genres?*

LJ I think it's very important to be aware of what's happening and what people are exploring and to try and create some sense of balance in programming. But it's not a highly self-conscious process. I try to look for gaps and fill them. The first initiative I took quite self-consciously like that was in 1985 when I found six women directors. I didn't necessarily give them plays by women but it ended up that half the plays workshopped were women's plays. That balance had never been struck before. My early work with Tes Lyssiotis in multi-lingual theatre was important. I have tried over the last couple of years to move into working with the Chinese community in Melbourne. I commissioned a play by a Chinese writer who came here after Tiananmen Square but unfortunately she's simply been too busy earning a living to write the piece. I want to encourage Indigenous theatrical expression in Victoria. The Ilbjerri Theatre Company have been working on a "stolen children" project for about five years and Playbox are going to help bring that to fruition hopefully next year. At the same time it's important to make sure that people who want to work exploring form can do that with support, including the possibility of doing it in a larger space with the same support if they want to.

I think it's very important too to make sure that your space is available to iconoclasts. If you run a theatre space you need to help people who are really challenging the validity of current ideas. I never totally understand what Howard

Stanley is saying he wants to do but I always enjoy what he actually does. He is someone who works brilliantly as an actor within a conventional—well not terribly conventional—theatrical context, but then he just loves getting in there and doing a piece that in the end everyone sits back and says "Was that theatre?" He did a piece in the Melbourne Marathon like that. It divided the audience—bang. There were people who thought it was the most boring thing and there were others for whom it was the highlight of the season. Or someone like Maggie Cameron who plays with what is the edge of the personal and the theatrical to such an extent that you're constantly unsure what you're really watching. La Mama's a fantastic place to play around with those kinds of explorations.

When I started running La Mama I thought I'd simplify my life by having a few rules for what I'd program. I thought "I'm sick of naturalistic theatre; we won't have any more naturalistic theatre". "No more monologues. Too many monologues around... We won't have anymore." But in fact just at the moment when you make a decision like that, something comes along and turns it on its head. And if you did actually do it you'd find yourself saying no to Sue-Ann Post and no to Sara Cathcart. At times people say to me "Don't you think there's too many monologues around? Is it really a theatrical form?" and then I think, well what do we mean by a theatrical form? Anything's a theatrical form if the person doing it chooses to call it theatre even if it's sitting cleaning their nails. I think James Clayden once did a piece where he cleaned his toenails under Val Kirwan's direction.

MR *That was in the 70s when there was a lot of cross-over between the visual arts and performance work so that people like Jim Clayden were exhibiting at the Ewing Gallery and performing at La Mama, and Stelarc and others.*

LJ I love the theatrical explorations in performance art and actively encourage them.

MR *I wonder whether those performance art ideas haven't informed the theatre here?*

LJ Rather than the other way around?

MR *Or whether it hasn't become a distinct genre here because it's assimilated into the theatre? Or simply because there isn't a venue for it here?*

LJ I don't know. Lyndal Jones worked

out of La Mama long before she did work in spaces like ACCA. Her first five pieces were at La Mama. She actually came out of a theatrical context.

I was still gnawing away at the problem of where people go after La Mama. Touring to Geelong is all very well but there must be a limit to the number of tight physical theatre ensembles that can beetle up and down that very straight road. So I asked Liz whether the urge to produce didn't somehow overpower the process of development.

She replied that the most useful dramaturgical work a playwright can receive is a production by a committed director and cast.

She's right of course but the trouble is, at present, you can do that at La Mama and then if the play goes well you can...er, restage it at La Mama. Ross Mueller's No Man's Island for example, will be restaged for the Melbourne International Festival in October. It's a fine production directed by Peter Houghton and designed specifically for La Mama. It might not work as well in a larger venue but the creative team who made it probably could, if they could find one. They'd also need the stamina to face a few years of funding knockbacks. Then they'd need to set up the administrative, marketing, venue and production infrastructure. By that stage they might just be too exhausted to come up with the "product".

LJ I suppose I'd love to set up a space that fledgling theatre companies worked out of rather than individuals. [In 1996 Kickhouse, Chameleon, Five Dollar Theatre and Hungry Ghost applied unsuccessfully for funding to set up a shared theatre space] It is the kind of notion those guys set up, but to have them working from a space without having also to take on the horrors of managing it. But to get a space like that for companies like Kickhouse, Chameleon etc we'd need a change of federal funding policy.

Maybe then La Mama is not the lone tree on the prairie but the colonising settler spreading out across the plains after the buffaloes have been shot.

After her 20 years as Artistic Director of La Mama—a record only John Sumner at the MTC outstrips—I had intended to ask Liz if she had given any thought to securing her succession. I didn't. She's still doing too good a job. But perhaps the next round of casino money for the arts—the purse that funded the development of the Dancehouse venue—could be spent on that generation of artists who have gone as far as they can at La Mama and may not live long enough to get a show at Playbox or the MTC.

Meredith Rogers is a Melbourne actor/director/designer. She teaches production and performance-making at La Trobe University.

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Disputed territories

Virginia Baxter and Keith Gallasch survey issues and practice at CPW8

The strength of Contemporary Performance Week, presented and organised each year by Sidetrack, seems increasingly invested in its program of workshops. These are clearly of value to the performance community offering instruction, inspiration and possibilities for collaboration. This year the focus broadened to include the visual in the form of objects (Joey Ruigrok Van Der Werven from Dogtroep), the biomechanics of performance (Gennadi Bogdanov), the integrative possibilities of site specificity (Allan Schacher), dance improvisation (Lisa Nelson) and writing for the singing, speaking and recorded voice (Amanda Stewart, Carolyn Connors). Watch for feature interviews with the international guests in future issues of RT.

Also given increasing weight were the forums, this time more casually structured as conversations around a theme, "The Monumental, the Fluid". They included informal talks between artists Annette Tesoriero and Nigel Kellaway, and Nikki Heywood with Anna Kortschak and Bernadette Walong. The opening forum featured Ed Sheer (Newcastle University), Jane Goodall (University of Western Sydney), independent artist Zsuzsanna Soboslay, Christopher Ryan (PACT Youth Theatre), Gail Kelly (Partyline, Club Swing), visiting US choreographer Lisa Nelson and Keith Gallasch (Open City). While the panel attempted to eliminate the binary in a conversation about tradition and the new, the participating audience edged the talk to the legitimacy of documentation. It seems some practitioners are worried that the small flurry of academic studies and forthcoming books and anthologies of performance texts has the potential to kill off or reify an esoteric form. Others see this as short-sighted and feel a strong need to discuss just what exactly we've all been doing for the last 15 years or so.

Two Critics Forums (*Convergence and Collision*) featured James Waites from *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Stephen Dunn from *SMH's Metro*, John McCallum from *The Australian* and writer-academic Jane Goodall speaking about the way they see their roles: JW: "part parish priest, part dentist"; SD: "mediator"; JM: "probably unimportant" and JG: "ideally going against the grain". Speakers and audience were just beginning to unravel some of the language that defines differences between forms when time ran out, but an important dialogue had begun. Such forums have always played an important role at CPW and this year ended with a determination to program some regular events. Again, watch RT for news of these early in 1998.

To the performance program itself. CPW's policy of integrating sonic works into the contemporary performance sphere continued successfully in this year's program titled *Sonic Mapping*. It included the exhilarating verbal orchestrations of Amanda Stewart's *Extended Vocals Meets Linguistics*; magical manipulations of voice and objects in Carolyn Connors' *a glass and a half*; natural sounds mixed in electro environmental collages in *Spatial Circumference II* from Social Interiors (Rik Rue, Julian Knowles, Shane Fahey with Peter Oldham); playful techno-grunge from Toy Death and digital jamming from guitarist Michael Sheridan. In Sydney, sound artists more usually gather in music venues and galleries. Their presence at CPW reminds us of the untapped possibilities for the use of voice and sound in performance.

Wobbly was the word for the rest of the performance program. In fact some of the works explored wobbliness as the body was submitted to various kinds of stress. Early in the week Martin del Amo was all spidery unease on high heels in the hypnotic *A Severe Insult to the Body*; Extra Bimbo (Anna Kortschak and Chelsea McGuffin) performed inventively precarious tricks observed by a huge red jelly in *Wobbly and Beyond*; in *The Ancient Australian Tea Ceremony*, Sue Broadway balancing a cup of dripping tea on

her head tried largely unsuccessfully to lob sugar cubes backwards into the cup in an act of circus minimalism; Victoria Spence, Catherine Fargher and Simone O'Brien teetered on blocks of wood taped to their toes, protecting raw eggs under their net body suits from the inevitable in *Tirry Boxes*; in *Vestige of Vesture* Claire Hague's voice wavered in a distant high-pitched visceral vibrato as she butohed her way across the stage.

Along with Open Week at The Performance Space, *Putting on an Act* at Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, and *Shock of the New* at Brisbane's La Boite, CPW is seen by some as a showcase for completed short works or performances-in-progress from independent artists. This year, works by Claire Hague, Martin del Amo, Extra Bimbo, Spence, O'Brien and Fargher, Sidetrack's

Goodall asked, "are artists not responding to the crisis in contemporary culture?" Well, of course, since the 80s, performance has been strongly concerned with gender politics, gay and lesbian experience, Indigenous issues, the repercussions of new media, ideas of the body. For some, it's a crisis of form—no new performative ideas. For some it's something lost, a yearning for something aggressively European like Jan Fabre or intellectually New Yorican like the Wooster Group or aesthetically Japanese like Dumbtype. For Sidetrack artistic director Don Mamouney, it's the unremitting pressure for the 'new' as opposed to space and time to develop what we're already doing.

Is Australian performance in crisis? Well, the answer is everywhere and signs are that we should not be looking necessarily to inner Sydney for the reach of performance and the next important developments. As readers of *RealTime* will know, work across the country has matured and there's a lot of it reaching an ever-widening audience here and overseas and manifesting performance principles in many different ways (and places: see 4WD in "Top

moment, are not guaranteed whatever the experience and calibre of the artists involved and however sympathetic certain arts writers are to performance. An increasing number of works are better served by arts festival appearances here and overseas. Sadly, innovative festival directors are few in Australia, the short tenures of Kosky and Archer offering brief solace, but high visibility. It's interesting nonetheless that when it comes to appearing overseas it's small, innovative and provocative works and companies that figure prominently and travel well.

Before we decide that performance is in crisis, it'd be a good idea to ask some fundamental questions about what we think we're doing and why. Some propositions made at the opening forum presumed something akin to the 70s notion of 'alternative theatre'—performance as the place for tough ideas and the tackling of issues. Some suggested performance as a challenge to conventional forms. But are we merely here to ginger 'the mainstream' or do we exist in our own right, with our own traditions? Certainly we do have the capacity to irritate Stephen



Claire Hague

Melanie Russell

Nobody's Daughter, Gravity Feed and Ari Ehrlich's *Memory & Sacrifice* showed signs of something more substantial on the way. On the other hand, watching more experienced companies like Etcetera and Gravity Feed made some of us wonder at the impulse to show such tentative work. Is it simply to prove they're still alive and well despite working within fragile company structures or because they see the audience at CPW as having no knowledge of their considerable histories?

For others CPW is the place for unknowns, tryouts and spontaneous, roughly shaped one-offs for which no further life is envisaged. The best of these works add something imaginative to the performance vocabulary—the total presence of David Williams' *Lovesick Idiot*, the conceptual spectacle of Katia Molina's *Words*, even the curious hybrid *Western* from Tara Jakszewitz and Mark Rogers. The worst of them make you feel that nothing much has been discovered in performance since the 70s. Watching it makes your hair hurt like bad TV satire or amateur revue or theatre exercises. At CPW, all these works—inept or wobbly or virtuosic—appear on the same bill, minimally rehearsed and technically assisted, each 'act' interspersed with that old theatrical standby the blackout and some loud filler music, the audience primed for a night of skittish entertainments. Hey Hey It's CPW!

Maybe it was the mess of acts that led to talk of lack of direction in performance and inevitably, murmurs of crisis. "Why", Jane

End Mix" on page 6)—in music theatre, physical theatre, a range of Indigenous performance, the monologue and various multimedia ventures. There is an incredible proliferation of work that operates outside majority theatre, dance and visual arts conventions including Barrie Kosky's Gilgul Theatre (see page 32), the work of Jenny Kemp, skadada, Stelarc, Barbara Campbell, Club Swing, the cLUB bENT performers, Kooemba Jdarra's *The 7 Stages of Grieving, Ningali*, Leah Purcell's *Box the Pony*, The Party Line, PACT, Linda Sproul, Urban Theatre Project, William Yang, Frank Productions, Sidetrack, Josephine Wilson and Erin Hefferon's *The Geography of Haunted Places*, Doppio Teatro—in rave performances with younger audiences connecting on-line with anarchist squats in Italy. The list barely begins, unless your concept of performance is very particular and then you'd quickly whittle this lot back—like the argument for a return to the pure principles of performance art put forward by Mike Parr and Noel Sheridan at *25 years of Performance Art* at The Performance Space in 1995.

If there is any crisis it is that performance, especially in newly premiered works, still has trouble reaching audiences. This was discussed at length in the Critics Forums, where reviewers conveyed how severely constrained they are in what they are allowed to cover. Press previews are almost impossible to get and reviews, certainly in Sydney at the

Sewell, Richard Wherret and other theatre artists disdainful of "image-based work", fearful of the 'death of the playwright', the absence of the director and the emergence of Hybrid Arts/New Media Arts funding at theatre's alleged expense. This irritation, along with the considerable range of performance practice already cited, is a good indication that performance is no longer marginal but increasingly pervasive and defining for itself whole new territories.

That CPW8 provoked serious and sustained discussion and could offer classes with leading Australian and overseas artists, says much about its on-going value—it's a rare meeting place for performers to exchange skills and ideas. The performance program, however, needs radical re-thinking. A season featuring try-outs by new and established artists should be (almost) free. A CPW season featuring the very best of new and established artists in a much smaller tightly curated program with more repeats and longer works might lift CPW's reputation to where it belongs. Of course, its generosity in showing many works by many performers over eight years (including performances not matched this year) cannot be denied and the financial difficulties involved in a change to a more prominent and more exacting performance program cannot be ignored. It's difficult territory.

Have we got Jews for you

Suzanne Spinner at Gilgul Theatre's *The Operated Jew*

Kosky erupted on the scene after I went North. I first heard about him from Robyn Archer in Darwin before she did *Cafe Fledermaus*. I've read about him and read about him, I've seen extracts of shows, and an opera on television but this was my first experience of the flesh *eine zie fliesche*. I've been blooded and I wasn't disappointed. It lived up/out to the reputation he has made for himself.

Someone who went on the opening night told me it was in-your-face and not to sit in the first few rows, so there I was on the second night in the fourth row middle, back in a theatre I'd worked in 11 years ago and not been in since.

The genesis of *The Operated Jew* is material Kosky collected "dealing with the notion of what constitutes identity, and also with notions of fear and paranoia", as he told Kim Trengrove in *The Age*. There was also a short story, *The Operated Jew*, written by an Austrian Oskar Panizza in 1893 about a Jew who decides if he transforms his body he will de-Jew himself. Then there were the lives and work of French Jewish tragedienne Sarah Bernhardt and our own Roy Rene, Mo—"Strike Me lucky!" And behind it all Freud the inventor of what was dubbed "the Jewish talking disease" and who said that to interrogate a Jewish patient is not easy; they interpret and question their disease, confuse the doctor out of fear that they might not have presented their case, their symptoms clearly enough; in short, the patient invariably cuts off and pre-empts the analysis, leaving the analyst nothing to do, one presumes, but concur.

Gilgul Theatre's *The Operated Jew* is a short ejaculatory eruption, a frantic spewing forth of words, gestures, music and objects, working from its own logic and is finished when it is spent. It is funny fast and loud, you aren't assaulted, just put through the mill and dehusked like the



Louise Fox and Michael Kantor in *The Operated Jew*

Jeff Busby

actors are. Images are presented then pulled apart and reassembled, each new one curling back on itself and the ones preceding like pages out of a photocopier on automatic.

It is such a dossier of paranoia and self-hatred that one might have asked why does anyone bother hating Jews, they do it so well themselves and they're so funny doing it. The crust of identity, the scab, is picked and worried over and never ever left alone, in endless self-recriminations and punishing routines of self-improvement.

Despite the awesome presence of Madame Bernhardt, particularly as Salomé,

it is very very boysey, fixated on the prick but then I guess that's also understandable. It is onanistic, there is no relationship between the 'characters' just repetitions and refractions of self, enacting the masturbatory, fixated on the self alone. Accused of self obsession, all it can do is plead guilty, which of course it does, true to the self to the end.

The stage is a raised square like a boxing ring, the lighting is harsh, distorting and unforgiving. On the vast bare back wall there are always enormous fuzzy shadows—frightening like things in a child's nightmare, but they are only the

actors' shadows. Silly us to be frightened of our/their own shadows.

Two characters who aren't credited intrigued me. On stage throughout, never speaking, only rarely changing position is a figure representing Anubis—shepherd of the dead—with the head of a jackal, wearing thongs and a Fitzroy Footy jumper, an apparently benign witness listening and watching—I thought he was Freud.

Then there's Kosky at the piano on the floor playing throughout, conducting the performance wearing a little green fez like an organ grinder's monkey, observing the whole operation. I know he's the director and I'm glad he's there.

The actors are marvellous: they are so physically disciplined they can make aerobics expressive and vocally—they sing like angels and screech like banshees in many languages and accents. I could try and describe and pull apart the images and moments that affected and engaged me but there were so many and it would be like the piece itself, a catalogue, when the reality of the experience is the totality of the images and the sequence, the piling up.

The Eden of de-Jewedness is a beige sitcom TV ad, everyone changed into Tori Spelling and her Adonis partner, but are they relaxed, happy? No, she is frantically spraying air freshener on everything, he is smiling stupidly. If this is the De-Jew Club then I don't want to join. Who could blame them? So it starts all over again, regression, reversion to form—I came into this world with my illness and all the world's Jewish anyway, the song says. There is no conclusion just an endless cycle of worry and fear, biting its own tail. But it is profoundly live performance in a theatre, the text taut and the choreography and the music stretched like a tight skin around it—the performance as tumescence. I am so sick of theatre that's like primeval television, I will come back for more.

Gilgul Theatre, The Operated Jew, directed by Barrie Kosky; performers, Louise Fox, Michael Kantor, Thomas Wright; designer, Peter Corrigan; lighting, Robert Lehrer; Athenaeum Two, Melbourne, September.

Disappearing performance

Peta Tait reviews three recent books on women's theatre practice

Geraldine Cousin, *Women in Dramatic Time and Place*, London: Routledge, 1996; Ellen Donkin, *Getting into the Act: Women Playwrights in London 1776-1829*, London: Routledge, 1995; Catherine A. Schuler, *Women in Russian Theatre: the actress in the silver age*, London: Routledge, 1996.

I am hopeful that these books indicate a trend in publishing to make feminist scholarship on theatre history more accessible. As I argue elsewhere, the more numerous publications of, and about, women's plays unbalance feminist theatre pedagogy toward the published play rather than the larger sphere of women's involvement in theatre practice. As well, the feminist project of revisioning theatre history has only been addressed in a handful of books published since 1988, so, as Tracy Davis continues to point out, many periods need detailed attention.

Conversely, as Cousin's book demonstrates, feminist commentaries on women's drama have become so specialised that we can now pick and choose reference books for their applicability. *Women in Dramatic Time and Place*, inappropriately

subtitled, "Contemporary Female Characters on Stage", has value for its thematic links. But I am dismayed to find theatrical performances evoked in sudden digressions then repeatedly disappeared back into dramatic analysis of the written plays without mention of, or an erratic reference to, the director, performers, designer etc—that is the (women?) theatre artists—and other details about the performance.

Importantly, despite their Euro-centrism, Donkin's book about the staging of plays by 18th century women playwrights in London, and Schuler's work about 19th century Russian actress-producers, expand the possibilities for pedagogical knowledges of theatre history. Both these carefully researched, descriptive histories are extremely useful for their insights into the uneasy relations between women and the theatre establishment. Some of their conclusions are pertinent today. Donkin's recognition of the importance of a "collective presence" in the 1790s for the creation of further opportunities for women is insightful, as is Schuler's point that the marketability of 'women's themes' was not stimulated by

individual personalities but, conversely, the milieu of uncertainty about gender identity created the demand for such characters and their actress interpreters. However, Donkin argues that women's participation is variable and seemingly contingent on anomalies. Her twist on the common accusation in theatre history that the few women playwrights were plagiarists—their male counterparts were doing adaptations—is to show that this was levelled at women plagiarising men.

In theatre history, most women worked in performance. Schuler points out that, while Stanislavski and Chekhov are pivotal to 20th century theatre history, few of the popular actresses she writes about, including Anna Brenko whose ensemble company preceded the Moscow Art Theatre by 15 years, are recognised. (I would add, neither is Olga Knipper's contribution to Stanislavski's and Chekhov's work.) There is a salutary lesson for us about the difficulty of retrieving the performance text once it has been 'disappeared'.

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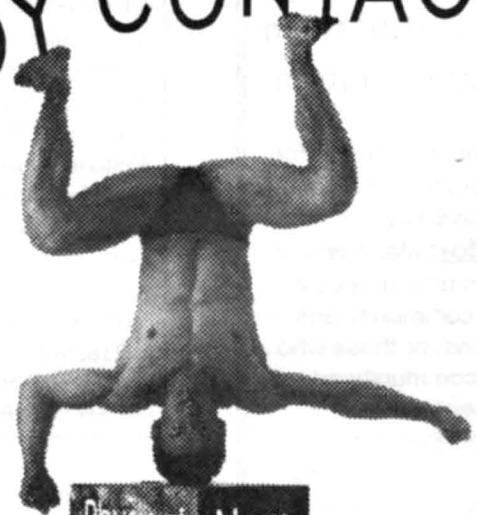


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Sound connections

John Potts speaks to 2SER-FM Music Producer Nicholas Gebhardt about *AudioStretch*, a collaboration linking music and audio students from universities across Sydney.

JP *How did AudioStretch originate?*

NG It started with a collaboration between Nigel Helyer, who teaches sculpture at Sydney College of the Arts, and *Audiodaze*, an experimental sound and new music show on 2SER-FM. A couple of years ago students from Sydney College of the Arts produced some radio programs for *Audiodaze*. Thinking about how we could develop this further, Nigel and I were aware of how many different sound courses there are in Sydney, yet there was very little sense of people working as part of a larger field. It seemed to be very fragmented, so we thought it would be interesting to produce an encounter between the different courses and students. This could give them a sense of other people in this area, all trying to find ways to work with sound. The radiophonic element was the key, given that 2SER covers the whole city: you could bring together all this work into the one program.

JP *Which university courses linked up with AudioStretch?*

NG There's the Macquarie University audio course, Sydney College of the Arts sculpture course, the sound course at the College of Fine Arts, sound design at UTS [University of Technology Sydney], the University of Western Sydney music department, and the University of Sydney's computer music course. The first round of broadcasts happened in July of this year in the form of two five-hour programs. It

was exciting in that it was the first time so much student work had been brought together and played on 2SER for a long time. There was a wide range of work: the Macquarie Uni work was radiophonic, focused on soundscapes and narratives, as opposed to the computer-generated stuff from some of the other campuses. There were performance pieces recorded by the UWS, and the final two hours were produced by students at Sydney College of the Arts as a live radiophonic performance.

JP *What responses did you receive to these broadcasts?*

NG We had a lot of calls on the night, which is exciting for community radio. We also had calls from other universities asking why they weren't included in this project. As a result, the University of Wollongong will be involved in the end-of-year *AudioStretch* events.

JP *How is AudioStretch organised?*

NG The important thing for me was that the project was driven by the students. I was working with a group of ten students, which amounted to roughly two people from each course. Those students were responsible for co-ordinating the student works, and for publicising the project. We also held a forum in the middle of first semester, which was a way for the different classes to meet the people involved, to get a sense of each other. There was a feeling of

wanting to combine even more in the future, to cut across the institutional boundaries. I think that's very important in these times when we have a federal Education Minister who's devoted to driving a wedge between institutions, departments, lecturers and students. *AudioStretch* moves in the opposite direction, trying to forge connections between places, to show how resources can be shared.

JP *What are some of the other issues arising out of the AudioStretch project?*

NG It really sets up the debate over teaching sound in terms of digital production. That relates to both the interesting things that can come out of that process, and the problems people are having in shifting over from music courses that were acoustically based, grounded in performance or composition, into a computer-based environment where the parameters are entirely different. Something that emerged for me, as someone who was both overseeing the project and listening to what people were doing, was a tendency for over-saturation of sound sources. Because you have so many choices once you're working with a digital system, the tendency is to maximise that out of sheer excitement. It can produce works of genius, but it can also end up sounding like TV advertising, with every sound pumped up, or as an advertisement for the technology itself.

It was also interesting to see what constituted strong works in this context. The people who succeeded were the ones who started with a very strong concept. For example, there was one great piece from Western Sydney where they wrote a chamber work, but each person played their piece separately, so the group was never in the one place at the one time, and finally the composer re-compiled the

pieces of the work in the computer. That worked extremely well. Overall, the first broadcasts were exciting because it felt like a transitional phase in musical thinking.

JP *What's organised for the end of this year?*

NG There are three three-hour broadcasts on 2SER, November 25 and December 2 and 9, featuring second semester student works. There's an *AudioStretch Listening Night*, including performances, at the Performance Space, December 16, open to the public. There's also an exhibition of sound objects and installations at the UTS Gallery, November 25-29.

JP *Is there a possibility of this kind of collaborative project working on a national scale?*

NG There's a push by the students already involved to put on a national festival of student work early next year. We're going to record the next *AudioStretch* broadcasts and put them up on the community radio satellite, COMRADSAT. We'll contact stations around Australia; hopefully there'll be enough interest to produce a national broadcast of student work drawn from courses around the country. There's also an *AudioStretch* web-site [<http://splinter.sca.usyd.edu.au/audiostretch>] with information for anyone interested in joining the project. With so many courses around the country to draw on, we're thinking of a 24-hour festival to be broadcast one weekend.

Audiostretch Broadcasts: 2SER-FM, November 25, December 2, December 9, 10pm - 1 am; Soundsculpture Exhibition, UTS Gallery, November 25-29; Listening! Performance Night, The Performance Space, Sydney, December 16, 8-11 pm.

Between production and destruction

Anna Forward enters the sound world of Colonic La Vage in Hobart

Cisterns, electrical drills, fire alarm bells and fuel tanks are just some of the materials incorporated into the music of Colonic La Vage. Mik La Vage and Michelle Nunez, now relocated to Melbourne after having spent the greater part of the last three years in Hobart, use guitar pick-ups to sample and loop the sounds emitted from these objects to write beautifully cacophonous music, melding soundscape and song into visionary experiment. It is this looping of eclectic samples that gives Colonic La Vage's music its distinctive quality, the process allowing the band to constantly re-interpret the parameters of contemporary music. The momentary delay between the production of the original sounds and their re-invention through distortion and amplification is pivotal. The auditory space is used to challenge expectations towards found sound and to forge a path into the conceptual tangle between musical production and musical destruction. Listening to Colonic La Vage's recordings one can almost visualise the members of the group navigating this stretch, both through strangely ambient instrumentals that unexpectedly crackle and wail with electric feedback, and through lyrics that wind themselves out of recognisable samples such as the poetry of Beat legend Allan Ginsberg. Even at its most discordant, the music of Colonic La Vage is eerily beautiful because of its familiar, sometimes primal origins and futuristic inclinations.

Mik La Vage, the band's frontman, has been exploring the wider possibilities of the instrumental for many years, working with visual artists, contemporary musicians such



Colonic La Vage

as The Church's Peter Dinklage, the Japanese performer Yumi Umuare and classical outfits including Hobart's IHOS opera company. However, Mik attributes recent developments in found object technology to an association with the legendary Resource Co-operative in Hobart, a group of workers who hold exclusive salvaging rights to the two main rubbish tips in southern Tasmania. He speaks of the inspiring wealth of resources at the site and the opportunities it offers, for example performing on "Otis", a welded sculpture of wire and grille played with a cello bow before a bewitched audience at the Taste of Tasmania Summer Festival, and displaying

piece in an exhibition in Hobart's Long Gallery titled *Art From Trash*.

Drawn together by a mutual admiration for the Ken Russell film *The Devils*, members of Colonic La Vage met on what was to be a short working holiday in Hobart. This film inspired their choice of name—French for enema—and the material for their first performance, a theatrical exorcism via enema at the Hobart Oddball—a one night performance festival for alternative artists. Colonic La Vage's manic performance generated a highly excited response and, partly because of this, the members of the group became increasingly enamoured of

the Hobart lifestyle and started to play music in alternative venues and make plans to record.

Through a succession of drummers, the group evolved from a jazz-influenced three piece to an industrially oriented four piece, but remained consistently theatrical. La Vage revealingly speaks of performances as "displays", and in Hobart these displays were frequently on stages with full lighting rigs and costumes that combined the hauntingly industrial with deliberate bad taste—blank masks, leather bondage gear and, on one occasion, Ku Klux cloaks and hoods.

Asked about the group's choice of venues—the Peacock Theatre, the Studio Theatre, the Hobart Tipface—Mik La Vage commented, "I'm not really a pub person. Pubs detract from the act, because there is no real sense of audience space and because you are playing to people who feel as if the venue is their second home. I want to reach people in different areas...in a different light. That's one of the great things about theatres, that you have the potential for lighting. I'd like us to play in more theatres but our choices are kind of limited. We've played at the Tip twice. I think there's something poetic and poignantly apocalyptic about music performance there".

Colonic La Vage are planning to record a 74 minute CD to be out just after Christmas, and to create a solo installation at Melbourne's Next Wave Festival in May next year. They hope to return to Hobart this summer.

Hard-selling 'difficult' music

Vikki Riley speaks with Steven Richardson, Contemporary Music Event's construction man

Anybody who has been watching the repeats of Edgar Reitz's *Second Heimat* on TV recently will be familiar with the musical terrain—formally post the performance codes of instrumentation and proficiency surrounding classical music but responsive to its universality of language and presentation, driven by a progressive impulse but striving for legitimate acceptance in the wider commercial music culture.

Of all the marginal musical genres to emerge in the past two decades, experimental music (aka *New Music* or *Minimalism*) has enjoyed a privileged status due to the big successes of groups like *The Kronos Quartet* in the 80s and the art world's reappropriation of minimalism as practice (sound art and its attendant theoretical conceits).

The *Contemporary Music Events Company* was set up in Melbourne in 1991 to develop new forms for the presentation of such music outside of the pub, gallery or concert hall. Their success in staging music-focused large scale conceptual events designed to attract mainstream audiences, in sometimes unorthodox settings, is unparalleled in Australia. *Metrodome*, in 1993 for example, saw the *State Library Reading Room* as a venue for a choreographed work involving non-musicians and musicians who performed in the stacks to an audience below, a sort of *John Cage meets Alvin Curran* piece with book trolleys as found instruments. This year they are collaborating with the *Melbourne Festival* to bring out the English composer and musician *Gavin Bryars*, best known for his 1976 LP *Sinking of the Titanic* and recently his scores for the *Balnescu Quartet*. CME is a somewhat curious organisation, always searching for seductive ideas and themes in which to sell otherwise 'difficult' music as a theatrical event.

VR Can you describe CME's curatorial structure, because it is quite unique

SR CME was set up originally in 1991 with a view to helping a range of people interested in contemporary music to provide a professional level of performance presentation for their ideas. The company is very much interested in ideas and servicing our constituency of music practitioners and the audiences that are interested in that range of work. More and more we are expanding those horizons. There's a lot more cross-over art form work that we are participating in now—film and video, site specific work and installations, sound sculptures as well as the more middle ground contemporary classical work.

VR But CME is not an artist-based organisation. With the events you put on you call for curators.

SR We put out a call for curatorial proposals at least once a year in the mass media in the form of paid advertising but we also target individuals, people who have expressed interest in the work of the company. In the first instance it's a call for ideas, ideas with a contemporary music component, not necessarily a series of concerts. We want someone with a good idea, and the idea is then developed accordingly.

VR But the money for each event has to be raised, doesn't it? Once a project is scheduled CME acts as a broker for funds to be sought from the Australia Council or other sources to pay for artists' fees etc.

SR Yes and no. We have some core funding for projects but it depends on the scale of the project in question. If the

project is beyond our financial reach we pursue the full range of funding options through to corporate sponsorship as well as all the government opportunities. The company has been very successful in attracting funding. I think there's a perceived need for the company to be working in this end of the industry.

VR What do you mean, "this end of the industry"?

SR I think that contemporary music is basically good ideas in search of an audience, and they don't necessarily happen fabulously easily together. Part of CME's main brief is to put those good ideas to people who want to see them, and to find those people through publicity and marketing and also setting up alliances with other organisations and festivals. There are a lot of alliances that are set up which are not necessarily about expanding or creating audiences but about catching the one audience. Given the breadth and diversity of the work that we undertake it's also very difficult to achieve those aims. The company may turn, chameleon like, to running an electronic computer music festival and then to collaborating with an international contemporary music ensemble from Europe or the UK. Audiences don't always cross over. I would like to think we can retain some of them, build up some sort of brand loyalty to the work of the company but realistically it's the nature of the work that attracts people not the company.

VR How would you describe the music CME represents—what does contemporary music mean? I myself would tend to call it *New Music*, as a known genre, very Eurocentric.

SR Historically speaking contemporary music is anything written after 1900.

VR You've put on a lot of events interpreting the Eastern European greats—Pärt and Gorecki for instance

SR That's true, we've done that, but we've also worked with people from the improvisation realm. It also begs the question about what is composed, but contemporary music can also embrace jazz and world music and electro acoustic music and classical music. We are able to explore those boundaries and crossover forms under the umbrella of contemporary, the performance outcomes of the company play a role in defining it.

VR Last weekend the *Mad Professor*, one of the pioneers of Jamaican dub, a respected innovator and key figure in English dance music, did a show here. Lots of young people went. I was wondering why something like that isn't in CME's brief. It just strikes me that your events are very non-youth culture tailored.

SR Yes it's interesting. We don't have a culture of exclusion but we have to be able to tap into that.

VR Your events seem to be left of centre stuff thrown to the mainstream. Performers like *David Chesworth* and *Warren Burt* who, 15 years ago would have played to only 20 people. Artists and commentators at seminars have said that small audiences were expected because this was a marginalised area of music practice and always will be. Your company seems to prove that wrong because we live in bigger, different times or because you can market that music to a mainstream audience.

SR We can market it and attract a

mainstream audience. Our most recent event in Sydney (*della Laguna*, curated by *Jennifer Phipps* for the Sydney Festival) proved that with excellent audience turnouts. What we can't guarantee is that they will like it. While we can put contemporary music to a mass audience, we've done our job. In terms of Europe and the UK, contemporary music is attracting mass audiences, so in the big picture our time will come and we see ourselves as helping people get ready for when that occurs.

VR What about *della Laguna*? There were ferries to board for one show on *Goat Island* where a troupe of percussionists were firing up on arrival.

SR *della Laguna* was a conceptual event, about placing a musical map of the city of Venice over the city of Sydney. There were a number of specific elements the curator wanted to highlight, notions of water and history and so on about Sydney and Venice. A lot of it was site specific. On *Goat Island*, a very under-used place on the harbour, we staged percussion concerts. You could go and have a picnic lunch and see a fabulous performance. We had concerts at the *Hotel Intercontinental* with an *Early Music* group called *La Romanesca* and that architecture bore a relationship to buildings in Venice.

VR There seems to be a stable of musicians and composers the company has given continual exposure too—I'm thinking of people like *David Chesworth* again, *Helen Mountford* and *André Greenwell*.

SR That's certainly part of the work of the company, to assist where possible more established artists, and the older guard well ensconced in their craft. With *Chesworth*, for example, part of the work we will be doing in the *Melbourne Festival* is to provide an international context for him.

VR So what will be happening at the *Melbourne Festival* event—you are bringing out *Gavin Bryars*?

SR The event is curated by *Tyrone Landau* who is a singer from *Chamber Made Opera* and the idea grew out of looking at minimalist and post-minimalist work.

VR And *Gavin Bryars* is a king of minimalism.

SR Yes but it's funny, nobody wants to be called a minimalist. It seems to be the loaded word of the minute. Obviously *Bryars* is considered to be a leading practitioner and in many ways the event has become a composer's portrait. It's a three concert series [called *A man in a room, gambling*] with the repertoire being half his work and the other half Australian composers and musicians including *Helen Mountford's* string quartet and *Michael Smetanin* who has composed *Ladder Of Escape*. *Chesworth* will perform his *Lacuna Suite*. The *Bryars* ensemble will be augmented with local musicians who will have a chance to perform his work.

VR An artist in residence type of idea?

SR It certainly has elements of that, a trans-Atlantic link up with *Professor Bryars*. He will be bringing only a small core of his ensemble with him. So for local musicians it will be great to work with someone who has had 25 years experience in the area.

VR So how do you sell someone like *Bryars* to the media—Australia doesn't even have a decent critical music magazine and

art magazines refer to experimental music as sound art.

SR We had this problem in Sydney too, trying to get someone to look critically with rigour at the *della Laguna* project was difficult. We couldn't get anyone to make a critical response to the idea and I think that's reflective of a serious critical culture which is just absent.

VR Which is strange because Australia has such a high quota of experimental musicians compared with Europe.

SR Yes and most contemporary musicians speak through their music. It's tricky to find critical voices who are strong advocates for the work.

VR The next big project is to be curated by *Barrie Kosky*.

SR Yes, it's a film and video music hybrid event which looks at the role of the composer in the creation of a series of short films in a number of ways. It will have five components, in a sense filmic and composition exercises drawn on a long history of those mediums. Firstly we'll be asking artists who are not filmmakers—say a silversmith, a painter, an architect—to create a short film, but they will be constrained by a number of things (duration etc) and they will be assigned to a composer, who will create the score, in isolation, randomly and anonymously. The composers will also be constrained in that they will be composing for the human voice, which is then performed live.

VR What if the artist, turned filmmaker doesn't like his or her score?

SR Bad luck! The next component will be about getting young filmmakers to make a film which has a pre-existing score. *Kosky* will choose a piece of music, we hand them the tape and that's their score. In that outcome we have the same piece of music played eight to ten times. The filmmakers also have very fixed parameters, for instance they may be constrained by using only one shot, for a five minute film.

VR What sort of filmmakers are you talking about?

SR Recent graduates, people like *Laurence Johnston*. It would be great to get someone from Hollywood.

VR It's almost the same idea as *Aria* which had *Ken Russell*, *Nic Roeg* and other directors using opera scores.

SR The third component, pending funding, will hopefully be a retrospective of the work of *Ennio Morricone*. The fourth component will be a talkfest around these ideas and the last event will be *Cinema for the Ears* where you go to a cinema (the *Kino* in Melbourne), put on a sleeping mask and listen.

VR Why a cinema?

SR The acoustic properties of a cinema are certainly attractive. You sit there blindfolded and the movie plays in your mind.

VR Why would people necessarily invent a movie just because they are in a cinema? Surely at any music performance you 'invent' images.

SR In a sense it's a purist event and a lot of people love that—great sound system, great acoustic environment, comfortable chair.

Sexing the Space

An australYSIS season at The Performance Space prompts Lynne Mitchell to think through the contemporary music venue issue in Sydney

Ah, audience development...it's been the driver, second only to lust, of some truly bizarre artistic directions in a number of art forms. The contemporary music genre, with its multiple marketing handicaps, has been a keen starter. We've put paintings up behind the musicians to pull the visual arts audience, a dancer in front to attract the dance crowd, project a bit of film on the side to get the film buffs...and so our audiences mutate and multiply. Yeah, right.

What is it that draws a crowd to a contemporary music event? When the weather, the parking, the prevailing arts calendar and the planets are all lined up, why would one concert attract a frigid handful and another a warm, pulsating mass? Venue has a lot to answer for.

Venue loyalty, like genre loyalty, is a personality thing and needs years of therapy to budge. Most jazz lovers, for example, like pubs and venues with full bars and ashtrays on the tables. Seating might be arbitrary and the acoustic can be spiked by the hum of fridges and the buzz of the bar. Contemporary classical audiences seem to go for recital halls with tiered seating in rows, a nice dry acoustic and cask wine in plastic cups at interval.

Given these deeply entrenched preferences, it's a brave, or is it desperate, entrepreneur who will switch

venue type in the hope of achieving audience development. It is well known that Sydney has an appallingly deficient line-up of venues for contemporary music. Some of the most interesting experimental work—potentially of greatest interest to an international market—has had a fixed audience ceiling of around 150 for years. It's a dedicated fan who can track these groups, with their zero marketing budgets, around the range of unsuitable venues available to them.

The Sydney-based group australYSIS, which I would describe as a relatively established and mature experimental group with a history of support for emerging artists, normally presents concerts in the Joseph Post Auditorium at the Sydney Conservatorium, one of the plastic cup types of venue. australYSIS's regular 'Con audience' is made up of other composers, students, academics, friends and long-time supporters of the musicians involved. There's good parking at the Con. It's nice and quiet (no risk of sudden planes, sirens or hoonish traffic), it has a great location (just down from Circular Quay in the Botanic Gardens) but it's hard to attract new audience members brave enough to intrude on the genteel academic concert-going ritual.

So when australYSIS puts on a series

of concerts at The Performance Space in Redfern, as they just did in August, what kind of audience can they expect? Parking's OK but you couldn't call it safe, exactly. You can get a beer from the bar and smuggle it in to the theatre with you. The acoustic is good for instrumental and amplified music, but rain drumming on the roof, a noisy fight in the back lane or sirens along Cleveland Street can and do interrupt at any time. The bonding that results from real or imagined dangers is strong in Redfern, and that's a great thing for an audience. But it does tend to stop the average Con audience from making the trip across town, so a group like australYSIS has to build its audience anew.

I like to think—and the mysterious and repeated reference to profiteroles in a *Sydney Morning Herald* review of one of the australYSIS nights proves me right—that venues have a residual characteristic, a patina laid down by years of a certain kind of activity. The Performance Space, of course, is steeped in sex. Physical performance, queer and non-queer, clothed and naked, offensive and tame, predictable and totally unexpected, it's become part of the very structure of the place and will rub off on anyone who goes there. Even australYSIS. They've used The Performance Space a few times

now, and it does look like they really are building a new audience there. This year numbers were more than double last year, but still short of the 150 ceiling. They've bonded with the old building's shortcomings and idiosyncrasies and have added their own layer to the sexy patina. In case you're wondering, no, they don't take their clothes off, but you don't have to study music at the Con for four years to recognise a good band when you hear one, and for an audience member new to any art form, that visceral conviction that you're experiencing some of the best is exciting enough.

But what when The Performance Space moves away from Redfern, as it undoubtedly soon will. One less venue for the experimenters and it's back to the foundations for the audience builders. A custom built or converted small venue with a perfect acoustic and a good bar in a central location would do more to build significant loyal support for new music and sound than any other desperate gimmick I can think of.

Lynne Mitchell was Co-ordinator of the Western Australian based new music and sound promotion organisation, Evos Music, and is now Publications and Marketing Manager at The Performance Space.

CD review

Sydney Alpha Ensemble
Strange Attractions

ABC Classics ABC 456 537-2

Strange Attractions brings together seven recent works recorded over a two year period at performances by the Sydney Alpha Ensemble. There are six Australian composers—Michael Smetanin, Mary Finsterer, Helen Gifford, Liza Lim, Anne Boyd and David Lumsdaine, with one English ring-in, Michael Finnis, whose work nevertheless is a record of his affinity with Australia. As a representation of contemporary Australian composition, this disc is a welcome one; it also provides enough contrast within the chamber format to sustain interest across its seventy minutes.

The pieces by Finsterer and Lim, for example, are energised by short scurrying lines for woodwind or strings, punctuated by piano. The contributions of the three older composers, Gifford, Boyd and Lumsdaine, by contrast, involve more space, and seem almost stately by comparison. Another noticeable difference entails the inspiration for the different works: Boyd, Gifford and Finnis attempt impressionistic accounts of Aboriginal culture, or, in Gifford's case, "a plaint for lost worlds". The younger composers draw inspiration from disparate sources: Lim exploring the intensity of vertigo in *Diabolical Birds*, while Smetanin's title piece is a musical elaboration of concepts from chaos theory and artificial life.

So, while the disc at times sounds as if the composers are sifting through the detritus of modernism, there are many delights to stimulate listener interest, not the least of which is the expert and sympathetic playing by the Alpha Ensemble itself.

John Potts

In *RealTime 22* a review of koto player Satsuki Odamura's CD *Burning House*. This eagerly awaited Voxaustalis recording from the Australian Music Centre features tracks by Tony Lewis, Sarah de Jong, Anne Norman, Anne Boyd, Barry Conyngham and Liza Lim with guest musicians Ian Cleworth, Jim Denley, Philip South and Mara Kiek. VAST022-2

Preview

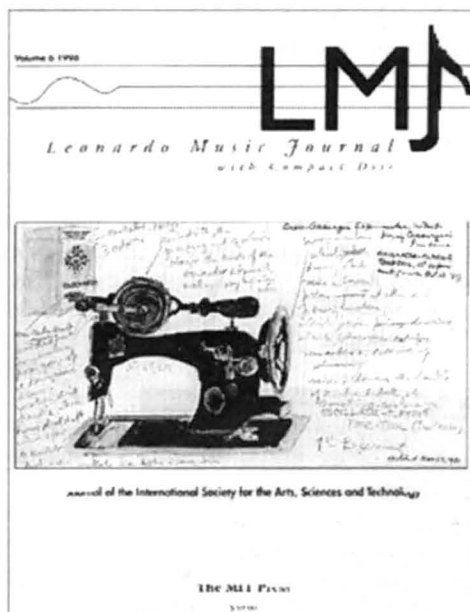
Topology
Noninstitutionalised New music

This is the kind of concert program we'd like to be able to enjoy in Sydney, but which is usually left to percussion ensembles. Brisbane's Topology have an impressive lineup of premieres at their October 17 concert. First Australian performances include: Terry Riley's *Ritmos and Melos* (1993) for violin, percussion and piano; Michael Nyman's early work *Bell Set* for metal instruments; and Californian composer Sasha Bogdanovitch's *Wings Across this Way*, written especially for Topology. Bogdanovitch, a student of Lou Harrison, is a leading gamelan and suling flute performer. New Australian works featured are: Brisbane composer Tom Adeney's *Kagu Ha Hime*; the Topology version of Robert Davidson's *Tygalum* written in response to the landscape of the Tygalum region near the Gold Coast and "the violent volcanic history of Mount Wollumbin (Mt Waring)". Also on the program is Gavin Bryars' *North Shore* for violin and piano, coinciding with Bryars' visit to the Melbourne Festival.

Topology: John Babbage (saxes), Christa Powell (violin), Robert Davis (double bass), Bernard Hoey (viola), Kylie Davidson (piano) with guest percussionist Kerry Joyce. St Mary's Catholic Church, cnr Merivale and Peel Sts, South Brisbane, Friday October 17, 8.00pm. Enquiries 07 3366 0275

Note

Leonardo Music Journal
Vol 6 1996
MIT Press ISSN 0961-1215



This issue of *Leonardo Music Journal*, the journal of the International Society for the Arts, Sciences and Technology, contains a section devoted to Australian music, sound art and design, edited by Douglas Kahn. Kahn has also curated a CD which comes with the journal featuring works by Rainer Linz, Sherre Delys, Joyce Hinterding, Jodi Rose, Frances Dyson and Paul Carter. In a brief introduction, Kahn comments on the relatively healthy Australian environment for sound art, sound theory and innovative music, giving due credit to the nurturing role of ABC Radio's *The Listening Room*, an institution envied by sound artists from other countries. Given the unenviable task of selecting a few representative sound artists, Kahn has wisely gone for diversity, including notes contributed by the artists to support their works. Inevitably, the selection will be contentious for the people it leaves out—but no-one could begrudge the inclusion of Percy Grainger on the disc. This extraordinary composer is represented by five recordings from the early 1950s, experiments in the realisation of his Free Music dream. In an informative mini-history of Grainger's experimental project and its influences, Kahn traces the composer's ambition to create "a machine that came out of music". Not surprisingly, the attempts to build such a machine took some eccentric routes. With parts recruited from rubbish, the Free Music machines were assemblages of, for instance, pencil sharpeners, milk bottles, ping-pong balls, egg whisks, vacuum cleaners, and hair driers. Grainger's own drawing for his "Oscillator-Playing Tone Tool 1st Experiment" is included on the journal's cover: it comprises a Singer sewing machine driving a hand drill that operates a Codemaster, a small oscillator for practicing Morse Code. As Kahn remarks, it is surely one of the great icons of twentieth-century music.

The inclusion of the pioneer Grainger sets a fascinating context for the Australian work in innovative music and sound art of more recent times, as is evident from both the disc and notes included in this journal.

John Potts

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Gut feelings

Elsbeth Probyn on the experience of *Body* at the Art Gallery of NSW

As I considered the task of reviewing Tony Bond's curated exhibition, *Body*, a phrase ran through my brain: "Encore le corps". If the English translation ("the body again") doesn't quite catch the rhythm of French *ennui*, the mixture of promise and *deja vu* generated by this show did send me back to a little article by the French cultural critic Roland Barthes. Entitled "Encore le corps", and written in 1978 (a testimony to the enduring fascination of 'the body'), Barthes' comments connect with some of my own hesitations about the logic of this exhibition. Immediately, one wonders at the singular and almost corporate title, *Body*. Is the lack of both definite and indefinite articles a way of distinguishing the banner outside the AGNSW from the logos of Anita Broderick's empire, *The Body Shop*? The singular *Body* also recalls Barthes' argument that we cannot really talk about a singular body, but need to address multiple bodies, "bodies that have a lot of trouble communicating with each other". One of the threads in this exhibition is the way in which bodies expressed through very different media try to communicate with each other. If there is a constant tension amongst them, they are in the end more successful at communicating than the real life bodies were at the companion symposium, *Regarding Bodies: The Erotics of Engagement*. In fact, the symposium demonstrated that we may not yet have found a critical language that can incorporate bodies.

In my own case, I also lack the language of art history and art theory. So this review is less a detailing of 'what', and more motivated 'why' or 'how'. Or at least that was my rationale as I pondered the pressing question of what one wears to a gala *Body* preview? The sartorial response on view at the press preview was suits: guys in sombre suits relieved by fetching ties, girls in short skirt suits enlivened by colour. My own choice included unusually high heeled boots which affected my gait but allowed me to peer over the throng of journalist bodies.

Walking into the first rooms, one is surrounded by gorgeous, seductive paintings and photographs: an overflowing mass of cunts, curves, breasts, legs, bums that envelopes like the blast of hot moist air at an anonymous tropical airport. Past the eerily real work by John De Andrea, *Allegory: After Courbet*, where the life-sized model teases with practiced seduction, Helmut Newton's *Self-Portrait with June and Models* is pure scopophilic delight: the studied indifference of the model with her urbane acknowledgment of her 'to-be-looked-at-ness' only heightens the desirability. Yes, this is voyeurism at its finest: if not thinking women's porn, certainly artistic licence to desire. It is of course not surprising that everything in these first rooms swirls around the presence of Courbet's *L'origine du monde*, rendered all the more palatable for its absence. In its place, however, we have *The Source*, and *The Source of the Loue*, water gushing in the stead of *The Origine's* beautifully rendered pubis—meticulously wrought dark hair caught in tension between the rounded belly and glimpsed breast, and the long crack leading from the curves of the bum culminating with a hint of lips. And just to remind you that you are indeed looking with your hands, eyes and mouth, Richard Bacquié's replica of Duchamp's *Étant Donnés* (itself in reference to Courbet's painting), requires that you bend over, bum in air, in order to peep through the cervixes to see part of a naked woman—this time lying on a bed of twigs, bereft of pubic hair.

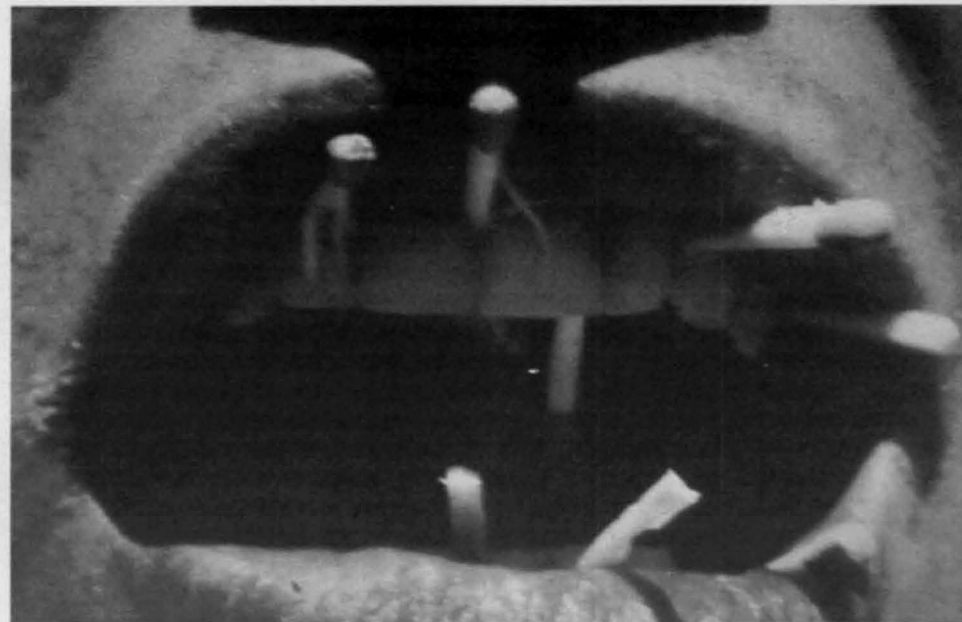
Wallowing in such beauties, word comes whispered of darker things in the other rooms—on and into the belly of the beast. The buzz of the crowd that had already penetrated ahead spoke of blood, the blood-filled head, carved up penises. There is indeed a sense of being sucked into these nether rooms: past the bizarre Otto Dix, the poignant Lucien Freud, Bacon's very studied *Study of the Human Body*, and the cool Pollack, one feels drawn along, not quite catching the momentum of Yves Klein's photograph of a man leaping into sky and street, but beginning to feel like Courbet's *Le fou de peur* (*Man Mad with Fear*, here shown in reproduction), face squashed flat against an invisible pane that opens onto unknown atrocities. And in fact, here we are in the torture rooms, faces pressed up against bits of bodies sliced open (most notably the penis in Rudolf Schwarzkogler's *Atkion Wien*), faces stitched up (Gunter Brus's

Selbstbemalung), Marina Abramovic's depiction of whipping herself into a mire of blood. It only seems befitting that it is also here that we see behind Bacquié's piece: the semblance of unity wrought by the peeping eye explodes in fragments once viewed face-on.

In some ways, Mike Parr's photographs and performances seem to occupy the heart of this exhibition. Perhaps because they are both touching (the odd congruence between a stump of an arm and a missing breast), and also because they point to the fine line between pathos and pomposity that *Body* travels (the projection of a video in which he slices himself with a razor blade only to have the

Nietzsche, Foucault, Lingis, all woven into her point that we need another typology of looking: the glance, the observation, the wink, the blink. This is an important point, as is her argument that nakedness in our culture is only permitted to children, between those in an intimate relationship, and in art. Nakedness, for Grosz, invokes the other's care, and makes us more prone to the affect of the other. Or as Barthes put it, "every time we think of the human body, the bodies of others, of our body, we should try to be a little more subtle, a little more delicate, to feel how, in the image of the body, we are somehow fragile, vulnerable".

There was, however, little of that



Mike Parr, *Push matches into your teeth until your mouth is filled with matches, 1972*

camera move down to a pool of blood on the floor was greeted with a collection of 'yuks' and a spontaneous bursting into laughter by the viewers). Nonetheless, the exhibition seems to eddy off once past this gory centre: a coda of the truly weird (the Chapman brothers' *Two-faced cunt* with, not surprisingly, a cunt holding together the mutant heads of two dolls), the delicate (Louise Bourgeois' bronze sculpture that invites as it defies touch), the nifty (Mona Hatoum's *Deep Throat* that features a dinner plate with a video projection of the passage to the guts). Julie Rrap's *Vital Statics* serves as a bookend or a throw-back to the Courbet front rooms. Echoing the voluptuousness of the nineteenth-century nudes, this time it is the artist's own body that provides the crevasses that beckon the hand, the eye, the tongue.

There is a strong narrative pull to the exhibition that exists alongside the curator's emphasis that this "is not the history of art, but a history of art". The move from the definite to the indefinite article is accompanied by Bond's insistence that this is "visceral viewing", that there is "a quality that anyone would get naturally". Thus this exhibition is presumably an effort in the democratisation of the aesthetic whereby all that is required is 'a bodily response'.

This emphasis on the gut response is presumably authorised by the organisation of the art works under the rubric *Body*. Of course, it is only allowed to go so far, and when one audience member at the symposium hazarded that Parr should be carted off and locked up, not displayed as art, visceral disdain for the gut-feelings of one man was evident. By the time of the symposium, moreover, the idea of a populist response to the collection of art had gone out the window.

Given my own engagement with theories of the body, I am badly placed to criticise theoretical work on the body, and such is not my aim. However, it is becoming obvious that after more than a decade of sustained work on the body in cultural theory, we have yet to find a way of doing justice to what the body is capable of (to take up Elizabeth Grosz' line). Grosz' talk was a general narrative of the major themes and theorists who have been used to think about the body:

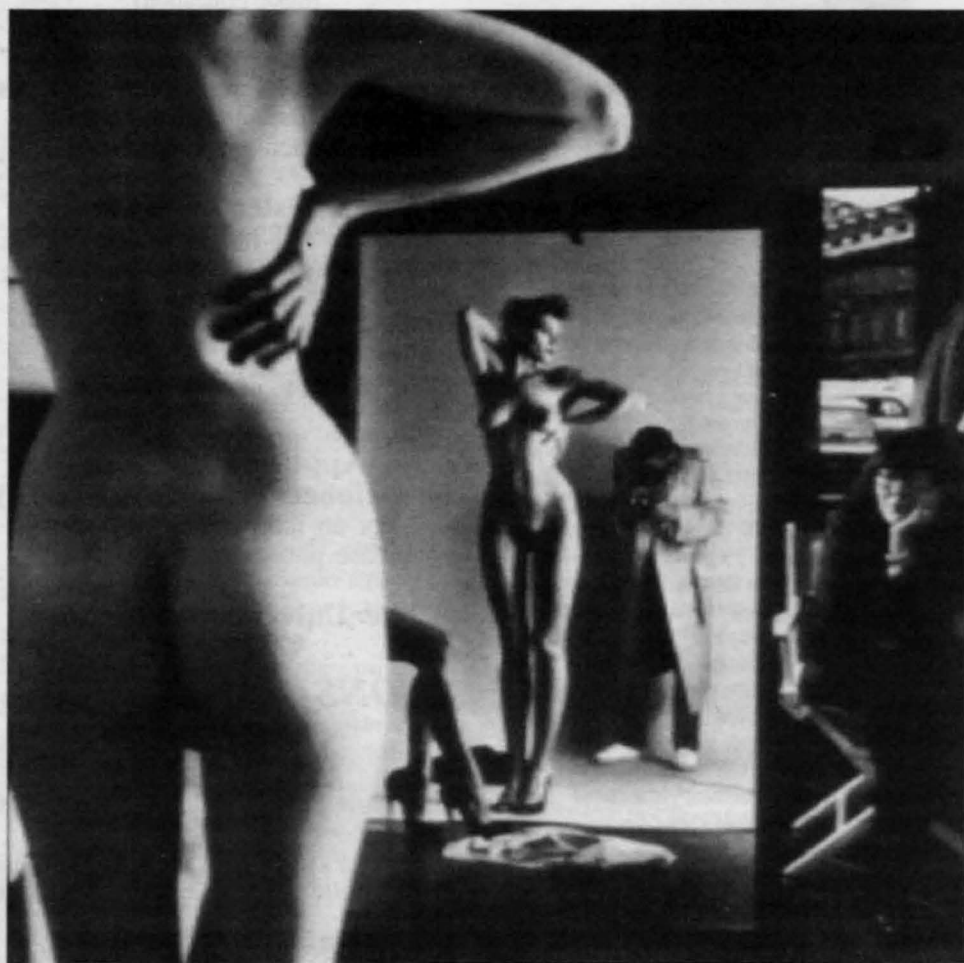
fragility, subtlety, or even vulnerability on display at the symposium. This isn't to say that there were not interesting talks (Sue Best on Merleau-Ponty), and gentle ones (Virginia Spate's presentation on the thematic in 19th century Western art of humans turning into trees). But as Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger's talk demonstrated, *Theory* can be as aesthetically displeasing as any depiction of body mutilation.

I eagerly awaited the final session, the artists' panel, if only to see how the artists reacted to the theorists. However, this was where the gaping absences of the exhibition became evident. From a rather silly discussion about the lack of joy in the art works represented, the debate circled rather aimlessly around Adam Geczy's comment about artists being "committed to crisis" and to "dealing with real issues in the world". Another way of putting this is, what are the politics made possible through the body, a point not taken up except obliquely in Grosz' remark about the hope expressed in the body's infinite capacities. If Geczy raised overpopulation as the most pressing issue, a more evident and breath-taking absence was of any Aboriginal art or artists. Apart from the 'embodied' nature of much Aboriginal art, sitting in the auditorium next to the Yiribana Gallery it was hard to forget that this was taking place in a nation slowly coming to terms with the eradication of its Indigenous bodies.

While these comments about the political nature of the body may be just another gut reaction, hopefully viewers of the exhibition will find ways to connect their gut feelings about the quite amazing art work on display with some of the issues that are currently confronting bodies—both individual and collective.

Body, curated by Tony Bond, Art Gallery of NSW, September 13-November 16.

Elsbeth Probyn is head of Women's Studies, The University of Sydney and co-editor with Elizabeth Grosz of *Sexy Bodies*, *The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*; her latest book is *Outside Belongings*. She is currently working on *Visceral Citizenship: Food and Postcolonialism*, and editing with Anna Munster an anthology *Six Senses of the Body: A Reader*.



Helmut Newton, *Self-portrait with June and Models, 1981*

Mixed greens

Australian Perspecta 1997, *Between Art and Nature*, reviewed by Jacqueline Millner

In the hope that charting an up-to-date course between art and nature might compel some rethinking, this year saw a concerted effort to decentralise the Art Gallery of NSW's biannual exhibition of Australian contemporary art. Whereas formerly Perspecta reflected chiefly the studio-hopping research of a single curator, this year the coordinator of the project Victoria Lynn sought to unsettle the institutional imprimatur which normally accompanies the art selected for the event by providing each of the 20 participating organisations with the power of initiation and selection—a grass roots rather than a top-down approach as it were. Within the broad rubric of between art and nature, these organisations—taking in not only galleries and museums but also universities, radio, and small advocacy groups—undertook independent projects to be mounted throughout the month of August, with simultaneity and loose thematic links rather than careful orchestration intended to stimulate dialogue and debate.

Was the decentralisation successful? Other than the logistic impossibility of experiencing every event (I'll make my disclaimer right here and now; also I will focus on artworks), the other chief frustration of this grass roots approach is the loss of the survey function traditionally expected of Perspecta. There is something valuable in a large survey exhibition of contemporary art, whatever the reservations about exclusions and promotion based on one individual's personal taste. A viewer can get a quick and coherent grasp of what's new and happening out there, and the proximity of works installed in the one space can spark some interesting dynamics. Also, of course, there is the opportunity for emerging and inexperienced artists to deal with a large and (relatively) well heeled public gallery. These functions cannot be well-performed by a decentralised event; rather, Perspecta becomes something else, more like a type of festival which brackets a series of quite separate events within dates. Such a format can harbour many gems, with the additional input of so many more contributors, but perhaps at the expense of coherence and intense dialogue between individual works. This looseness and flexibility pervaded *Between Art and Nature*—the works on exhibit covered the spectrum from poignant to forgettable, the theme was so broad and elastic as to make room for just about any form of artistic endeavour. Take *Fibro* for example, at the Casula Powerhouse.

Nothing here immediately suggested Perspecta's theme—indeed much more about the negotiation of self-identified marginal spaces, ethnic, geographic. And yet, an artist's culture may amount to his or her nature, so that suburbia becomes some kind of essential attribute which imbues his or her work. Many of the pieces in this show wear their 'westiness' with defiance, as a finger-gesture to what they themselves construct as the artworld centre. Mitchell English's garage doors, Norma Hall's decoupage tributes to Elvis (complete with tasteful nest of occasional tables), Jennifer Leahy's lawn scrap with bug catchers, break off a piece of diurnal kitsch for installation in a gallery.

So how did 'the centre' acquit itself? Admirably, I must confess. Both the small group shows at the AGNSW and the MCA were consummate curatorial efforts, satisfying in themselves. Websites (AGNSW), curated by Victoria Lynn, wrought a fine balance between vastly different types of installation practice,

from the minimal conceptual, to a sensual indulgence in materials, to the finely crafted object-based. The sense of affected decorum in decay that pervaded Lauren Berkowitz's piece after six weeks in the museum's rarefied atmosphere, the quiet foreboding of Fiona Hall's suspended body fragments in counterpoint to the exuberance of the work of the Arnhem Land weavers, made



Ruth Watson, *The Real World*

for a substantial meditation on the relationship between art and nature.

Across at the MCA, Linda Michael, with a similar sensibility for balancing each work to another's best advantage, brought together the work of six women artists. A highlight was Ruth Watson's compelling worlds made flesh—hand-held scale spheres crafted from the basic elements of animal life. To gaze into these decidedly non-crystal balls was to be confronted with the dumb intransigence of organic matter. Most moving, undoubtedly, was *The Real World*, the Earth carved out of animal tissue and suspended in formalin on a pedestaled vitrine—in strange tension between embalmed death and visceral life, the planet becomes a living being hanging in the balance, at the mercy of our nurture or neglect. Watson's appeal to our atavistic impulses was well contextualised beside Patricia Piccinini's *Plasticology*, which with its computer generated swooning fronds takes us to the extreme of mediation—not the quiet insistence and connectedness of incarnation, but the cool and controlled world of a 'nature' created according to the limitations of a software program. Vera Möller's crochet-swathed objects and Louise Weaver's junk abstracts added dimension to Natural Selection, but Lyndal Jones' *Garden of Eden* was disappointing.

The Botanic Gardens component was also a missed opportunity, with works not making the most of an ideal setting for a broad public engagement on the exhibition thematic. Less than compelling or plain ham-fisted, the works served more to highlight horticultural artistry than focus attention on themes of racial dispossession or the callous disregard of our indebtedness to the tree. Perhaps the setting was too overwhelming to allow for a fully realised installation, a charge that is often levelled at the National Trust trappings of the S.H. Ervin Gallery which do little to enhance contemporary art. Despite this handicap, however, individual works in *Temple of Earthly Memories* shone with intelligence. Most notable, perhaps, was Hossein Valamanesh's *Change of Seasons*, a series of five life-size folded shirts woven from

birch-bark, lotus-leaf, paper-bark, crepe myrtle leaf and lead. With simplicity and rigour, this work neatly encapsulated those dilemmas intrinsic to negotiating art through nature and vice versa—despite our instrumental approach to 'nature', we are imbued with its imperatives. Deborah Russell's intimate paintings also navigated this terrain with wit and whimsy.

complex register. However, Robyn Backen's beautiful manipulations of optic fibre light filaments—and her inspired incorporation of a peephole into the bowels of the building to reveal the cables bursting through the earth—redeemed this group show. (Unfortunately, I was unable to make the trek to Westmead Children's Hospital to experience Sherre Delys and Joan Grounds' site specific soundscapes—from all accounts, however, an accomplished project.)

Perhaps the inability to cover all bases is intrinsic to such a multifarious event as *Between Art and Nature*. A multi-media approach which mobilises responses across a variety of institutions with not only artworks showcased but also symposia, conferences, interviews, scholarly papers, soundscapes may be more about creating an atmosphere of inquiry and experimentation on a theme than about concocting a set menu of portions intended to be consumed whole. And the theme is of central importance. Yet, while *Between Art and Nature* might be a timely affirmation of the abiding links between art and politics, the event demonstrated the continued ascendancy of aesthetic and conceptual concerns in contemporary Australian art.

Too literal (littoral/litteral?) a strategy, of course, rarely comes off, and I would say Simeon Nelson's artwork addressing environmental concerns at Ivan Dougherty lacked the requisite

Mixed Greens was also the title of Perspecta's film program.

Australian Perspecta 1997, *Between Art and Nature*, August-September.

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Take the money and run

Joanne Harris reflects on leisure and writing at the EAF's *Lawyers, Guns and Money*

The minute you or anybody else knows what you are you are not it. You are what you or anybody else knows you are and as everything in living is made up of finding out what you are it is extraordinarily difficult really not to know what you are and yet to be that thing.

Gertrude Stein

I passed a shop window the other day emblazoned with the words 'Casual Lifestyle' in large lettering, accompanied by four sets of objects: a picnic set, general homeware, kitchen utensils and gardening tools. It simply looked like more hard work to me.

But it was tempting to ponder what a real 'casual lifestyle' and its accoutrements would include (any 'lifestyle' for that matter). I imagined lounging mid-morning in a sunlit bedroom in a ritzy apartment furnished with the obligatory classics—Charles Eames chairs, Saarinen side tables and a Sotsass dresser amidst the sweet scent of mon parfum. Dressed in Polo and Nautica clothing one would loaf between daily activities with a studied indifference. Idle hours would be spent pleasing oneself, drifting into relaxed late afternoon indulgences to dream for example, of breakfasts in Paris and dinners in London. A life suggesting the elegant ease that wealth brings.

The title of a Warren Zevon song, *Lawyers, Guns & Money* had a certain gung-ho, dare I say blockbuster, ring to it. Co-curated by Richard Grayson and Linda Marie Walker, subtitled "art, artists, law and power", the project addressed structures of power and their complex relations with "...ideas and expressions of

'law'...the legislation of information, the placing of the artists, of individual rights against the social...multinationals, warfare, money, surveillance, biology, the police, the revolutionary, the criminal..." (information flier, EAF)

In part, the curatorial premise evolved from "...ideas of the 'transgressive', the claiming and romanticisation of the criminal in a certain school and reading of art, artists and culture..." (Richard Grayson, "Stubborn Certainties", *Lawyers, Guns & Money* exhibition catalogue, EAF 1997) and the classic representation of the artist as outsider or 'invisible legislator' (information flier, EAF). Financial well-being is hardly a term that would be used to describe the economic status of the average artist, often deemed powerless in society until very successful, with success often measured only in monetary terms.

The perception of *Lawyers Guns & Money* as a project of epic proportion was reinforced by its exponential growth into radio, talks, a specially designed website, logo and an 88 page catalogue, with works from the Art Gallery of South Australia collection shown in conjunction with the season of three serial exhibitions at the Experimental Art Foundation. Thanks to this complex conglomerate the artists and writers had much to live up to.

Each of the exhibitions appeared to be grouped, with overlaps of course, around some of the previously mentioned concepts.

The first emphasised economic and political power structures with a more passionate or opinionated political edge in works by Alex Danko, Andrew Petrusевич, John Reid and Harry J Wedge.

The second, featuring work by Destiny Deacon, Sally Mannall and Scott Redford was perhaps more specifically about identity—aboriginal, gay, criminal, the outlaw, revolutionary—and experiences with the law or police. This related most directly to the personal narratives of close encounters with the law in the handsomely packaged, refreshingly free from art speak catalogue. Cath Kenneally's account of her survival from an attempted murder and Angus Trumble's adventures in New York were two of a suite of compelling tales.

the Gulf War, rolling relentlessly down the television screens. This simple, chilling language device which avoids explicit naming was used to distance the impact of this horror. Cummins' use of technology simultaneously alluded to the Pentagon's strict control and manipulation of all Gulf War media coverage.

A long way from a 'casual lifestyle', Stevenson's daggy 'interactive' buggies were covered with a suffocating number of overt, sometimes humorous slogans such as "Let those who ride decide" and "If you drink and paint you're a bloody expressionist".



Sally Mannall, At the traffic lights near fire station

Redford presented a number of seemingly effortless works that used gay iconography and the language of the media, popular culture and art history. Sly humour, a touch of symbolic logic and a brightly painted yellow wall in the *Hamlet Machine (not)* installation were offset by a pair of potent, perhaps overloaded, *Who* magazine images of media-exploited 'Australian Psycho' Martin Bryant in *Untitled (printed matter)* 1997. (According to the 'world famous' Lüscher Colour Test, yellow represents "release from burdens, problems, harassment or restriction".) Opposite, a few metres away, Redford's *Double Kurt*, two besser bricks stencilled with the words 'Kurt Kurt', acted as laconic lament to the once 'beautiful' now deceased Kurt Cobain, highlighting the blurred distinction that sometimes exists between criminal and genius.

Four rather bleak, lutescent ("yellow, or the inclination toward yellow") photographs of 'witness appeal' signs found on London streets made up part of Sally Mannall's *Incident series* installation. Placards placed by police at the sites of unsolved crimes, rapes and murders requesting information, were deliberately documented by Mannall as emotionally drained images in order to convey a lack of potency due to over exposure.

Deacon's *Not Another T-Shirt* clothesline installation used t-shirts from her own collection to address Aboriginal land rights and political issues. Amusing and critical slogans such as *200 Years of T-shirts* and *Always was, always will be Aboriginal Land* reiterated the historical abuse of capitalist political power.

Comprising the third show, Rebecca Cummins, Laurens Tan, Mike Stevenson and Patricia Piccinini exalted in the seduction of technology (with the exception of Stevenson) while considering the freedom and dissemination of information, multinationals, warfare, surveillance and biology.

Cummins's tower of video monitors in *Descending Metaphors* 1991 housed silent, unaccompanied euphemisms used during

Their almost cartoonish representation was far removed from the grim fact of the genuine article.

What is interesting is the number of Adelaide artists with literary leanings. Although only two of the eleven artists in this exhibition were from Adelaide originally, most of the catalogue pieces were written by local artists and writers. Many in the exhibitions included text in their work.

I wondered whether a 'casual lifestyle' would perhaps be a term used by those who subscribe, willingly or otherwise, to the nine to five, forty hour week workhorse construct, to describe what artists or writers call 'work', with their 'transgressive' working practices being viewed outside the definitions or structures of so-called 'real' work.

Despite their tolerance of a poverty stricken reality, artists generally seem to please themselves, determining their own place in the world and a working pace to accompany it, the compensation being the luxury to fine tune singular interests without any obvious formal structure, often resulting in the development of highly refined peculiarities.

Writing, it seems, has become an increasingly popular medium for contemporary artists in the 90s. The *Lawyers, Guns & Money* title indirectly embodied the project's strong writing component in the catalogue which was, for me, more alive and somehow a little less jaded or cynical than some of the work on show. Regardless, part of this ambitious project's advice to artists seemed to suggest, while the going is good, take the money and run.

Lawyers, Guns & Money Various artists, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, June 19-September 17.

Joanne Harris is an Adelaide-based artist and writer and is the Assistant Director of the Contemporary Art Centre of SA.

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Ned Kelly and the Bandit Queen

Dean Chan on the complexities of cross-cultural collaborations

The issue of collaboration in cultural exchange programs poses a set of vexed and vexing questions. There is, above all, a tendency to quantify the quality of the resulting work. Is this a successful collaboration? How has the encounter impacted on the work? Is it about the encounter at all? That working collaboratively often entails a process oriented base is undeniable. The debates, challenges, conflicts and resolutions involved in this process are often not readily identifiable in the completed work. At the previous Artists' Regional Exchange



Pushpamala and Derek Kreckler, *Indian Lady*

(ARX) project in 1995, the consensus of the participating artists from Indonesia, Australia and the Philippines was that the five week residency marked only the beginnings of an on-going process of cross-cultural negotiations. Expecting works produced in relatively short term residencies to serve as indexical summations of complex cultural dialogues and experiences is problematic.

Collaborations usually involve artists (whose knowledge of each other often predates the actual working period) deciding to work together towards a common objective. Cross-cultural collaborations instituted by cultural exchange programs might seem a contentious anomaly. It is too tempting to talk about arranging marriages to have pre-determined outcomes, namely the artistic offspring. What, indeed, are the creative and conceptual possibilities or such cross-cultural engagements?

Fire and Life is an Asialink project that attempts to explore these concerns. This project was curated by Alison Carroll, Julie Ewington, Victoria Lynn and Chaitanya Sambrani. Co-ordinated by Suhanya Raffel (Australia) and Shireen Gandhi (India), the project aims at facilitating cross-cultural collaborations—through residencies and exhibitions—between artists in India and Australia. The artists were nominated by the curatorial team to work in pairs for the duration of the project. *Bombay Perth (Nadia and Ned)* is an exhibition at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts arising from the working collaboration between Pushpamala and Derek Kreckler.

Kreckler met Pushpamala in Mumbai (Bombay) at the first stage of the residency program, which led to an exhibition there of the resulting work. Pushpamala was recently in Perth for the second stage leading to the exhibition in Perth, incorporating work produced in both stages of the residency. A key issue here is the treatment and negotiation of difference. In a sense, "Nadia and Ned" may serve as a metaphor for the strategies adopted in the name of cross-cultural communication. The discursive exhibition space figures as a testimony to Pushpamala and Kreckler's apparent strategy not to perpetuate the fiction of being able to 'enforce' the production of immediately 'hybrid works' arising from such apparent 'hybridised work partnerships'.

Traces of individuality crucially remain evident; it is possible to discern Pushpamala's contributions to the exhibition from those of Kreckler's. These traces strategically refuse to elide the constituencies of difference. The works produced in the first stage of the residency are correspondingly installed in

such a way as to distinguish them from the works put together during the second stage in Perth. A sense of the sculptural permeates the works produced in India, with Pushpamala's Indian slippers work and Kreckler's box assemblages containing found objects and his photographic images of India.

The Perth works comprise two sets of paired video projections. Firstly, black and white slides of Kreckler posing as 'existential' lonely guy in Perth are paired with black and white slides—originally photographed in India and produced by Pushpamala independently of the collaboration—of Pushpamala posing as Nadia the 'bandit woman' of Mumbai. Both are dubbed to video. Secondly, video images of Kreckler as a blind Ned Kelly stumbling through the bush with a white stick, are paired with video images of Pushpamala playing "Indian Lady", stepping from behind the painted backdrop of an Indian city scene to coyly (and ironically) perform a few 'traditional' Indian dance steps with finger placed on cheek.

The cumulative staging of the exhibition enacts a series of conceptual tensions—binary relationships are reinforced with the pairings and juxtapositions of works, materials and images. Does the exhibition perpetuate essentialised binary categories of cultural difference? Or does this reading elide the parodic and ironic elements inherent in it? The slide works and the "Indian Lady" and "Ned" video pieces, in particular, may be symptomatic of this

process of inquiry. The struggle between possession and dispossession, or between critique and reinscription, is necessarily perilous. There is a fine line indeed to (t)read between parodic critique and discursive reinscription.

In 'cultural play', identity is staged as a performative realm of the personal. We constantly move between our tradition and our contemporaneity, stopping at and starting from various points along the way. We 'perform' different roles and assume different guises in order to accommodate our different environments. We don our different cultural 'masks'—ironically if need be—if and when it suits us. To a degree, "Nadia and Ned" is emblematic of this process of cultural role-playing. Yet, importantly, there is no seeming evidence of 'cross-cultural cross-dressing'; no attempt is made to speak in the name of the other. Artistic self-representation in the context of this exhibition makes sense in this manner. The two artists choose to work and to represent themselves with reference to each other, rather than directly in relation to each other.



Pushpamala and Derek Kreckler, *Blind Ned*

Respecting personal and artistic autonomy is integral to this activity. Kreckler's Mumbai work, which is arguably made outside the familiar parameters of his own sound, video and installation art practice, was apparently produced as a result of working with deference to an unfamiliar environment. Pushpamala's intention to begin exploring the medium of video and new media installation was attributed to the new work produced in Perth. In this sense then, the artistic collaboration is an aggregate experience of exploring how to position oneself differently. This has to finally figure as the beginning of a process, if only by dint of the sporadic nature of such residencies and exhibitions.

Clearly then, in an attempt to write about an exhibition which comes relatively early in an on-going process of creative and conceptual familiarisation, the challenges are manifold. The context of the exhibition demands that the work not be exclusively viewed in itself, in any 'finished' sense. The fact that this exhibition is part of the whole *Fire and Life* project is significant. The work arising from the other residencies and exhibitions needs to be considered in order to gain a more holistic view of the different strategies adopted in the name of cross-cultural collaborations. An important interpretive cue resides in a work included in "Nadia and Ned" featuring a mirror overlaid with a grid. When looking at the mirror, it is impossible to focus on both the reflection and the grid at the same time. The problematics and contingencies of looking and meaning-making are emphasised. This viewpoint may well finally reflect a point of entry into the critical reception to works produced as a result of collaborations instituted under the banner of cultural exchange.

Bombay Perth (Nadia and Ned), *Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, September 4-21*

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WHERE ALL IS REVEALED

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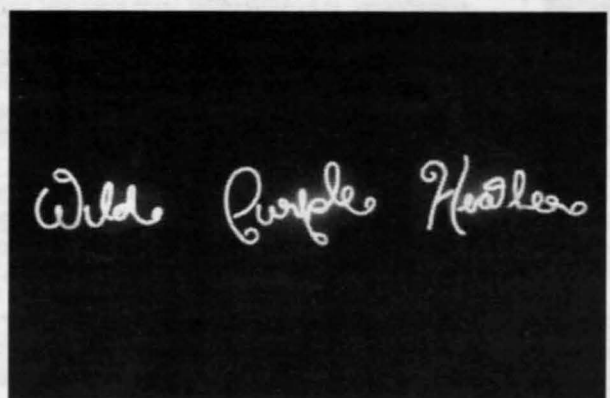
Body reveals the naked human form as seen by famous artists as diverse as Courbet, Gauguin, Bonnard, Schlele, Duchamp, Bacon, Pollock, Nitsch, Beuys, Horn, Dix, Parr and many others. This exhibition you must not miss.

UNTIL NOVEMBER 16 1997

THE ART GALLERY
OF NEW SOUTH WALES



Heather Inglis, *First Language*



Heather Inglis, *Abundance*

The personal, ordinary and everyday: for a long time the stuff of artmaking, and the link for a new group show at Brisbane's Institute for Modern Art curated by Christine Morrow. With works by Jill Barker, Janet Callinicos, Sally Cox, Heather Inglis, Colin Reany and Hossein Valamanesh, *Nitty Gritty* trades on revealing something of the personal obsessions of each artist. Inglis' work is a droll take on the culture of nominalism, a pun on the very personal subject of her own name in the tradition of neon conceptualist jokers like Bruce Nauman. *Nitty Gritty*, IMA, Brisbane, October 2-November 1.

www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au

The Sydney Morning Herald
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Baggage, Cairns Airport

David Campbell

second glance, *Baggage* places unfamiliar art up front, holding people's attention for the one and a half minutes of each revolution of the carousel.

From a pure numbers point of view, Sydney is more of a "tourist town" than Cairns, but it is in Cairns rather than Sydney that contemporary artists are more likely to engage with this cultural phenomena. Over the last few years artists from the Kick Arts Collective have regularly tackled both the sites and practices of tourist culture—in exhibitions from *The Fish John West Regrets to Club Canetoad*.

Baggage, staged for the first time late last year, and reprised in September this year, brought contemporary art into the Qantas luggage claim at the Cairns Airport, using the activity surrounding the baggage carousel as the conceptual prompt for works investigating "the psychological, emotional, physical and cultural baggage we inherit, collect and accumulate" as we travel through life.

Curated by Sharon Pacey for the Kick Arts Collective, the project has taken off as "Transfer/Tranship", and is currently flagged for development at a number of other Australian airports. In simple terms it takes luggage, packages and boxes of various sorts as a physical base (or performance prop) and then intersects with a captive audience—the crowd anticipating the arrival of something familiar (their own baggage) amongst a passing parade of unfamiliar but generically similar objects.

While the project may be very simple—even broadly appealing—in its pastiche of the process of luggage collection, it also offered an excellent opportunity for introducing a wider public to the work of local contemporary artists. While most "airport art"—no matter how significant the artist—almost always runs the risk of a slow slide towards invisibility in a sea of signs, or like the average museum piece, slips past in a seven

Peter Anderson



Jay Younger, *Trance of the Swanky Lump*

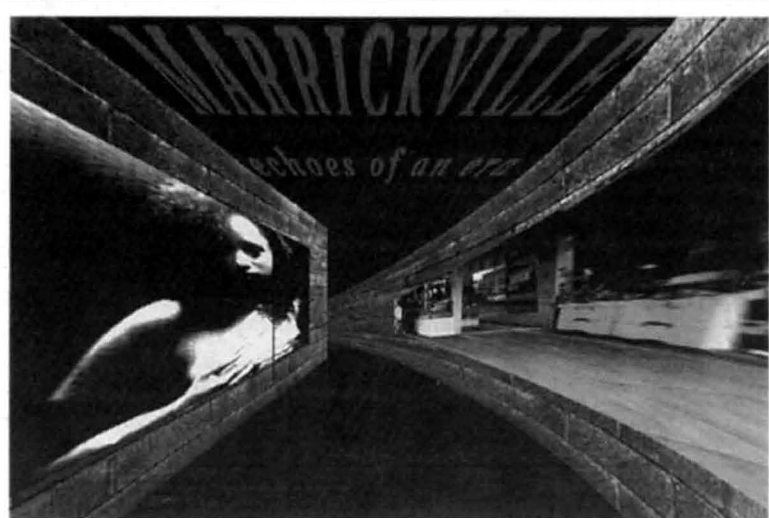
Michael Cranfield

What is a trance but an overwhelming sense of seduction or surrender? In Jay Younger's installation at the Brisbane City Gallery, *Trance of the Swanky Lump*, the rules and games of seduction are made explicit by her focus on the high heel and the diamond as symbols of the patriarchal and commodified construction of the feminine. Younger charts a complex series of collisions and exchanges in which these symbols act as proxies or exemplaries of the feminine in a multifaceted psycho-sexual terrain of allure, perversion and fetishism. The hypnotic spell of the "swanky lump" begins as you walk down the stairs into the gallery, bathed in pink light and filled with the music of a slow-moving, serpentine (at least by techno standards) dance. In this mimetic disco, the contemporary equivalent of Cinderella's ball, it is the constant repetition which makes this environment so compelling: the rhythm of the music, the mechanical whirr of dozens of larger-than-your-average-woman's-shoe-size glittery high heels which randomly self-propel across the dance floor, an enormous rotating "diamond" which acts like a mirror ball, casting mesmerising reflections. Projected on a wall, also larger than life, is video footage of women examining the window display of a nearby jewellery store. The lure and commodity-value of the myth is made ironically overt and monstrous.

Then there's the one that got away, another video project of a postmodern Cinderella, glimpsed as she takes her leave via the emergency exit. She's not sucked in as she stomps up the stairs in her Doc Martens, the epitome of the sensible shoe. And our mothers always pleaded with us to wear sensible shoes.

Linda Carroll

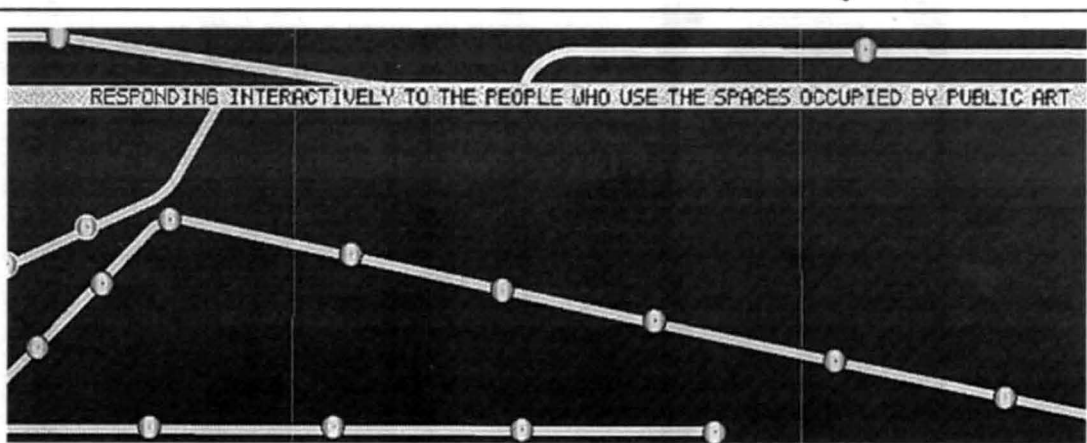
Jay Younger, *Trance of the Swanky Lump*, Brisbane City Gallery, September



Vahid Vahed and Farzin Yekta, *MARRICKVILLE echoes of an era*

Marrickville Series reminds us of the strangeness of Australian suburbia. Photographer Emmanuel Angelica is building an international reputation on these unstaged documentations of his neighbourhood. His *Marrickville Nudes* are about to hit Japan. A room within the room evokes another place. Omid Daghighi's *My home in Marrickville* is a temporary shelter, a cardboard cube furnished with a small carpet and a sparse line of lush photographs of racing bikes, on the floor out of the light a jumble of black and white images of another home, another time. At the door, a pair of shoes waiting. To one side, Reza Akbari-Sepehr's *LIFE* re-positions a steel hospital bed and screen to receive sunny projections of the everyday. A metre away, if you move Adam Hinshaw's *Milkcrate Marrickville Migrate* around a square of carpet you tune in to the intimate sounds of the suburb. In another corner John Conomos' stylish video work *Autumn Song*, calls up the ghost of an uncle who haunted his childhood in Tempe. Behind a roller door in a space full of stones Deborah Petrovitch reads a letter telling her that her soldier friend is dead. On a video screen in front of her, Cezary Prokopiuk's sad poetic text unfolds to the sound of a gong. Meanwhile, above our heads (in John Asiandis slide installation *In Transit*) and all around (in Debra Petrovitch's *Lullaby/Soundscape*) the timekeeper, the echo of the ever-present flight path.

RT



Art in public places or public art? What's the difference, and does it matter? In *Art on Line*, artists Craig Walsh, Wendy Mills and Keith Armstrong have come up fairly and squarely against this question on Platform 1 at the Brunswick Street Railway Station in Brisbane's Fortitude Valley.

Art on Line is a 12 month project using the platform wall as an installation site. Walsh, co-ordinator of the project, describes it as an attempt to engage with the commuter in a space defined by its temporary status: a space between arrivals and departures. His own work, a series of irregular-shaped perspex mirrors along the wall, reflects this both literally and figuratively, requiring the individual to face her or his image at the very moment when it is about to be blurred by a passing train.

Mills takes a more conventional approach. Her installation is a flower-covered wreath, a monument or memorial to the unnamed inhabitants of the Valley past, present and future. Here the work stands apart from the commuters, positioning itself as "art" even as it invites engagement by way of its symbolic familiarity.

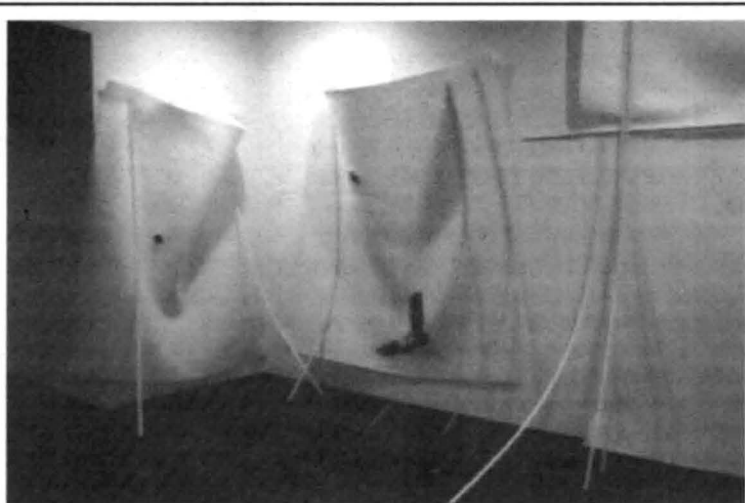
The work by Armstrong is still in the process of being installed. It's an electronic network of communication modules, based on the Brisbane railway system, with a message board throwing up commuter-generated reflections on journeying (or the state of being 'between difference') at its centre. The delay in its appearance has been caused by problems that go to the heart of the project. What if, Queensland Rail has asked, a commuter says something that doesn't fit with the QR ethos? What if...a commuter speaks?!

Which raises another question: is art in public places always and already at odds with public art?

The Cleveland Train is now departing from Platform 1. Stand clear, please. Stand clear.

Maryanne Lynch

Art on Line, by Craig Walsh, Wendy Mills, Keith Armstrong, Platform 1, Brunswick Street Railway Station, Fortitude Valley, Brisbane, February 2 1997-January 2 1998



Katie Moore, *huff* (installation view)

You can imagine Katie Moore's installation, *huff*, as small talk. A way of indicating a 'topic', rather than claiming one; in fact though, this is actually a huge architecture, a type of spatial dancing that is precarious and oddly, unswervingly beautiful. Like a blue line (called Sea) or a new leaf (called Spring) or a pink sky (called Dusk). And this poetic is shelter, a sheltering, that will fade and fall and fold. It props itself against whatever is already there, like wall, floor, you; that is, existing planes. I mean, what you could imagine too is this architecture looming over the city, floating, billowing, into the clouds. And having no love of demolition, yet in-love with collapse. It's rather like 'in addition to', a terminal condition perhaps of both reluctance and acceptance.

There are, occasionally, small holes, apertures, in the thin foam sheets. The cast of an ear, for instance. These walls listen. Other holes are open, mouths perhaps. If only walls could speak, we muse (and know they do). The sheets are held by metal strips with rubber feet, and seem to curve under their own slight weight. Stuck onto one of these sheets are seeds, like seeds of doubt. Wall talk, like pillow talk, is (a bit) unreliable. Whispered as it is. And low on one wall of the gallery there are more seeds, a seed painting, glued with blue toothpaste. Amongst these are two large black ones, which from afar look like beetles, pests ruining the crop; they draw you close and down, as if they are the key to 'everything'. In a nearby corner seeds make their way up the wall, migrating, one by one. Placed midway is a white foam cup with one seed jammed in a split. A poem for sure, and recalling the William Carlos Williams' line: "Saxifrage is my flower that splits the rocks". Change comes via the tiniest move. This seed is equivalent to the last sung note in Fred Neil's *Dolphin* song, recently treated by Heights Of Abraham.

On a high cross bar is another gathering of seeds. The seeds, you see, are 'making their (own every which) way'. On the floor, two foam cups, one standing, the other not. Around one, as I recall, is popcorn, exploded seeds, and the blue toothpaste again. Seeds as bombs, fluffy crunchy bombs, for the fresh mouth, for swallowing ("I'm not swallowing that"). What to say, and how to listen, then. Katie Moore writes in the catalogue: "Cheap sayings, fondly held, accompany me in the studio. In the show, how many can you spot?... Shall I start off? (You are looking for things like mother used to say)... But no, I shan't. To say them aloud makes them tawdry... It's nicer if they drift about, unsaid, unless memory whispers in your ear".

Inside the other cup, as I recall, a few more seeds, positioned as if a broken letter, or the remains of a signature. So, each component of *huff*, each 'thing', is surface, and is surface working on surface. Like the complex surfacing of the ear, and the thick surfacing of language as remembrance, as structure (shelter) built for oneself over time by 'being-told', by 'overhearing', by pressing one's ear to the wall. If *huff* is a work of listening and repeating, an architecture about detail and touch, then it might favour speech whose abiding 'law' is 'As I recall'. The relationship of architecture to law and language, to differing forms of speech, is critical. Speech, to-articulate, builds.

Linda Marie Walker

huff, Katie Moore, Contemporary Art Centre, Adelaide, August 1-31

Constructivist at work

Chris Reid interviews Adelaide artist Andrew Petrusевичs: the mind behind the web-site *Konstrukto* and writer of a forthcoming multimedia Constructivist opera

Direct political commentary is not a frequent concern in contemporary visual art practice, except perhaps through allegory or metaphor. Nor is visual art the principal medium used by political activists. But Andrew Petrusевичs is not one to follow well-trodden paths or doctrines. He lampoons politicians and their policies. He challenges rather than deconstructs. Petrusевичs is an activist, an artist with a message.

Petrusевичs describes himself as a Constructivist, and his sculptural work follows the forms of Constructivism. The works are mocking, deriding contemporary media and manners. The objects comprising his sculptural assemblages are carefully chosen for the effect their recontextualisation will have. His is not the optimistic, nationalistic stuff of a post-revolutionary social order.

*In the show *Lawyers, Guns and Money at the Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide in July and August*, Petrusевичs showed three works—an assemblage, comprising objects about media, including a mock-up of a movie camera on wheels; a video of 'e Party' flags flying high; and photos of current Australian politicians, set out as campaign leaflet portraits, but computer-morphed to satirise them, showing, for example, John Howard as a vampire.*

*Andrew also helped set up the website for *Lawyers, Guns and Money*, and contributed an essay to the booklet which formed part of the show. His essay, entitled "Liberals Descending the Staircase" begins: "Every day there is another fantastically uplifting statement which indicates that things are getting better and we are just about to turn the corner on the past. The future is certain. These artworks guarantee it".*

*Petrusевичs has his own web-site, exhibits paintings, installations, sculpture, and is a graphic artist. He is a musician, composer, and was once in a band called *The Bus Stops*. His work seems endlessly wide-ranging. I spoke to him about his work in general and current projects.*

CR *What is your purpose in maintaining a web-site?*

AP To take advantage of the opportunity to publish. The web is great for publishing, as it costs less than print, and its reach is enormous. The content is agitprop graphically and in text. The site is brought up to date only about once per month, although I wish I had

time to update it daily, to keep up with the political developments.

CR *What is the future of art, is it the web?*

AP The web is beautiful because the normal rules which apply to galleries—who goes to them and what happens there—don't apply. A lot of curators are loath to go there. The gallery mediates, but anyone can put anything on the web. It uses a variety of languages, like radio, film. There is democratisation.

CR *You can't earn a living making web art.*

AP An artist typically doesn't make a living from art alone anyway, so it's not an issue. I am happy for people to take my images off the web, although I'd rather they didn't cut and paste them into other work. But it is all a freebie. Payment could be managed but it would be clumsy and dangerous and isn't the point anyway.

CR *What new work are you planning?*

AP I am writing an opera, which will be Constructivist in nature. It will embody a fake Australian history leading up to the point at which a Republic is established. It will look at the struggle. The history of Australia up to federation will be 'Movietone News' format. Then the 20th century will be operatic in form but with a fusion of elements—projections of actual footage, actors, and so on. The opera will climax with great joy at the Republican victory. It will have a cast of students and will use agitprop machines. It could also be shown as an animated opera on the net.

CR *So the work will be about how we write about and understand history and how its flow is shaped?*

AP Yes. It's about how we construct meaning and values. We write values as we need them. I'm picking up on Orwell's theme, that we reduce meaning by reducing language.

CR *And the music?*

AP I'll be using a synthesiser with some sampling to create the music. The fragments of music will recur in a loop, a bit like 'lounge music'.

CR *What about your painting?*



Andrew Petrusевичs, *Richard Alston*

AP In 1988 I had a studio in Tokyo, and following that residency I showed the work at Greenaway Gallery and at the Festival Centre Foyer. I'm concentrating on web art now. I will return to painting, but the electronic studio is the thing, although there are other things I do too. Some colleagues and I are among the finalists for the Mall sculpture competition organised by the Adelaide City Council. But I tend not to submit proposals for such things unless they're likely to be successful, because of the cost of submitting.

CR *Sculpture has been an important part of your work. What are your assemblages about?*

AP The assemblages relate to my student work—I was concerned then with the Constructivist condition. It is about where we start and where we end up, about energy and velocity. I find the production of such work very draining, heavy with value judgements. They are about the human as automaton, about free will versus determinism. We can develop and embrace new ideas, but the political process often works against that, to constrict thought, and the assemblages are designed to show that. Other artists these days are working away from a viewpoint, not towards one. This reflects our political crisis—they say: "let's not attempt to lead or to determine".

CR *Are there no longer any ideological differences between political groupings?*

AP There are some, more than the electorate would admit, for example on the republic

issue. This is very divisive. But the main thing is that the government appears more concerned with balancing the books than with actually helping people. They are missing the point.

CR *What is the e party?*

AP We established the idea in the early 1980s as a medium for satire, and it was rekindled with the election of the Howard Government. 'e' stands for 'everything', 'emptiness', 'emulation' and so on. That is to say that the e Party's platform is to deliver whatever you want. But the 'e' does not refer to those pills popular amongst discophiles!

CR *Professionally, you are a graphic artist. Are you not then part of the media machine which influences public opinion?*

AP Working in mainstream media means being part of the process of shaping thought in one direction, then after hours, in another direction.

CR *What response do you get to the web site?*

AP Web browsers send in messages, some national, some international, there are regulars on my page. I try to maintain a database so that I can let regulars know when I've updated it. The National Library has archived my page as part of its catalogue of political sites. There are one or two other artists doing pages with a political message or an art message.

CR *Where is your work on the web headed?*

AP I am working with Steve Wigg (an Adelaide artist) on a poster archive which will be available on the web and comprise e Party posters which people can download and print.

CR *Your views as expressed in the site are anti-government, but do you take a position in favour of a political party?*

AP I am not especially pro-Labor. There is an anti-Hanson theme running through the work at the moment. I just want people to aware of the constraining influence of the political process.

Andrew Petrusевичs:

<http://konstrukto.va.com.au/>

e Party: <http://dove.mtx.net.au/~andypc>

Sport

TOOTH AND CLAW

with Jack Rufus

A church in California recently announced it will combine its religious services with aerobics classes. This bold move, sure to be a huge success, may well be an inspiration for sport around the world. With so many sport-lovers too busy to devote the necessary hours to their chosen sport, combined leisure activities could become the way of the future.

Why waste time shopping for groceries when you could be honing your bowling skills? Ten-pin bowling alleys could be installed in supermarkets: knock down those pins and pick up a special on frozen peas. For the more mature, a stately game of lawn bowls would be the perfect way to do the shopping. You could follow the bowl down toward the jack, filling your trolley from the shelves as you go.

Why stop there? Judges could double as referees, handing down their sentences at half-time. Umpires could officiate at wedding ceremonies just off the cricket pitch. Tennis players could hang out washing along the net: why waste all that sunshine? Let's not leave politicians out of it. With their proven travel skills, Canberra's finest could compete in long-

distance events, clocking up the most miles in the super-marathon. They could even compete to tally up the highest figure on their expense forms: winner gets to embarrass John Howard.

TEE OFF

with Vivienne Inch

I have been hitting Par-3s all week since I have engaged the services of Newcastle's captain Paul Harragon as my personal mascot. My ears had pricked at the official word from the American engaged at enormous cost by the Institute of Sport to report on the direct relationship between sporting success and community confidence and business success. Putting two and two together, I decided that a close relationship with a top sportsman was the only way to take the pressure off me to improve my own flagging game. Clearly the same idea occurred to John Howard as he mingled with his people at the Grand Final on Saturday after a shitty week fiddling the petty cash. Meanwhile, kicking the goal for the Steelers, Paul Harragon was acutely aware that what was at stake was not simply a ball between posts but an eye to industrial relations, tariffs and trade, not to mention the blight of unemployment and youth suicide affecting Newcastle and the entire regional sector.

Scott Redford: *Guy in the Dunes*
Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 1997

This little volume makes me yearn for more quick-turnaround monographs on contemporary Australian artists. It's concise but thorough, beautifully designed (with an attractive faux fur cover punctuated with a love heart) with a good balance between visuals and text, and maintains an air of currency and accessibility. Indeed, such a text would sit better amongst a crop of similar treatments of other artists, although it's easy to understand the IMA's singling out of Scott Redford, local boy made good, with a decade of conceptual practice behind him.

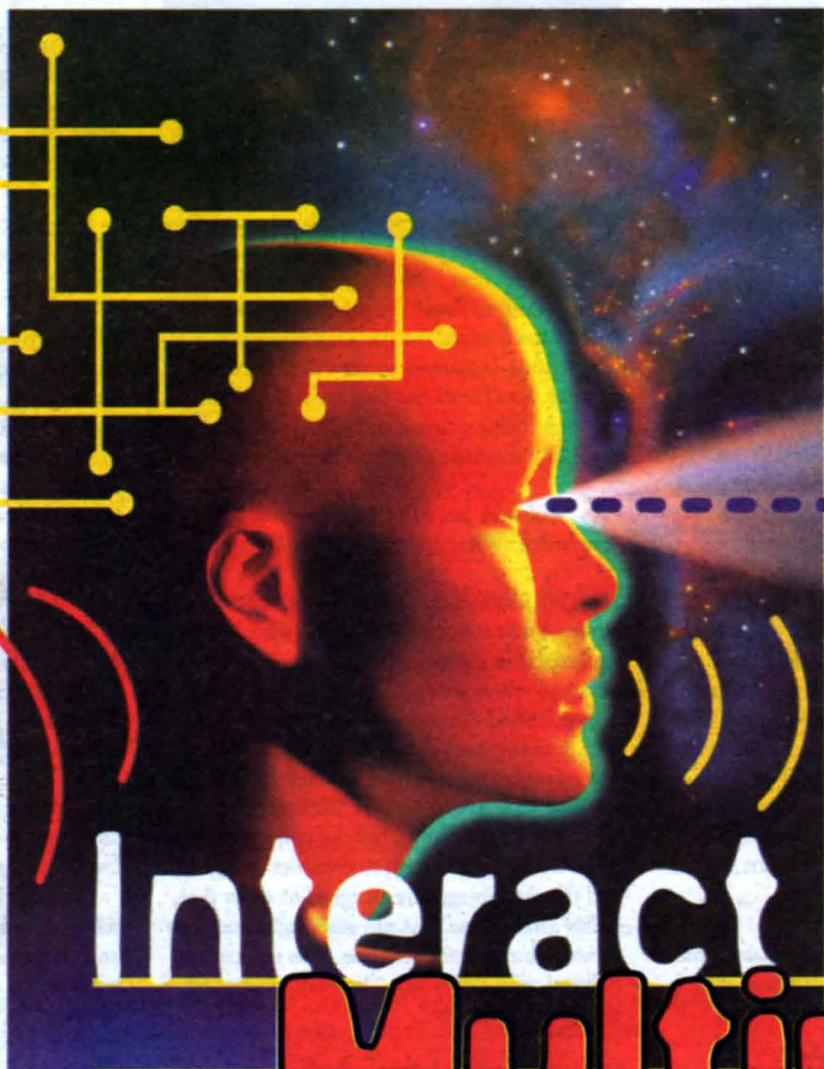
The IMA's Michael Snelling commissioned five writers—"curators, art historians, theoreticians and critics"—who have tracked Redford's career on and off over the last ten years to contribute essays on Redford's work from various perspectives, including psychoanalytic, art historical, and political. At times some of the writers labour their prose or draw perhaps too long a bow in their analysis: I'm not entirely convinced by Rex Butler's contention that "everything is now only able to be seen in terms of some feminine quality that it is said to be expressing" nor Christopher Chapman's claim that by cropping an image of Brad Pitt, Redford "subverts" Pitt's sex-symbol allure. However, Redford's career in terms of his conceptual, art historical and queer concerns is well covered, if perhaps too well covered on occasion given the overlapping concerns of some of the authors. (While I'd hate to argue for an essentialist feminine voice, however, perhaps the inclusion of a woman critic might have chopped and changed the coverage to good effect. To me, there is something a little unsettling about an all male team in such a publication, although perhaps this very united front, as it were, dovetails nicely into Redford's project.)

The standout contribution is Chris McAuliffe's "Playing the Margins—Scott Redford as a Regional Artist", which sounds a timely cautionary note against reading Redford's work as an ironic manipulation of modernism. McAuliffe argues rather for Redford's unambiguous embrace of his Gold Coast provincialism, coupled with a sustained belief in the yet-to-be exhausted possibilities of the modernist project, thus underlining a view that Redford's practice is less about identity politics than a negotiation of the conceptual tradition as signposted by Duchamp, Klein, Rauschenberg et al. David Phillips, however, claims that Redford's photo-installations "initiate a much-needed disarticulation of identity" by mimicking "the discursive logics and narratives that constitute current quests for the 'truth' of identity". Certainly, the book's multiple perspectives would appear as testament to the complexity of Redford's project, balancing as it does between artistic self-referentiality and political engagement.

For me, the equation pieces—such as *Not the Formula for Population Standard Deviation* (1993)—remain the archetypal Redford works: witty, oblique teasers with an infinite number of possible solutions. This volume narrows down some of those possibilities while expanding the range of others.

Jacqueline Millner

an
EXPLOSIVE
4
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