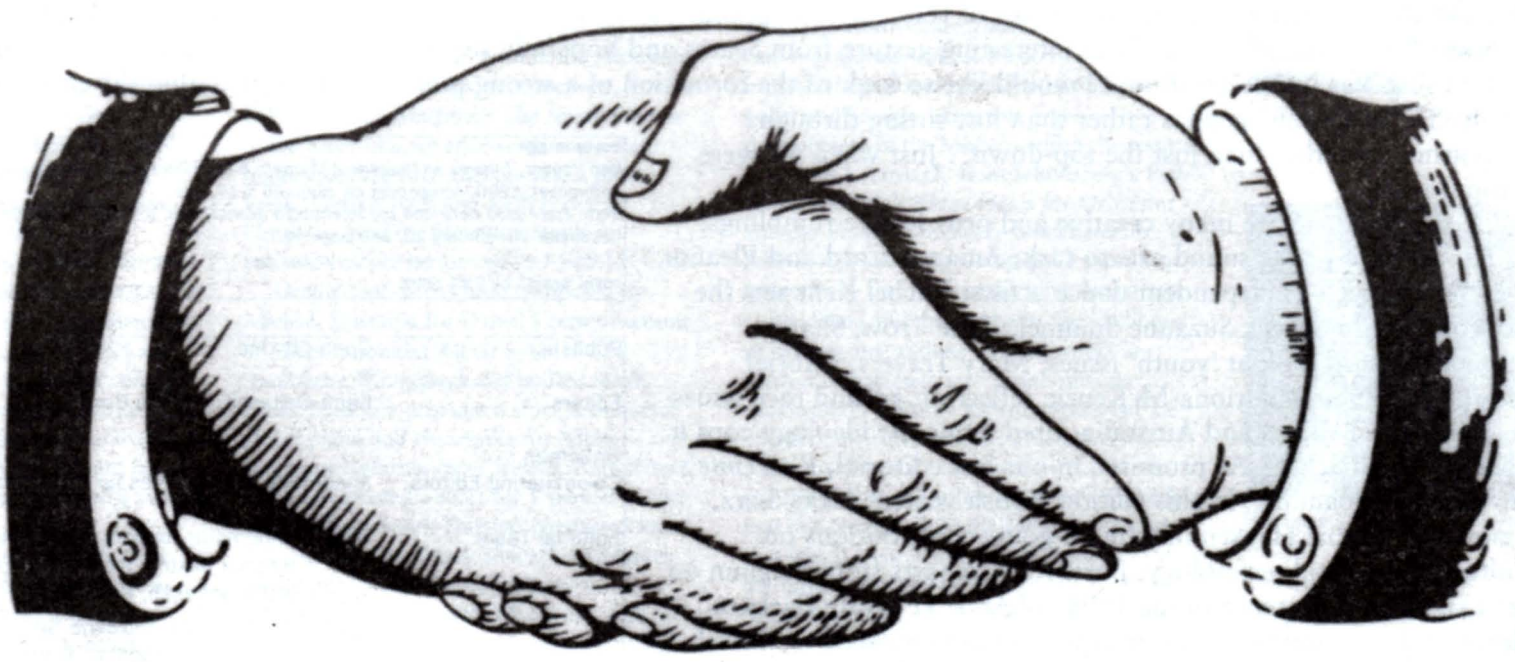
RealTime 22

free

ethnies en luttes pour le droit á la différence



OnScreen

the national arts December–January 1997-98
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Welcome to our Big Critical Xmas Edition of *RealTime*. Not only is Native Title at the centre of our emotional and political concerns at this time, but Barrie Kosky and Robyn Archer have attacked increasing hostility towards artists. At the *Trends and Design in Contemporary Music Theatre* conference held in Sydney in October, Kosky was still reeling from the response to Gilgul Theatre's *Operated Jew* in Melbourne—press reviewers oblivious to the influences and traditions informing the work—and equally from an *Age* editorial in which arts editor Robin Usher displayed the ugly corporatist mentality now so pervasive in Victoria and beyond. Prompted by Adelaide's ludicrous assault on her Madonna-with-accordion festival motif (did Indigenous groups complain about the iconic inlay of pretend Aboriginal symbols?), Archer, at the Cultural Crossroads Conference in Sydney, attacked a "raging anti-intellectualism" that entails the marginalisation of artists in favour of Howard's 'mainstream' values. From the same conference, occasional *RealTime* writer Mary Travers reported, "The Australia Council chair Dr Margaret Seares described the division of funding between state and federal governments as 'a dog's breakfast'. She announced public forums around the country to be organised by the Council over the next two years, 'so that people in the field can work in the anticipation of a long-term cultural policy for this country,'" Travers believes, "It will be an immense achievement if the Council can surmount the party political divisions that have often determined the non-co-operation between different Australian governments, or to re-ignite the concept of long-term planning. In the meantime, the party policies will be written for the next round of government elections". Seares is right, now is the time to influence even create "a properly federal approach to our arts and cultural policy". However, she'll need to take into account some serious reservations from artists about the prospect of Australia Council-led cultural policy making. First, this proposal has come at a time when there's blood on the floor after the latest round of Australia Council funding results, with companies finding themselves literally ticked off the funding lists (see Zane Trow on the implication for youth arts on page 9) and with some devastating regional results eg for theatre in South Australia. Although *RealTime* is pleased to announce at the end of almost four years of publishing that it has been granted triennial funding by the New Media Arts Fund of the Australia Council, the pleasure is tempered by the anticipated demise of an increasing number of arts companies and infrastructure organisations, up to 35 per cent of them, over the next few years as a result of Australia Council policy. Where was the consultation with artists and arts organisation on the need to cull, or the means or the implications for Australian culture? Seares will need to gain the trust of artists. It was only recently that her predecessor berated us for imagining that the Australia Council was only for artists; it was, Hilary McPhee said, and house dogma now it is, "for all Australians". McPhee's inability to think dialectically cast artists as a greedy and backbiting bunch, chronically individualist, baby boomer villains holding back the development of young artists, artists and Australians as different breeds. It's interesting now how pervasive McPhee's vision is. Doubtless Mark Davis' *Gangland* will appear in the Christmas literary pages as her year's best. Let's hope that Seares as seer, has a vision less apocalyptic than McPhee's and is ready to consider the Australia Council, in collaboration with artists, as an active generator of ideas and cultural policy rather than of schemes. In recent times the Australia Council's position has been defensive, the Keating and Alston onslaughts doubtless required of McPhee and General Manager Michael Lynch considerable strength and resilience. Council lost a lot of ground to the Department of Communications and the Arts in particular, surely part of the "dog's breakfast" Seares complained of (see also Caroline Spurgeon on DOCA's *Artsinfo* website, page 22). Thirdly, there are those who see the Council as simply an interpreter of government policy and the role of artists as limited—as in fact it has become in terms of numbers of artists on Funds, in the dismantling of artform committees and in the absence of artists on the Major Organisations Fund or in the decision-making processes of the Audience Development and Advocacy Division. How seriously then will artists treat Margaret Seares' proposed forums? Fourthly, can we have faith in an Australia Council with a steady growth of very curious appointees to Council and the Funds? What then will happen to the ideas emerging from these forums? Nonetheless, it's an interesting gesture from Seares and hopefully signals an important change of direction for the Australia Council. Most promising was her declaration: "I would like to look to the formation of a strong policy community within the cultural community. To one which is involved with setting agendas rather than just sitting through them—from the bottom-up rather than just the top-down". Just when we were getting used to top-down!

In this edition of *RealTime* there are many creative and provocative rumblings: Vikki Riley and Philip Brophy take sound arts to task; Amanda Card and Eleanor Brickhill come to the defence of independent dance artists; Rachel Kent sets the Serrano fiasco in context; Ed Scheer, Suzanne Spunner, Zane Trow, Shane Rowlands and Anna Forward look at 'youth' issues; Mary Travers, Gabriel Gbadamosi, Eddy Jokovich and Catriona McKenzie reflect on art and race issues in South Africa, Israel, the Balkans and Australia; tired humanist ideology cops it from Brian Doherty and Ed Scheer. As promised in our last editorial, *RealTime*'s international coverage is expanding. In this edition British writers Aleks Sierz, Gabriel Gbadamosi and Sophie Hansen initiate on-going contributions on performance, culture, dance and technology; Boris Kelly reports from Belgium on Flemish culture (a significant presence in the 1998 Adelaide Festival); Barbara Bolt, Joanne Harris and Julianne Pierce cover aspects of *documentaX* in Kassel, Germany; Kerry Casey reports on a Meyerhold workshop run by Russian visitor Gennadi Bogdanov. Good reading. Don't forget to vote in the Constitutional Convention Election, and have a great Xmas. We're looking forward to 1998 with larger print runs, wider distribution and some exciting new developments.

KG

It's hoped that papers from the Cultural Crossroads Conference (convened by the Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy, Griffith University, Queensland) will become available at: http://www.gu.edu.au/gwis/akccmp/crossroads_conf.html

http://www/rtimearts.com/~opencity/

cover image
Ben Vautier, *Ethnies en luttespout la droite à la différence (Ethnic groups struggling for the right to difference)*, 1990, screenprint on cloth, 55 x 77.5cm.
from: *Francesco Conz and the Intermedia Avant-Garde*, a Fluxus exhibition, Queensland Art Gallery, December 20-February 22. See page 40.

cover design by Paul Saint

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Produced at	Art Almanac	
Printer	Pacweb 02 9609 3111	
Thanks	Gail Priest, Kirsten Krauth	
Office	*RealTime* PO Box A2246 Sydney South NSW 1235 Tel 02 9283 2723 Fax 02 9283 2724 email opencity@rtimearts.com	
Distribution	Nationwide to museums, galleries, cinemas, performing arts venues and companies, cafes, universities, bookshops	

ISSN 1321-4799

Open City is an association incorporated in NSW and is funded by the Australia Council, the federal government's arts advisory body and the NSW Ministry for the Arts
RealTime acknowledges the financial support of the Australian Film Commission and the NSW Film & Television Office

Hearing is believing: Robyn Archer's grand festival of musics

Keith Gallasch senses music at the sacred centre of the 1998 Adelaide Festival

Like her immediate predecessor, Barrie Kosky, Adelaide Festival Artistic Director Robyn Archer is afraid of neither intellect nor vision. If the ecstatic played a significant role in Kosky's 1996 festival, the spiritual, whether religious, mystical or plain artistic, is central to Archer's programming. And it is in music that the spirit primarily resides.

Nearly every aspect of the festival entails music: live music in theatre and dance works, in music theatre and concerts, and with food, in rituals (daily weddings), in churches and in a culturally rich obsession with the accordion—from Paris street music to Hans Eisler's high music drama of political choice, *Die Massnahme* (four accordions with orchestra and chorus and text by Brecht), to Les Ballets C de la B's provocative world of the outcast, *La Tristeza Complice* (dance with music theatre ensemble Het muziek Lod playing 10 accordions with a solo soprano). This is, Archer says, "a celebration of the hippest instrument in the world" and will manifest itself diversely in the free Squeezebox venue (10.30pm to late) as Zydeco, the Berlin sound, a Bulgarian wedding band, Mexican style, the Pakistani harmonium, Argentinian bandeon, Paris cafe, and accordion genii New York's Guy Klusevic and Viennese Otto Lechner. Kosky had his Hills Hoist, Archer has her accordion. We will all convert.

Given Archer's theatrical experience, it is not surprising, in turn, that music is given theatrical life in the staging of Nicolas Lens' *Flamma Flamma* or Hans Eisler's *Die Massahne*, no mere concert versions. *Flamma Flamma* is about "primitive death rituals (Lens) witnessed in which fire is considered as a positive energy". It premiered in 1994 and has been a best selling CD for SONY. Nigel Jamieson will direct a large cast of performers drawn from Adelaide religious, cultural and social groups and the event will feature huge icons and flames, orchestra, choir and a vocal trio led by Mara Kiek.

At the end of this open air, opening night event, Hans Peter Kuhn (a leading European composer and sound artist and sometime Robert Wilson collaborator) will activate his set of large coloured screens with sequenced sounds on the opposite bank of the River Torrens. Appropriate to the festival's criss-crossing of forms, Kuhn's sound/music is realised in the context of dance (Junko Wada) elsewhere in the festival and in this river bank installation rather than in conventional concert.

Just as important is the capacity for music to realise itself *as* theatre. In *Experimentum Mundi* Italian composer Giorgio Battistelli conducts artisans—coopers, carpenters, pavers, a mason, a pasta maker, smiths, stone masons and shoe makers—from his birthplace of Albano using the materials and tools of their trade as musical instruments and performing to a score by Battistelli. Zen master Akio Suzuki, who makes tools and instruments to produce sound is giving a concert in the Elder Lunchtime Series.

Music theatre is given its own space in the program appropriately at a time when more and more Australian artists are venturing into the area. Archer has programmed a spectacular flamenco-driven revisionist *Carmen* performed by La Cuadra de Sevilla with a traditional band of cornets and drums, and a white horse. Melbourne's Handspan and the rock band Regurgitator appear in *Raised by Wolves*, there's the Eisler *Die Massahne* and two talented singers, Jordan and Arias, parody Wagner and others in their "cabaret attack", *Heruinen* (Heroes). At the centre of this program, along with the Eisler, is Heiner Goebbel's *Black on White*, a 'shadow show' spectacular performed by Europe's leading contemporary musicians, the 18 strong Ensemble Modern. Goebbels worked extensively with the late Heiner Müller (texts by Müller and Poe are heard in *Black on White*); the Goebbels-Müller *Man in an Elevator* is a good introduction to their work and is available from the ECM CD catalogue.

It's striking the number of theatre performance and dance works that entail live music: Nigel Kellaway's extrovertly introspective *This Most Wicked Body* now features virtuoso pianist Gerard Willems. Australia's only female cantor Janece Erman Cohen sings in Deborah Leiser's *Hungry*, appropriately given that this work is about the restraints on female involvement in Jewish religious ritual. In their original productions *...Wicked...* and *Hungry* used pre-recorded music. The Balanescu Quartet appear in collaboration with Meryl Tankard's Australian Dance Theatre in *Possessed*. Leading Swedish percussionist Kilas Brommare works with Finnish dancer Virpi Pakhinen in *Salamandrar*. Ballets C de la B perform to the music of Henry Purcell interpreted for 10 accordions. Chef Cheong Liew has the Australian Chinese Music Ensemble in residency at the Hilton. Restaurateur Gay Bilson collaborates on *Not a Lieder Recital* (and prepares a meal for Nigel Kellaway and a member of the audience each night for *This Most Wicked Body*). Leah Purcell is a more than able singer in her *Box the Pony*, a hit at the Festival of the Dreaming. One of this festival's major attractions, Robert LePage and Ex Machina's *The Seven Streams of the River Ota*, an epic (seven and a half hours including four intervals and a dinner break) journey back and forth between Hiroshima and the present, features a percussion score performed by Michel F. Coté.

Original music has been composed by Michael Smetanin for Daniel Keene's account of Hitler's architect Albert Speer in *The Architect's Walk*, produced by Red Shed; Garry Bradbury provides a scary delinquent player piano and electronics for Nikki Heywood's searing *Burn Sonata*; Hans Peter Kuhn has created a score for Japanese dancer Junko Wada; Stuart Day has composed for Adelaide designer Mary Moore's ambitious multimedia realisation of Japanese crime writer Masako Togawa's *Masterkey* with a cast of Australian and Japanese performers; Tyrone Landau composes for Michael Kantor's *Natural Life* (an adaptation by Humphry Bower of Marcus Clarke's Australian classic *For the Term of His Natural Life*); and Alan John will doubtless have a feast of themes from classical, Indigenous and surfing pop on his plate for *Lyrebird*, actor Tyler Coppin's account of Sir Robert Helpmann.

The spiritual manifests itself in music and in content through an enormous range of mystics, visionaries, religious composers and ritual observances that inform festival performances. A leading North Indian company, Imphal Chorus Repertory Theatre, present *Uttarpriyadarshi* and the Taiwanese Cloud Gate Dance Theatre perform *Dance of the Wanderer*, both works reflecting on the meanings of the life of the Buddha (the latter using Gregorian chant and inspired by Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha*). Abbess, mystic and composer Hildegard von Bingen has her 900th birthday celebrated with the performance by acclaimed British group Sequentia in St Peters' Cathedral (heavily booked). Stalker, after the success of their collaboration with Indigenous artists in *Mimi*, find themselves in a very different spiritual realm with the William Blake inspired *Bloody Vessel* (a free outdoor performance). The mystical Hebrew Kabbalistic images in Michael Strum's computer imagery for *Hungry* and the sung text performed by cantor Janece Erman Cohen make an intriguing companion to the three and a half hour account of parables from the Bible in *Va Yomer Va Yelechas* performed by Israel's Itim Theatre Ensemble in Hebrew (with simultaneous translation into the English of the King James' Bible).

The spiritual is equally and powerfully evident in the concert program. A brief sampling reveals: Russian composer Sofia Gubaidalina's magnificently demanding and sublimely resolved *Offertorium* and Messaien's *Et Exspecto Resurrectionem Mortuorum* on the same Sydney Symphony Orchestra program; the Australian String Quartet's account of Haydn's *Seven Last Words from the Cross*; and from the jazz program, the Australian Art Orchestra's *Passions: adaptations of J S Bach's St Matthew Passion* for five composers. *Music is our Culture* features new works by Richard Mills, Chester Schultz and Indigenous composers Grayson Rotumah, Jensen Warusam, Kerry McKenzie and Jardine Kiwat in what promises to be a very special concert with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. Rachmaninov's *Vespers op. 37 All-night Vigil*, an intensely beautiful 70 minute work, gets a once only performance at St Francis Xavier Cathedral by the 60 member Rundfunkchor Berlin (rumoured to be already booked out).

Just as powerfully represented is the secular in music, part of its purpose, in his centenary year, to confirm Eisler's position in the grand canon of German music (clearly he's already in Archer's personal pantheon of musical gods) and his distinctive role in the development of the Modern which the festival programs so strongly from Schoenberg's *Piano Concerto*, Berg's *Three Pieces for Orchestra* and the *Violin Concerto* to Stockhausen's *Stimmung* (The Song Company, a must hear), to works by Goebbels and Kuhn. As with the Gubaidalina and the Messaien, the likelihood of hearing any of these seminal works in concert is extremely rare. Don't miss the opportunity. If Kosky looked to Scriabin for an alternative and ecstastic account of the alternative roots to the Modern, Archer fills out the picture in another way. In Gubaidalina you can certainly hear the Modern but also that which went before transformed now into the future (something you also experience in Schnittke, Silvestrov, Kancheli in their own ways). Where Eisler finally fits, this festival is bound to take us part of the way.

Robyn Archer is determined to show up the myth that text is not important to contemporary performance. Her choice of Itim Theatre Ensemble's account of the Bible, the poetic playwrighting of Daniel Keene, and Fiona Shaw's already famous 40 minute performance of T S Eliot's *The Wasteland*, let alone the texts of *The Seven Streams of the River Ota* and the surreal rendering of *For the Term of His Natural Life*, the voices of *Lyrebird*, *Hungry* and *This Most Wicked Body* among others, mean that words, often poetical, play their own music in this festival.

I haven't mentioned two works which must be seen: Needcompany's intense variation on the Leda and the Swan myth, *Snakesong* (see Boris Kelly on Flemish performance on page 6); and Saburo Teshigawara's *I Was Real—Documents*, a strange contemplative, deep space, dance reverie from a sculptor choreographer fascinated with sound.

True to her musician's spirit, Robyn Archer has created a thematically and musically rich festival with a cultural and spiritual generosity that should deeply reward festival-goers. Once again the Adelaide Festival reveals itself as the unsurpassed leader of Australian festivals, a continuing source of inspiration for audiences and artists, for its critical juxtaposing of past and present and for its sense of occasion and community and, for which let it not be punished, its wit. See you in the Squeezebox, reading the special festival editions of *RealTime*.

Telstra Adelaide Festival, *February 27-March 15, 1988. For booking information see advertisement, page 7.*

Seven Streams of the River Ota

Viviane De Muynck, *Snakesong*, Needcompany
Phile Deprez

Deborah Leiser, *Hungry*

Itim Theatre, *Va Yomer Va Yelech*

Heiner Goebbels, Ensemble Modern, *Black on White*
Wonge Bergmann

Imphal, *Uttapriyadarshi*

Het muziek Lod in *La Tristeza Complice*
Laurent Philipe

Challenging survivor culture: real lives in real time

Gabriel Gbadamosi on the work of the Israeli Tmu Na and Akko theatre companies

I first saw the devised work of Tmu Na theatre company in London at the Lyric Studio, Hammersmith in April 1993. I was struck by their handling of performance in spare, emotional improvisations from actor into movement and spoken text, and then by its subject matter. Their play *Real Time* is set in Tel Aviv on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) with the 1973 Yom Kippur war about to break out. People gather in Eva's Bar on that evening in the Jewish calendar for close family gatherings. Strangers to themselves, these are lost characters, fragmented lives, drifting in and out of febrile relationships—delicate, fragile, breakable. As Israelis, they are brought together from many different cultures. The handyman sleeping rough in the bar remarks, "In Russia I'm a Jew. Here, I'm just that Russian guy". The actor, now an Israeli, is from Russia. The director, Nava Zukerman, of Polish extraction, comments in a program note that, "Every gesture used in performance is rooted in the individual experience of the performer". The actors of the company draw on their real lives in making the performance.

One late afternoon in the autumn of 1995, I went along to visit Tmu Na in a dingy suburb of Tel Aviv. (We knew each other from London where I'd taken an interest in them and their work, and we'd spent several evenings figuring the human angles to its darkly obsessive atmosphere in their floating hotel, a house–boat moored on the Thames.) Before arriving—almost blindfolded, met off the bus in the half–dark and led through a warren of small backstreets I lost track of—I had decided that the peculiar intensity of the T'moonies was a reflection of Israel's wars; their method of devising work out of close personal exposure to each other's lives a form of group bonding under conditions of siege. I had not expected to find them in a bomb shelter.

During the Gulf War in 1990, with Iraqi scud missiles over Tel Aviv, they had moved into the lower basement of a grey, suburban block—a submerged black box for rehearsing and living the communal nightmare. When I arrived, they were still there, years later, performing in that space, outside of the mainstream of Israeli theatre. Being there, blinking into the light, brought into focus the compelling sense of event in their work, its implosion of the personal and the epic. But it also raised an eyebrow in my thinking about the convergence of the real life and the drama, the self-analytic and the self-dramatising. Here, in their lower basement, they mined an exposed seam of hurt defiance and historical trauma in themselves and the city—excavating at the rock face of their own and Israeli intransigence. And yet, having situated themselves so firmly within it—a lock-in situation—they still emerged to challenge the orthodoxies of Israel's survivor culture.

The concept of survivor culture was introduced to me by Dudi Ma'ayan, director of the Akko Theatre, to explain the background to his production of the widely-discussed, site specific performance, *Arbeit Macht Frei* (*Work Makes you Free*)—a title taken from the notorious Nazi death camp motto. As a Moroccan–Jewish Israeli, he described Israel's Zionism, reinforced by European experience of Holocaust, as articulating the culture of the *survivors*—the European Ashkenazis. For Sephardic Jews from the Arab world it involved "the removal of the past": the suppression of their languages in favour of Hebrew, and with those their styles of dress, dances and musics—once denigrated as "bus station music", denied air-time and forced underground. Such Israelis are not survivors, despite the inculcation of a Holocaust consciousness through remembrance rituals, museums (where part of the performance of *Arbeit Macht Frei* takes place) and through the presence of the survivors themselves, rather they are *witnesses*.

Akko Theatre's performance is not about the Holocaust then, but about Israel now, in the context of endless Arab–Jewish conflict. In drawing on a revisionist archaeology of the old fortress city of Acre where they are based, it searches for the "circles of association" between Arab and Jew. As an historic site within Israel proper, Acre preserves a Middle-Eastern cosmopolitanism in its Turkish-Crusader-Arab architecture, to which the 50-year accretions of modern Israel are 'the blink of an eye'. Despite widespread support among the Sephardim for the hard anti-Arab line of the Likud party, it is to the witnesses from the Arab world that such a perspective looks to free Israelis from the bunker mentality of survivor culture and to critique its unspoken taboos. *Arbeit Macht Frei* says Dudi Ma'ayan, "is now also that performance and therefore available for speech".

Among the younger Israelis I met there is a mood of revolt against the rigidities of perpetual conflict. There is a desire, according to the playwright, Ilan Hatsor, to forget it and go to the beach. Or, as put by the arts producer, Eli Grunefeld, to relax into the Middle-East. In Dudi Ma'ayan's paraphrase of the subtitle for *Arbeit Macht Frei*—*We need to escape from the dead land of Europe.*

Returning, then, to Tmu Na's take on survivor culture, the play I saw that afternoon, bomb-proofed, in semi-private, put on for me and a few friends, was *The Dress*—a one-woman show by a Moroccan-Jewish performer, Sara. It unfolded several life histories narrated through a dress handed down from woman to woman like Jewish identity and experience, beginning in Morocco and ending in Tel Aviv. In Israel, Sara, along with those women whose lives and struggles she narrates, is referred to as black, a denigration of her identity and culture. She is a witness, to another kind of survival. Though not a technically accomplished dancer—Tmu Na's focus in performance is on the person—Sara's movement was that unfolding of the body's experience that the director, Nava Zuckerman, speaks of in her program note. It was a coming free, an opening of repressed identity in an enclosed space. It was dancing such as I'd seen in the private room-dances of Moroccan women within the family. I'd seen Israeli women from the Arab world dance like that in the closed, Sephardic bars of Tel Aviv.

Tmu Na's mapping of and response to survivor culture goes deeper. It involves making the dead land of Europe speak into its Israeli legacy. In *Real Time*, one of the characters, an Israeli woman, Eli, reappears in Eva's Bar after an unexplained absence in Europe. She describes, to the bar at large and, with considerable emotional pain, to the Czech lover whom she earlier abandoned, the experience of going to see an opera by Wagner in Berlin. "It was," she says, "not easy to get tickets. An Israeli, a friend of an Israeli I knew, fixed it for me. What an opera hall! I wish *we* had such an opera hall here! *They* appreciate culture." Inside the opera hall she sees a familiar face. Not that she knows the person, but, as she says, "You know how it is. You immediately recognise *one of us!*" Originally, he's from Czechoslovakia. He has a number on his arm. In what becomes a song of tragic love directed to her abandoned lover, Eli goes on to describe Wagner's opera *Tannhauser*. In Israel, Wagner's music is still redolent of Nazi Germany; it is anathema. Such a love song enters the concentration camps:

ELI: The last scene was the one. The only beautiful one. Suddenly, he understands that he loves her. Only her. And he runs and runs to tell her—Ich liebe dich—Ich liebe dich—I love you. Suddenly he stops. The stage is cut by a funeral procession. I didn't understand. She committed suicide. She committed suicide in the arms of his best friend. When he came it was already too late. And he stands there and sees her passing—dead. And it's already too late. In every opera there is this moment. But I always wait for it. Even though I know.

That is the tragedy for Eli, in the opera and in her life. That moment, of love, when she is already dead and the body cuts past to the graveyard. And it is already too late. Eli's identification of herself and her Czech lover with the emotional deaths of the operatic lovers is complete. She is caught up in a fatalism held somewhere between exhaustion and rapture. In the Wagnerian tragedy of *Tannhauser*, 'this moment' is that moment of tragic twist in the plot—irredeemable, and inevitable. It is that moment we always wait for, even though we know, every night the opera plays, it is going to happen.

The problem in *Real Time* is how to locate this 'tragedy' within the context of the historical tragedy of the Holocaust. Eli's emotional rapture, *her* sense of the operatic tragedy, is spliced open by the intrusion of the—still difficult, still present—thought of Holocaust: "Not that it's not difficult for me to see Wagner in Berlin". There are, it appears, two kinds of tragedy jarring against each other in the play. Like a knife, the thought of the Holocaust flashes through Eli's emotional response to Wagner's tragedy—the completeness of it, the strange security it seems to offer, its intransigence in the way she holds to it and brings it into her relationships with the other people in the bar. She draws back from that moment of rapture as from Hitchcock's razor.

If the emotional logic of Wagner's tragic opera is unnerved, the historical tragedy of the Holocaust is still, nevertheless, at the heart of Israeli experience, and the consequences of survivor culture are being played out in *Real Time*. Time has stood still as far as the tattooed number on the arm, the ruptured lives, the continuing tragedy of Holocaust are concerned. It is present, and now. And again, it is the moment we are waiting for, even though we know it is going to happen. We know from the program notes that we are on the edge of the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War—of the fratricidal killing again. The characters in the bar in Tel Aviv, with their fractured relationships and their sense of being always on a precipice, an edge of disintegration, are persecuted by this sense of imminent tragedy constantly replaying itself.

But what kind of tragedy, and what possible responses? If the emotional logics of love and war are tied to the coat–tails of Wagnerian folklore—Wagner's Germanic structures of feeling; intransigence, fatalism—*Real Time* is a devastating critique of Israeli society. But if there is a response to tragedy which, like Eli's thought of the Holocaust, can lead them to question their own self-persecutory relationships, they are loosed from a long nightmare. The play ends as the war begins, with tanks and planes rumbling onto the television set in the bar and each of the characters watching in silence.

In real time, the events of *Real Time* are not so far away. The problem for Tmu Na in their challenge to survivor culture is how to break, how to purge the trance of televised war they always knew was going to happen, the logic of which must be repudiated by something more real in what they are capable of. It is worth returning to one more thing that the Israeli woman, Eli, says about the opera to her fellow Israelis—from all their different cultures:

ELI: There was another beautiful scene there. The one he comes to ask her forgiveness. I don't understand German. But you have to admit, this anti–semite made a beautiful music.

She hears the music, in all its unreal beauty and with all its destructive, anti–semitic implications, and still she can respond to its need of forgiveness. Atonement must start somewhere. Eli is asking forgiveness of people in the bar; the lover in *Tannhauser* is asking forgiveness of the dead.

Gabriel Gbadamosi wrote for RealTime *at the London International Festival of Theatre in June this year. His play* Shango *opened in at De Niew Amsterdam in November. Gabriel is interviewed in "New images, new bodies" on page 8 of this issue of* RealTime.

Multiple transformations, the arts in South Africa

Mary Travers puts three recent events in context

Opening the doors of South Africa to the world, and developing structures to include the 30 million black population, is ushering rapid changes into the South African arts. The Johannesburg Biennale and the Cape Town Olympics bid were two ambitious plans born in the euphoric lead up to the 1994 elections. The bid failed, but the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale is now in progress. It is managed by the Africus Institute for Contemporary Art, established in mid 1996, as a direct result of the massive international interest generated by the 1995 Biennale.

The AICA Director, Bongi Dhlomo-Mautloa said, "The artistic community had never ventured as a group to say, 'This is us, please let's talk'." Although 480 artists from 63 countries participated in 1995, the artistic intervention was not considered highly successful. "The first Biennale was more to reintegrate South Africa into the international cultural arena, after all those years of isolation," said Dhlomo.

Rather than a curator selecting all of the works, foreign governments were asked to help. It was a large mixed bag. A number of curators, including Tony Bond from the Art Gallery of NSW, assisted preparations for that event, but this included training for black curators, and these efforts are highly significant.

International interest has created market opportunities for artists such as Willie Bester. His sculptures and assemblages of township life, prominent in the public gallery collections, are now finding an international market.

The performing arts are also venturing out, if not on the same scale, and there are hopes for a project to introduce theatre into the international arena over the next few years. Companies such as the Handspring Puppet Company are increasingly touring (Adelaide Festival 1996), while this year at Grahamstown, home to the annual Standard Bank National Arts Festival, they presented *Ubu and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*.

Much of the work on display is pre-occupied with apartheid. The focus on social and political issues remains for some artists; this is not yet a relaxed and comfortable country. The massive social, economic and emotional changes in South Africa are partly revealed through three arts events I visited last June.

On a Saturday afternoon at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, I passed only two other visitors in two hours. Thirty minutes drive away, at Soweto, hundreds of people viewed a photographic exhibition housed in eight up-turned rail freight containers. Crossing from the South West Area Township, of over one million people, to the jacaranda-lined northern suburbs, the Goodman Gallery is much like a large commercial gallery in Australia. A major show of abstract painting by an established local artist is attracting a dribble of Saturday browsers. The million dollar, two storey gallery, stands out at an intersection close to the Rosebank Mall. You can't miss it. And you can't miss the gallery director Linda Givon, she always seems to be in the media, talking up the arts.

The Johannesburg Art Gallery, one of the two main contemporary art museums in South Africa, is situated in Joubert Park. This is now in a black area of the city centre, with a large black taxi rank opposite. After office hours you see few whites in the city, none, it seems, at Joubert Park. Yet in the halls of the 1910 built gallery, designed in Britain by the colonial architect, Sir Edward Lutyens, is a large collection of contemporary work, particularly from the 1980s onwards. Also, excellent African art alongside the patchy kind of European art collections typical of Australian galleries.

In contrast to the darkness of apartheid, expressed in much of the contemporary work, is a temporary Nelson Mandela show, in a few small rooms of the gallery. The hundreds of portraits and representations of Mandela in paintings, copper reliefs, embroidery, sculpture, appeared mostly amateur, the outpouring of feeling, is contagious. But the whites stay clear, while few in the black population have enjoyed any arts education at all.

One of the first projects of the Africus Institute of Contemporary Art was the photography exhibition of the 1976 Soweto uprising. Last year they planned a one month 20th anniversary show of one of the milestones in the liberation struggle, in which 600 people died, and a high school ended in ashes. But Soweto is the most tourist visited site in South Africa, despite having virtually no public buildings—a few churches and fewer monuments—no tourist venues. Tour operaters were among those who wanted the exhibition to stay. They said, "What else do we take people to", and so the Standard Bank and the railways, are supporting the show indefinitely.

While the AICA manages a range of projects, with primary support from the Johannesburg Metropolitan Council, at a national level, policy changes are impacting on the formerly white bastions of the arts.

Four massive Performing Arts Councils, housing companies for theatre, opera, classical and contemporary dance, musicals, previously consumed nearly half the national arts budget. Their subsidies went down 22 per cent last year, the first stage of a three year "rightsizing" process, which anticipates they will diversify funding sources and generate more income. They are changing from production houses to venues available to a wider range of producers.

By last December 190 jobs had disappeared from the Playhouse in Durban, and there are similar stories around the country. Subsidy cuts to the two main Cape Town orchestras, serving a city of around three million people, (or mostly the 850,000 white population), generated an emotional and successful fundraising campaign earlier this year. The two merged into one 85-member orchestra, although dozens of musicians lost jobs. The SA Broadcasting Corporation also shed the National Symphony Orchestra, which faces an unlikely future without the R19 million (A$5m) annual budget.

Among the forthright arts debates in the newspapers are accusations that bodies such as the NSO have no black musicians and have not worked hard enough to develop black talent. Across the arts, questions of form, the issue of Africanisation, the discourses of post-colonialism, multi-culturalism and identity are hotly debated. Many artists concerned with resistance under the old regime have been challenged to find new paths.

The famous Market Theatre of Johannesburg is breaking new ground. In 1993 John Kani became the first black managing director, having worked his way up the ranks. His theatre career began at the Serpent Players in Port Elizabeth, under Athol Fugard. He is also the first black chair of the Transvaal Performing Arts Council, and this year became one of the founding peers appointed to the National Arts Council.

Government arts policy reflects the overall approach in South Africa, that is to link the social transformation of the society to a macro-economic policy called Growth, Employment and Redistribution. In June, the Deputy Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Bridget Mabandia, made it clear when she said: "Growth in the arts will have to come from the entrepreneurial efforts of the arts sector itself." The future is seen as one of increased corporate support and a strengthened sector of small and medium-sized arts businesses.

The launch last February of Business Arts South Africa, by none less than Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, made it clear the cash strapped government needs partners. Some corporations are already involved. The Standard Bank is said to put A$750,000 into the National Arts Festival alone. BASA has government support to get running, but is a business-driven agency to encourage sponsorship, along the lines of the British ABSA model. A consortium of consultants is also devising the Cultural Industry Growth Strategy, involving a number of international experts, including the Australian visual artist, Michael Dolk.

In some ways, 1997 is a momentous year. The National Arts Council was established as the first SA government arts funding agency based on the principles of grants being decided at arms length from government, and peer group assessment. Statutory bodies for heritage and film are also on the way. Whereas the arts were funded through the education portfolio, since the 1994 election there is a Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology.

That their arts bureaucrats are extremely well informed about international arts policies and trends, was left in no doubt when Bridget Mabandia spoke at the opening of the Standard Bank International Conference on the Economic Benefits of Arts and Culture. She ranged across examples of the arts in urban regeneration projects from Glasgow to Pittsburg, to Belfast. Extraordinarily, the only individual credited in her speech was Paul Keating, who when Prime Minister, she said, had commissioned a report which described cultural development as a "post-industrial mode of wealth creation."

Mabandia, along with a delegation from the South African Parliament's Arts Committee, and around two hundred artists and administrators from all artforms, converged on Grahamstown in June to discuss aspects of arts economics with speakers from eleven countries. The question of balancing industry strategy with cultural objectives, and increasing private sponsorship, was a common thread in all developed countries. South Africa adds to this a massive need for training, community development and the creation of rural businesses.

Through the large number of community-based arts projects, the new policies should allow the best to emerge. Meanwhile, "Trade Routes: History and Geography", the title of the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale, is exploring global shifts of ideology, economics, technologies etc and the effects on citizenship, cities, immigration and their links to culture. (This is a brief summary of the expansive philosophical base.) Arts debate in South Africa is often pointed and to the point. Routledge are publishing papers from the Biennale's international conference which took place in October.

In the meantime, a great introduction to the visual arts is *South African Art, the future present*, an A4-size paperback which profiles 40 contemporary artists. The authors, Sue Williamson and Ashraf Jamal, also outline the social and aesthetic context. Like most things about South Africa, this book is an eye-opener.

For the Williamson/Jamal book, South African Art, the future present *contact David Philip Publishers in Cape Town on* dpp@iafrica.com *or fax (21) 643358 ; or contact AICA, one of the book's sponsors,* enwezor@icon.co.za, *or fax Johannesburg (27) 11 833 5639.*

Mary Travers was invited by the Grahamstown Foundation to speak at the Standard Bank International Conference on the Economic Benefits of the Arts and Culture. Her trip was sponsored by the Department for the Arts, Culture, Science and Technology.

High art in the lowlands

Boris Kelly sets the scene for the Flemish performing arts programmed for the 1998 Adelaide Festival

As well as opening her festival with a massive concert version of Nicholas Lenz's *Flamma Flamma*, Robyn Archer has programmed two Belgian companies for the 1998 Adelaide Festival; Needcompany, a theatre group, and Alain Platel's Les Ballets Contemporains de la Belgique (or Ballets C de la B), both of which represent important developments in Flemish performance. Not much is known about things Flemish here in Australia, with the obvious exception of certain painters, Heineken beer, windmills, tulips, pralines and cheese, but the recent history of theatre and dance in Belgium and the Netherlands has been quite extraordinary. The two nations are closely linked through history (until 1830 they were unified as The Lowlands) and language. Belgium is divided into the regions of Walloon, where French is spoken, and the northern province of Flanders where Flemish prevails.

Over a period of two thousand years the Belgian region has been occupied by the Romans, Spanish, Austrians, French, Dutch and Germans. Belgium established itself as a wealthy trading region during the Middle Ages, a task facilitated by a central position in Western Europe and the presence of many land and water ways. It has been said that sustained contact with various cultures has made the Belgians tolerant and flexible, and the characteristic 'peaceful anarchism' which exists between the linguistic regions, and the prominence of Belgium in the administration of the European Union appear to bear this out. The Belgian approach to politics, indeed to decision-making in general, is said to be based on discussion and compromise between different interest groups.

Les Ballets Contemporains de la Belgique Laurent Phillipe

Belgian theatre has its historical roots in mediaeval liturgical drama and the secular theatre of the crafts guilds such as the ubiquitous Chambers of Rhetoric of the 16th century. Perhaps the best known Flemish playwright of the twentieth century, notwithstanding he wrote in French, is the great symbolist Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) whose plays, foreshadowing the absurdist style, are characterised by a lack of action or conflict. The other significant dramatist of the period was Fernand Crommelynck (1855-1970) whose *Le Cocu Magnifique* was staged by Meyerhold in 1922 in a celebrated production.

During the 1920s the avowedly political and unsubsidised Vlaamse Volkstoneel (Flemish People's Theatre) enjoyed a popular following under the direction of Jan de Gruyter (1885-1929). Following World War II the official Flemish theatre had its locus in the KNS and KVS repertory companies and Hugo Claus (1929-), whose plays deal with small town issues in an often ritualistic style, is widely regarded as the most important writer of his generation.

Flemish theatre underwent a radical shift in late 1969 when a group of students from the Amsterdam School of Drama (Toneelschool) threw tomatoes at the actors during a performance by the establishment Nederlandse Comedie. The Aktie Tomaat (Action Tomato) movement was committed to the breaking down of old structures and the emergence of new companies organised on democratic and collective principles. Surprisingly, for an Australian observer at least, this development was accepted by the Ministry of Culture which subsidised the new theatre groups. Work methods changed, theatre was taken to new audiences and a fresh approach was taken to the classics.

Herein lies a significant difference between Australian theatre and its Flemish counterpart. In Belgium and the Netherlands the events of Paris 68 caused a permanent rupture in the theatre establishment which is still in evidence today. Here in Australia during the 70s, Melbourne's Pram Factory and the Sydney Performance Syndicate embodied the theatre *zeitgeist*. Ironically, the most visible survivor of the period is our most popular and artistically conservative playwright David Williamson.

During the 1980s a new generation of Belgian theatre artists arose. Influenced by the ripples of the Aktie Tomaat movement in the Netherlands these artists felt the need to work outside the existing structures. Jan Decorte, Guy Cassiers, Paul Peykens, Jan Fabre, Blauwee Maandag Co., Blauwe Vier, Epigoentheater (the forerunner of Jan Lauwers' Needcompany) and TheaterTeater were prominent artists and companies of the time and they found support for their initiatives in a new breed of arts centres which included Beurschouwburg, Kaaitheater, Stuc, Limelight, Vooruit and Nieuwpoortteater. These centres established themselves as collaborative sites for writers, choreographers, visual artists, video artists, musicians and actors. The period, often referred to as the 'Flemish wave', was dominated by interdisciplinary autodidacts and brought a new generation of theatre audiences to Belgian theatres.

With the new generation came a fresh approach to dramaturgy evident in a shift away from psychological realism to a more appropriative, associative form of theatre characterised by juxtaposition, sampling and hybrid forms. Former dance programmer for Stuc, Mark Deputter, describes these shifts as being appropriate to a world picture that is decreasingly stable and transparent. A clear indication of the extent of the shift in Flemish theatre since the 1980s is the imminent takeover of the Royal National Theatre (KNS) in Antwerp by the adventurous Blauwee Maandag (Blue Monday) group.

However, the allocation of subsidy in Belgium tends to follow a similar pattern to that in Australia where the high art of ballet and opera is virtually quarantined from the rest of the field. In 1995, for example, the Royal Flanders Ballet and the Flanders Opera (both of which fall outside the jurisdiction of a Performing Arts Act which is not dissimilar to that which saw the birth of the Australia Council) between them received 636.7m BEF. This figure amounts to almost six times the total subsidy allocated to all other dance and music theatre activities. The total theatre budget amounts to around 650m BEF which is distributed to over thirty companies plus around 16m BEF allocated as project funds.

In 1980 the only contemporary Belgian dance company with an international reputation was that of Maurice Béjart whose greatest legacy has been the establishment of the multi-disciplinary Mudra school from which have come choreographers Anne Terese De Keersmaeker and Maguy Marin among others. The period of the 'Flemish Wave', as the 1980s have come to be known, saw the rise of a new generation of choreographers working outside the established boundaries of dance. Alain Platel and Jan Fabre also belong to this generation. Platel's recent work has been called a "theatre of the fourth world" which draws on eclectic stylistic elements and 'untrained' performers to explore the terrain occupied by the emerging underclass in developed countries. His recent work has been widely celebrated in Flanders and has given rise to a number of offshoot companies and choreographers working under his influence.

It is not unreasonable to speculate that the willingness of the Belgians, and indeed the Dutch, to embrace non-narrative, associative, hybrid forms so warmly to the theatre mainstream is a direct result of the history of the region. Whereas the Flemish experience has been forged by the traffic of trade with the rest of the world, post-1788 Australia has been characterised by a desire for certainty born of the perception of the environment as hostile and unfamiliar. Under such circumstances culture becomes a repository of the familiar and this may be a trend which carries through to the dominance of the predictable psychological theatre which dominates our stages today.

I have heard it said in Belgium that it is difficult to bring anything 'new' to the theatre because almost everything has been done. But inevitably the emerging generation of performance makers are not entirely happy with the status quo and are challenging the artistic smugness of the survivors of the Flemish Wave era. It is doubtful, however, that a return to realism or anything like it will result from these rumblings. The love of eclecticism and abstraction runs too deep in the Flemish imagination for that to happen. Patrick Jordens, D&A, Tristero, Los Cojones del Toro, La Dea, the Roovers and La Comedie Crapule are amongst the names to watch. Add to this exciting developments in the Malpertuis Theater, which is reinventing itself under the direction of Sam Bogaerts.

Boris Kelly is a Sydney-based director and producer currently working in Belgium on a production of Richard Murphet's celebrated play Slow Love.

Invitation and danger

Aleks Sierz reports from London on experimental works by Caryl Churchill and Belgium's Alain Platel and Arne Sierens

Like new wine in an old decanter, experimental performance can sometimes make a traditional theatre space sparkle. While its historic building in Sloane Square is being renovated, the Royal Court has taken over the stuffy old Duke of York's in the middle of London's West End. Under the slogan "There Goes the Neighbourhood", the theatre's fittings were trashed and its interior daubed black. But, until *Blue Heart* was put on, its productions have used shock tactics while avoiding experiment. Putting an experimental work into a mainstream theatre is a risk you normally associate with an up-and-coming Young Turk. What's surprising is that *Blue Heart*'s author, Caryl Churchill, is 60 this year. But, then again, her hallmark has always been her ability to reinvent herself. With the aid of Max Stafford-Clark's Out of Joint company, she proves to be one of Britain's most playful and profound dramatists.

Bernard Gallagher in *Heart's Desire* John Haynes

In *Blue Heart*, Churchill gives us two plays, *Heart's Desire* and *Blue Kettle*. The first starts like a domestic farce: a suburban family—Brian, his wife Alice and sister Maisie—await the arrival home of their daughter from Australia. With a mundane "She's taking her time", the scene begins. Then stops. Then starts again. This time with a variation: Alice says she's leaving home. Someone in the audience laughs. As the same scene repeats itself again and again, you soon get the point: family life is a series of repetitions. But as each repetition gets more and more outlandish, you also realise that every banal incident contains within it a world of possibility. The choreography of repeated actions finds its own momentum. In one re-run, terrorists attack the house; in another, the stage is invaded by a playgroundful of screaming children, bursting out of cupboards; in another, the daughter's lesbian lover arrives; in yet another, an emu blunders in. The tension of constant repetition makes the audience laugh; bizarre outcomes make it roar. Each re-run is not only a possibility, but a fantasy, though which character—if any—has which fantasy is never clear. As repetition follows repetition, this short play turns into a self-reflexive meditation on theatre. It resembles a series of rehearsals for an improvised play—or a rehearsal subverted by the actors. Then Brian suddenly talks about cannibalism, about eating himself. This works verbally, but is crazy to visualise: "I've swallowed my head," he says. The audience's laughter becomes uneasy.

After many repetitions, slow, fast, speeded up and lazy crawling, *Heart's Desire* runs into an emotional wall. Maisie suddenly asks: "Do you ever wake up in the middle of the night and be frightened of dying?" Suddenly no one is laughing. When the long-awaited daughter arrives, Brian blurts out: "You are my heart's desire". Family life—repetition, cannibalism, incest.

In *Blue Kettle*, Churchill's second play, the mood is more sombre, the lighting more subdued. Derek, aged 40, collects mothers; he's a con-man who fools older women into believing that he's the son they gave up for adoption at birth. No laughing matter really. Gradually, as each scene gets more and more emotionally complicated—at one point Derek involves his girlfriend in his obsession; at another he brings two of his "mums" together—the words "blue" and "kettle" begin to appear at random in the dialogue. "I don't remember blue. Is that kettle?" At first you barely notice the odd "blue" and the occasional "kettle". But soon they've invaded the conversation in a kind of Saussurean nightmare. The emotional temperature rises, the plot unfolds, but nothing can stop those "blue"s and "kettle"s. As you strain to follow the twists and turns of feeling, the language disintegrates. You start to shift around uneasily. No laughter. Language unravels as if infected by a computer virus. The last scene is full of stunted lingo: "Bl dead?" "Ket k sorry". Coming after *Heart's Desire*, *Blue Kettle* works especially well. Since you expect each scene to be a re-run of the last, it takes a while to adjust to the different game that Churchill's playing. It's a slower, less frantic piece, so its emotional content—a male hang-up about having many mothers—has time to seep in. The piece is played with lots of silences. By being blue-kettled, even ordinary scenes seem strange; the most fraught scenes are the most blue-kettled.

Another theatre space that's enjoyed a recent revival is the Roundhouse, a battered railway shed whose high, circular dome has looked down on many shock-fests in the past. This time it hosts *Bernadetje*, written and choreographed by Alain Platel and Arne Sierens, two of Belgium's finest. Their show is set on a dodgem track at a fairground. Of course, fairgrounds are places our parents warned us about, so it's no surprise to see warning signs about "bad language" being "unsuitable for children". But because it's a fairground set, some parents have brought their kids anyway. "In Morocco, dogs are really bad—they bite and bark!" With a loud blast, the show begins. A blaze of 'Telstar' and some teenage girls in school uniform start practising their disco steps. At the same time, a woman and her ponce start arguing. Lots of swearing and shouting. And so it goes. The drunk Jean argues with Jack, her employee, because he's a bad driver and a "pervert"; Polish Tamara argues with Darren, her boyfriend, because he's "lost" her passport; Frances sulks because she never gets the chance to argue with her mother Jean. So that's what hanging around a dodgem track does for you. One parent and two kids leave. But as well as aimless drifting, there are explosions of energy. When the music kicks in, the dodgems come alive and the young cast clamber, swing, and fling themselves from one car to the other. Sparks shower down: danger. The music switches from techno to Bach; from Kate Bush to Kathleen Ferrier. Sexual nudgings mix with religious fervour. Another two kids are hussled out.

Among the bumping dodgems and angry adults walks a small child, wearing what looks like a white Communion dress. The excitement of the disco beat and what Siernes calls "surfing on chaos" turns into anxiety. A woman near me prays that the girl won't strip off—and more kids hit the exit. While this dodgem track is a symbol of chaos—loads of raw feeling, stamping feet, waving arms, a rat hunt—the disco music represents order, convention. Despite the holy moments of darkness lit only by the dodgem lights, there's a lot of male gaze directed at those dancing girls. Yet, when the lights snap on, you really want to join the dance. You're meant to. Fairgrounds spell danger. And invitation.

Blue Heart, *by Caryl Churchill, Royal Court at the Duke of York's, London, September 23-October 18;* Bernadetje, *by Alain Platel and Arne Sierens, Roundhouse, London, October 10-12*

Aleks Sierz is theatre critic for the London Tribune, *a freelance journalist and a part-time academic.*

New images, real bodies

Keith Gallasch on bodies British and Australian

In June of this year, as a guest of LIFT 97 (London International Festival of Theatre) RealTime *appeared in four special editions responding to festival productions and to the experience of cultural exchange—part of the newIMAGES program. Keith Gallasch wrote four articles, three of which are reproduced here (the fourth appeared in* RealTime *20; part 1 below is an edited version), reflecting on images of Australian and British bodies and discussing these with artists.*

1. The return of the archetype

The archetypal Australian body is male, headless (intellect in exile), lean, stoic, ironic, a good mate, egalitarian (to a point), a cruel joker (can't ya take a joke?), gut-full, an eternal youth, vigorous in work and sport, benignly fatalistic (no worries, she'll be right). This is Jung's *puer aeternus*, an immature, wounded young male, ever the incomplete hero, yearning for independence but prone to separation anxiety. The wounding is a history of victory in defeat in the service of parent empires—Khartoum (part of the relief force), Boer War (the doomed hero Breaker Morant), Gallipoli, Vietnam War. The wounding entails a land never quite conquered, a land that is always someone else's. For me, this body is as real as my grandfather, an Anzac, hero, victim with one arm and no legs, alcoholic, popular postmaster of a small country town, president of the football club.

This is a body dismissive of intellect (generations of artists and thinkers fled here to the Old Country never to return). This is a male body that excludes the female and the Indigenous. It is an insular body, wary of foreigners, anxious about disease. In a gut culture, this body is all body—beer gut, meat and two veg—always youthful, always vigorous. A substitute heroism resides in sport, in thrashing the parent (the eternal struggle for the Ashes), the body triumphant. This monolithic body is a perpetual presence, disinterred by conservative governments (education and health cuts, xenophobia), conjured up by Labor (Bob Hawke's sport-driven nationalism and neo-Ockerism) and the racist right—"We are not from Asians" (Pauline Hanson). A few years ago, in an informal survey in western Sydney, people in the street were asked to describe the typical Australian. In Australia's densest multicultural population with some 40 national and racial groups and twice as many languages, the commonest image conjured was male, fair, tanned, a typical easy-going Aussie. This is a pervasive body.

Behind me, behind this Australian spectre, hovers a more distant, but very real spirit. My Anzac grandfather was in fact an East Londoner. He ran away from a tyrannical father when he was 12, became a cabin boy and then a stockman in Australia before going to war, as an Australian. The memory of him is a reminder of the English body that persists in the Anglo-Australian body: a childhood of regularity (swallowing Laxettes and cod liver oil), saluting the Union Jack every primary school morning of the week, standing for "God Save the Queen" in the cinemas, eating stodge, performing English manners (the surplus of 'thank yous' that bewilder South East Asians in the same way we find American effusiveness insincere), espousing common sense, refusing the spiritual, cautious with the emotions, flinching at the too familiar touch, stoic in matters of health, mouthing the Queen's English. We couldn't do all of these ably, we defied and distorted them, but they were bodily present, standards by which we ourselves and the British castigated us—the body we were of but could not be. There was also the American body, fashion and the odd phrase revealing a continuing flirtation with that other colonising body. A clutch of American words don't amount to a syntax or an accent, but the American view of the body as mechanical, serviceable, replaceable has mixed uneasily with our stoicism. Australia has some of the world's highest rates of hysterectomy, mastectomy and is second only to the Americans in pharmaceutical over-dosing.

Since the late 60s, this monolith Australian body and the British body within, has been transformed by waves of European and Asian immigration, feminism, the gay and lesbian movement, a growing awareness of Indigenous culture. There are now many bodies, many voices, many manners. There are moments, like now, of panic, of woundedness, of a desire to regress into the one body of an imagined past. But, by and large, we have screwed our heads on, we have had government-driven bouts of being a Clever Nation and a Creative Nation, we have declared our identities, exported more than sport to the world, we eat better (well, 30% of us do, it's still a gut culture), we ingest the landscape (emu, kangaroo, crocodile, native herbs and fruits) in a curious gesture of connection with the land and kinship with the Indigenous people whose spirituality we acknowledge and envy. We are less insular. We touch. The Leader of the Opposition weeps in Parliament after reading the report on the stolen generation of Aboriginal children.

This is a better body, a body of many bodies, male and female, it is real and it is complex, comfortable for some, not for others. Its Indigenous body is un-well and uncared for. For all of us, the question of the moment is, what space does this body of bodies inhabit? Indigenous artists and writers speak of all of the others as immigrants, from the earliest convict to the latest South East Asian arrival. For all of us immigrants, the land belongs to someone else whose ownership is put in perpetual doubt by government, miners, farmers, racists. There is also talk of Australia as an Asian nation. Uproar ensues. Where can this body of bodies put itself? The once insular boundary between Australia and the rest of the world has faded. Even the new conservative government, initially hostile to Asia, now pragmatically recognises our need to be economically part of the region. We war with Malaysia over their civil rights abuse and our racism. In Australia the Land is the focus of almost all current anxieties—land as wealth, as environment, as spiritual, as property, as spiritual property. The issues are clear, the immigrants must share the land with its Indigenous peoples. However, those promulgating the notion of property as wealth and the politics of One Nation do not want a sharing, they want one place, one body, and one word, "certainty".

2. A fluid British body: Gabriel Gbadamosi

I'm enjoying being in the Polish Bar, Little Turnstile, Holborn, amidst the Friday after-work roar (including a few Polish accents, pumping British dance music), reflecting briefly on one half of my family history: German Lutherans fleeing Silesia via Southhampton to Adelaide in southern Australia in 1839. Actually, they're Polish Catholics, something an historian unearths in the 1980s, much to the consternation of some family members who had by then developed an intense dislike for Roman Catholics. In photographs reaching back across a hundred years, I see myself in their eyes, hairline and stern looks as they pose for marriages and baptisms and, in one case, with their Aboriginal charges on a remote mission. This is a harder body to feel part of than that of the East London grandfather turned Australian soldier hero on the other side of the family. It is even more reserved, more private, and it does not easily fit the national iconography (during World War I, in South Australia, town and family names are changed, some people are interned) even though in pockets of the Adelaide hills and the Barossa Valley German accents, wine-making and diet proudly persist. However, it is agricultural, stoic and sporting and that is enough, even though it left a younger me with a new sense of a hybrid self.

Over red wine, spiced chicken breast and potatoes, I'm recalling and distilling a long conversation with fellow *RealTime* writer Gabriel Gbadamosi in a cafe the day before. He doesn't think the British body thesis promising, but we try. Gabriel is Irish-Nigerian.

1. Choosing blackness. Gabriel recalls both a South African development ("Black by commitment rather than by colour", Joe Slovo the example) and a flirtation between the Irish and Afro-Carribeans in the "mid-early 80s". This attempt to transcend race through a refusal of colour ended, he says, "in an unseemly punch-up", and became the subject of his play *No Blacks, No Irish*.

2. A fluid body. "I have the head of a west African and the body of a west Ireland peasant." "I have three passports: Nigerian, Irish and British and hover between them like an international criminal." "Another image," he offers, "comes from a Yoruba proverb: omi ko lota—water has no enemy." The jokey 'criminal' resonates against 'water', the illicit against the natural. He recalls that the Irish in England were refused ethnic identity status and welfare funding (and were made even more 'illicit'). The water image expands: both sides of his family migrated by boat to Britain, both are Atlantic cultures.

3. (Tres)passing. "I'm fairly at home anywhere; it's a body that doesn't offend in Morocco, Turkey, South Africa...I pass. I call it trespassing, because I don't go over finally." "Mine is a body in movement, an identity in movement." "At Cambridge, I was the only black person in the faculty." He recalls an incident though where he became visible. His play *Eshu's Faust* was performed in a 1000 year-old chapel ("tribal English territory") within a secular institution, a university college. His was a pagan Faust. The introduction of a profane, noisy, black body into the chapel led to a ban on performances there, despite at least 500 years of its use for such. Gabriel feels that *Eshu's Faust* "re-awoke the sacred nature of that place", something the trespassing body can do.

4. Speaking bodies. "I speak with my father's voice in my mother's tongue: the taste of two peoples kissing." Behind his (father's) Nigerian English he can hear "pithy and epigrammatic" Yoruba, "It makes my English Senecan. The Irish is Ciceronian."

5. Black and not black. "I live the life of a black person, but I have no feeling of an existential black identity and I don't believe in race. Is race a thing? It was invented so recently."

6. Prized bodies and fluid voices. Black British bodies are proud bodies and Gabriel reminds me about the Dick Hebdige thesis that black bodies, fashion and gesture catalysed white style. (I'm reminded too of a Daily Dialogue where someone working on LIFT's Utshob project reports surprise at hearing white boys using Punjabi English and without irony—something he said wouldn't have happened 20 years ago.)

7. Kinship. "My kinship with other bodies is sensual." "I see colour, and I celebrate it in a spirit of sensuousness. Colour is attractive, difference is attractive." He mentions a radio program on fashion that takes into account skin colour, matching it with materials, however this is rare, given limited black access to the media. In the end, he surmises, it is an issue of class and powerlessness. I guess the British body is a class body, a collection of class bodies and the least empowered is the black body.

8. War body. Gabriel notes the regimented and regimental body of the army—regional and colonial communities represented/absorbed into the Black Watch and the Ghurkas and other dominion regiments. The Falklands and Gulf Wars he calls "wars without bodies" (on the victor's side), having a media focus on the few tragically wounded, and exhibiting a problematic heroism—what were these wars really about?

9. The wounded body. "*The English Patient*," says Gabriel, "is about a wounded white man; it's written by a Sri Lankan living in Canada; it rehearses the wounding of an empire, looks to the past and tries to understand wounds now".

10. Vaccinated. This is a healthier nation. Working class bodies are taller. The body is feminised. "It is", says Gabriel, "a vaccinated white body". Vaccinatory—a little bit of grit is British dietary practice. Foreign, formerly colonial bodies were brought in to the UK not just to appease the conscience of the conqueror or to supply cheap labour, but to vaccinate British culture against the foreign body. Foreign bodies are good for you. "In *The English Patient* the act of adultery looks like incest, because it's too English, whereas the relationship between the Sikh and the French woman is seen as more healthy."

That's as far as we get. Predictably, as with the Australian body, this discussion projects a British body of bodies, a complex of cultures, shifting bodies, new embodiments. Gabriel's vision of his own body with its three way cultural heritage is fluid and apparently liberating, if nonetheless constrained by class, that oldest embodiment of difference and control in British culture. But I want to know about Gabriel's Englishness: what is embodied in him that he takes to other countries, to encounters like this. Is there, like the monolithic, mythic body that lurks behind Australian culture, manifesting itself in bouts of restraining conservatism, an archetypal white British body (or one per class) that is impressed to some degree on every British body, whatever its origins and resistance to cultural vaccination? Another time.

3. The sound of one fly buzzing: Lee Paterson

Bar Italia (a home away from home), Frith Street, Soho. A meeting with Australian artist Lee Paterson. I ask her how the assimilation process is going after 18 months of being here. (In a faxed continuation of the exchange she replaces 'assimilation' with 'infection'.) I ask about her body and we quickly turn to speech, but without losing the body. (Someone here in London asked me when will I get over this preoccupation with the body that is elemental to contemporary performance and performance art. I reply that this body has a head and a voice too.)

1. Illness. Lee says that she felt out of sorts for the first six months, physically ill-adjusted, an imbalance, a trying to find a place and a voice in London. Some of her condition was London-induced. "It's a matter of scale, London is big, but it's small and too close. No horizon, no breeze inside. You know one moment that blissed me out last summer, was the sound of one fly buzzing through the still house. And the first time I feel the wind on the skin of my arm, after six months undercover, I am all follicles."

2. Slowing down. Some enjoy Australian directness (brash, speedy, gauche even). "You get over the formalities quickly and you get on with the topic", said a cultural consultant to us over lunch. Lee says, "Someone called me 'macho' when I first arrived. Though they didn't tell me until a year later. It's slow here. Fast (the city) but slow (the conversation). The body becomes frantic, bursting out all over this place, kicking over, molecule upon molecule, when I get a hint of a good conversation or a good feeling."

3. Atrophying. "I miss testing my muscles and that's not only about the agony of not swimming in the sea. It's about the muscularity of conversation, of meeting.

• *continued next page*

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Maybe some people thought it was an inclination of mine, but—it's a sweeping statement—I would say that Australians grow up testing their muscles, kind of expect to meet muscle to muscle, relish it."

4. Cultivating distance. Australians, even those restricted to cities, enjoy an expansive sense of space, and with it room for speed, muscle "with propulsion, and the capacity for momentum". With this comes the possibility of broad social contact. "I've thought a lot about the quality of distance in Britain and was fascinated by the way it was usually figured as 'keep back' or that hoary old idea of critical distance. I've entertained the thought of the salutary effects of the apprehension of distance, between one thing and another, and that it should be cultivated—that in the cognition that something is there, there is a perception of space, between you and it. Space and muscle, that's my definition of desire."

5. Speaking and failing. "I can vouch for the condition of being a *not-there* in England when I speak, or think I've spoken, but somehow it fails to locate a mass in space. What is it? An amphibian that knows it is there by bouncing sound waves...?"

6. Spatially speaking. "Maybe the English are a *not-there* sort of bunch, and the Americans are *here*. I was surprised by them when I was first settling into Los Angeles. You'd meet them and they'd be on, in-your-face. But I grew to value it, it suited me, and you could always tell them if it was too much. Cut me a bit of slack here, get out of my...Maybe when Australians speak (and listen) the paradigm is spatial, there is the sense that the conversation could range anywhere."

7. Infected. "To live somewhere else, you must apparently succumb to the local infection (in this place by the apparently benign) and hope to have some immunity."

I lived here for a year some two decades ago and recognise the symptoms of Lee finding herself infected by the space and body of English in Britain and trying to be heard in its measured flow, its insistent formulae ("Know wha' I mean?"), its sheer confidence (enough to make many an Australian feel like a colonial child again), grand statements and qualifiers stacked up against them. Even though mainstream media and political voices are now markedly lower middle class, their shape and impulse are still of an older middle and upper-class authority. This firm body that expresses borders and conditions can induce a physical and vocal stillness in any Australian staying longer than a short holiday. It is a voice not necessarily marked by skin colour (you hear white middle class, you see black), but the dialects and Englishes of other skins and other places are those that Australians can sometimes feel an affinity for—South African, Argentinian, Hong Kong, British-Indian-African-Carribean, as we most certainly have during a culturally intense LIFT 97. Lee wants to maintain some immunity, to preserve her own voice, to work as an artist here in a body nonetheless constrained by a space and pace that is in language, in the voice and in the body.

This is not the same English voice we grew up with (and fought against), that "xenophobic monologue" (Gabriel Gbadamosi) some Australian monarchists still speak. "Language is no longer (if ever it was) a guarantee of paternity so much as a map of influences and—why not?—choice of menus." (Gabriel again). Gabriel quotes Simi Bedford's *Yoruba Girl Dancing*: "Africans can talk oh!" Aunt Rose often said. She was right, in our house we spoke four languages, and two of them were English..." Similarly, in Australia codes are switched, voices chosen and Englishes multiply, including a formally recognised dialect—Aboriginal English, a language of survival where mother tongues were erased by the one tongue of the monolithic colonising body.

Fear and loathing at the "Virtual Woodstock"

Ex-*Next Wave* director Zane Trow laments the consequences of cuts to youth arts funding and the rise of LOUD

(Australia Council Chair) Dr Margaret Seares has said that a number of companies which have missed out on triennial grants will be unhappy with the outcome, but she endorsed the difficult decisions taken as necessary pain to achieve improved long term outcomes.

Oct 13, press release,
Australia Council for the Arts

Yes indeed...some of the people who got cut completely this round included Canberra Youth Theatre, Cirkidz and Magpie 2 Theatre for Young People. Youth Performing Arts Australia—the national membership-based association for youth performing arts—also got the knife. While some of the staff of these companies join the unemployment statistics in the near future, the *LOUD* national youth festival, a Department of Communications and the Arts project managed by the Australia Council, was actually deemed eligible to apply for more money. It already has substantially more than 1.5 million dollars of federal government arts dollars. Yet it applied to the Australia Council's art form funds and was awarded more, by probably well-meaning peers.

This travesty of process in "arms-length funding" seems to me—an ongoing and committed supporter of the Australia Council—to be a great shame. It may in fact offer us an example of Coalition rhetoric-versus-action in the nutshell of youth arts that could be applied to the entire arts sector.

So how is it that an Australia Council managed project like *LOUD* can apply to the Australia Council for money now? Has this ever happened before? I thought we'd narrowed the gateway? I thought we were re-defining infrastructure to free up research and development funds? Will we now see the federal government encouraging the Audience Development and Advocacy Division of the Australia Council to apply to the Visual Arts and Crafts Fund of the Australia Council for artists' fees for posters to advertise marketing seminars run by the Australia Council for arts companies that have been cut?

LOUD (or 'Quiet' as it's known in some quarters) has fantastic rhetoric, all that stuff about giving the youth of the nation a voice in the media...never been attempted before...the revolution will be televised. Mind you, it is of course a beautifully *marketed* package. Lots of glossy photos and a funky graphic design and lots of competitions. Youse kids could win the ultimate prize, something that every young person in 'stralia really needs—a job!

Young Senator Alston has called *LOUD* a "virtual Woodstock". Woodstock of course was a joke when it happened, the acceptable face of the 60s, a dead culture sitting in a field. And in terms of youth arts practice in Australia, *LOUD* is roughly 20 years out of date. Using a few www sites and 'getting the kids voices on telly' is certainly not art. It may be an educative process for 'the kids' of course, if so perhaps the Education Department could pay for it. It may even network some disadvantaged youth groups, and isn't that what we used to have Youth Affairs departments for? But *LOUD*, as it is presented to those of us who actually work in youth arts, has nothing whatsoever to do with us and the young people and young artists we work with. For that we will be punished. Because I suspect that *LOUD* is going to be held up by the federal government as a model for youth arts and audience development, and if that is the case, it will be a greater shame.

It will be a shame because artists involved in contemporary youth arts have long ago left the "hey...do anything you want kids!" school of patronising youth evangelism. They have investigated new forms. They have acted as imaginative cross-cultural catalysts amongst the arts community. They have also been using new media, some of them far earlier and far more imaginatively than the rest of the cultural sector. They have drawn some of the best artists in Australia into a direct dialogue with young people as *makers of their own art*. And a short while ago if they'd had a bad year or two they would not have been cut completely, they would have been put "on notice". But the Australia Council has been significantly cut by the Coalition, and it has to find "savings".

Contemporary youth arts is part of 20th century culture, and it takes a critical perspective. It has grown and developed as part of a wider critical investigation into the process of cultural development. It actually has traditions, techniques and theory. It has its own radicals and conservatives. It has a diversity of practice just as extensive and demanding as contemporary dance or the contemporary visual arts. *LOUD* seems to be bypassing all this complex culture and dealing just with the easy stuff...the 'hey kids let's put on a show' stuff...but on the net and Triple J this time...not in Mickey Rooney's barn.

The Coalition rhetoric is the old access and participation line. Access to what? For whom? Participation in what? Why? I think that access and participation might no longer be enough. How about some critical understanding? The Coalition action is cuts to arts subsidy in an environment of declining business support. If the Victorian State Opera goes into receivership and Opera Australia can't even raise the corporate dollars, then who can? That little contemporary youth arts group with 1.5 part-time workers doing 60 hours a week earning, if they are very lucky, pro-rata of $30,000 per annum? I think not. And the press release for *LOUD* says that it's gonna help get sponsorship for youth arts? By ignoring youth arts and all it stands for? I think not. If *LOUD* is so damned attractive to the sponsors, what the hell does it need Australia Council art form fund money for?

Either we need creative thinking about getting money into the arts sector or we need to institutionalise current policy into the Australian Foundation for Buggering Up.

Zane Trow is the former artistic director of the Next Wave *Festival and resigned from the* LOUD *committee in 1996 'cause he was ... like ... too old man ... and too fat to wear the t-shirt anyway.*

The unpronounceable, the unthinkable and the unsavoury

Edward Scheer on why phoney Beckettmania has to bite the dust

We're all a bit sick of reading the tired old humanist platitudes that get trotted out whenever Samuel Beckett's name is mentioned in the public sphere: Beckett the existentialist, Beckett the guru of negativity, Beckett the manically depressed prophet of the human condition which is also allegedly based on a kind of hyperbolic despondency. We're all alone. Isn't it awful. Yada yada...

Recent example: as the Melbourne International Arts Festival drew to a close at the start of the month the press was full of attempts to account for the fact that the hit of the festival was the Gate Theatre program of Beckett pieces, hardly populist fare even for Melbourne. Usually emphasising the 'quality' of the productions, journos didn't get around to probing the works themselves to see what Beckett might have to say to contemporary culture, nor did they ask what residual fascination exists for this enigmatic heavyweight (light heavyweight in his boxing days to be precise) of modern letters. So what's the deal with phoney Beckettmania? Let's pop a few myths.

The theatre program of the Melbourne Festival suggests that Beckett's theatre makes sense at this moment in history when placed alongside contemporary grunge theatre like Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* and Raimondo Cortese's *Features of Blown Youth*, a coupling of "50s existential despair" and "90s grunge"—as the critics said in their festival overview. (*The Age* March 3, 1997) But this double mythology doesn't add anything to our appreciation or understanding of Beckett who always denied being an existentialist bent on preserving the notion of the "bleakness of the universal condition". And no light is thrown on Gen-X (a cool way of talking about people substantially younger than your target audience) when considered in terms of a fluffy 'international malaise' (sounds like a pasta sauce). At the very least the critical language needs an update and one of the strengths of the Gate Theatre shows was to demonstrate that even if there's an element of retro-chic to the Beckett industry it doesn't have to be glib and gloomy.

And what of Beckett the man? What do we know or need to know of him? The recent paperback appearance of two high profile biographies of 'the great recluse' (Anthony Cronin's *Samuel Beckett, The Last Modernist* and James Knowlson's authorised version, *Damned to Fame*) has re-focused critical attention on the man rather than his work. Appropriate perhaps for the guy who said that there is "nothing like breathing your last to put new life in you". A relevant question here might be: is Beckett the only Nobel Laureate to be mentioned in *Wisden's Cricket Almanac* as is often stated? (anyone with an answer to this should contact the editors). An elegant left hand opening bat and a cunning but only medium pace right arm opening bowler, he served Trinity College with distinction for two years in the mid 1920s. While over in France the Surrealists were tying themselves in knots trying to get a glimpse of their unconscious minds, Beckett worked on his off cutter, though he never played for Ireland as is sometimes asserted. However, as another endless Summer advances in the South reassuringly accompanied by the tune of leather meeting willow and the sight of people throwing fried chickens at each other in the stands, it is not the memory of Beckett's off cutter that we will retain—*pace* biography.

Alan Stanford and Barry McGovern in *Endgame*

In any case Beckett held that the self was a hoax, "the aping of something non-existent", rendering biographical strategies doubly illegitimate even for the hyper-mediated fully redundant Gen-X. Beckett's own advice to youth was "despair young and never look back". The young poet who received this helpful suggestion repaid the compliment in full at their first meeting by throwing up in the bathroom. Beckett was nothing if not inspirational.

To be precise, the substance of the Beckett-hit our culture is getting seems to be centred on the major theatre works rather than the 30 short pieces, the poems or the seven novels. Not surprisingly, *Waiting for Godot* figures prominently. Apart from the sell-out Gate performances of the play there have been two major productions of *Godot* staged in Sydney in the last six months: at the Q Theatre and at the Festival of the Dreaming. The latter was a production of the translation of *Godot* into a Northern NSW Aboriginal language (Bundjalung). The result *Ngundalehla Godotgai* was a testament to the durability of the play. It survives because of its elasticity, because it can be morphed into myriad shapes, though probably none as perverse as this one, despite its traditional staging: desert-scape with ochre dirt stretching to a fluorescent blue horizon. A dead tree. Then the actors entered to struggle with their lines for well over two hours in a language which some of them couldn't speak and few in the audience could understand, continuing a long tradition of productions of this play. It's a classic because it is universally misunderstood.

Godot made Beckett's international reputation in the 50s and it's still making it. At the Council of Europe summit in Strasbourg on October 10, 1997 delegates told the Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi that "We are behind your plans for Italy but Europe cannot end up waiting for Godot". This phrase is one of the surprising success stories of modern copy-writing and has become shorthand for an experience of infinite deferral, for the permanence of an unsatisfactory state of affairs—though the endless high farce of Italian politics is a long way from Beckett's dead-pan post-Catholic tristesse. The phrase ultimately refers to the play itself. It's a play about waiting for the play to exhaust itself which it can never do, like an irrational number that can never be fully calculated or written down.

A student recently made the point that Gen-X had given up waiting for Godot and were probably experiencing an alienation as profound as the post-existentialist baby boomer generation, however differently expressed. Frustration and the anticipation of failure is generally considered to be as basic to the experience of Gen-X as it is fundamental to the design of Beckett's characters, but this overlooks the specific contexts of both Beckett's ideas and late 20th century young middle-class white trash. Much is made of Beckett's 'universality'. But in what does this consist? Enter 'the human condition' to signify all those things that previous generations couldn't be bothered contemplating. But if Sartre could describe his followers as a generation who had turned themselves into corpses then a vast number of Beckett aficionados of the late 20th century are probably several degrees of putrefaction further along the chain.

Hovering over the corpse of humanism, Beckett's major plays record the death of 'man' as the centre of the universe and the end of all those reassuringly anthropomorphic narratives about deities guaranteeing a pleasant afterlife experience. The human is depicted as parodic in its pathetic attempts to foreground itself, like the figure of Hamm in *Endgame* who behaves like a tyrant in his last days. Faced with the imminent demise of the species these characters don't respond with universal truths but with petty habits and irritating quirks.

Beckett is not interested in individual subjects and their fundamental alienation from each other as much as the states, impersonal and arbitrary, through which these subjects pass and which define them. Perhaps it is their very impersonality which guarantees the timelessness of these plays. Instead of stopping time to examine human behaviour under scientific conditions, Beckett stops behaviour to view time.

Putting it another way, Beckett did not try to represent human experience because he didn't believe in representation. The substance of Beckett's most fundamental arguments is that both object and eye work against representation in art, writing, theatre etc and suggest an intervening space between the artist's senses and the object world which Adorno identified in Beckett's *Endgame* as "that zone of indifference, between interiority and exteriority". This mutual exclusion of any unmediated expression constitutes the essential failure of art for Beckett which leads him to say of the artist Bram van Velde that the expressive act is "an expression of itself, of its impossibility, of its obligation." The famous closing line of the novel *The Unnameable*, "I can't go on, I'll go on", thereby takes on the resonance of an artistic credo rather than signifying the amorphous frustrations of 'the human condition'.

Similarly, the plays are tragi-comedies and are neither utopic nor dystopic. They are about mediation rather than alienation and so, arguably, is Gen-X. The experiences of media-literate teens and twenty-somethings are mediated, just like the artists of Beckett's generation. So not much has changed on that score, but it's nothing to get depressed about. It is only a problem if you think that some essential human quality suffers as a result. Unfortunately this type of observation has been enshrined by decades of compulsory humanism, the quintessence of phony Beckettmania.

Edward Scheer lectures in Drama at the University of Newcastle and recently directed a production at the Central Coast which sampled Endgame, Godot *and* Happy Days.

Penetrating commodification

Suzanne Spunner wonders what's going on at the Melbourne Festival: *Raised by Wolves, Features of Blown Youth, Shopping and Fucking, Catalpa*

I find it difficult to write about much of the theatre I saw at The Melbourne Festival as theatre *qua* theatre. The works demand an ethical response to the world they depicted. Festival Director, Clifford Hocking disclaims a grunge agenda but acknowledges, "I do think it is a reflection of what happens to be going on". The question of what is going on was squarely faced by Germaine Greer in her opening address to The Writers Festival and everything she raised for the feminists of her generation to consider was displayed in the three new works—Handspan's *Raised by Wolves*, Ranters Theatre's *Features of Blown Youth* and the Out of Joint/Royal Court production, *Shopping and Fucking*. The male writers and directors all spoke of their work in terms of the commodification of culture and enacted a view of sexuality that was as obsessed with penetration as Greer had warned. It was also difficult to resist connections between these three productions and the Serrano exhibition, and the season of Beckett and *Catalpa* presented by The Gate Theatre of Ireland.

The three contemporary plays are set in the visceral present and the characters inhabit a world without a future and without a past to sustain them now, let alone tomorrow. In this world, all the adults are evil and corrupt, the wolves who have raised them; there is nothing to relieve the terror and the tedium except shopping and fucking. The youth who inhabit this world are blown up, blown away and fly blown and we are left to remark on the features of putrefying young flesh; food for the cockroaches that will survive and inherit this future.

Forty years ago the world of Beckett seemed bleak, now it seems almost Arcadian. At least in his world people are a comfort to one another and face the existential abyss together, laughing from time to time at it and with each other. Beckett's characters are conscious and alive and articulate their pain and sadness as they pass the awful time. The youth in the current works trade their bodies and selves for things which pass the time but don't relieve the pain. The retreat into sex and drugs serves to deaden sensation. The possibility of change, of hope, of belief in possibility is beyond the ontology of the present.

Features of Blown Youth

All these plays are difficult to watch. They place the audience in the position of either voyeurs or witnesses to testaments of horror. You come away soiled by the participation because you can't help but feel complicit. Even if it is all outside the everyday realities of the world you inhabit, you feel the despair and powerlessness that they feel. By definition, as a theatre-goer, you are not part of the underclass depicted and despite being an adult you are not evil or corrupt, but you know that world does exist and is growing.

Your task is to tease out the social and political climate which is creating such divides and to resist and protest these tendencies. The plays offer no analyses, they just show it as it is. The saving graces of my generation—sexual liberation, expanded consciousness and a critique of consumerism and monopoly capitalism, class analysis, have all been betrayed and to use that 60s word, "co-opted". Greer believes that sexual freedom has been perverted into a freedom to be abused, an abuse of the integrity of the self masquerading as choice.

To look at these works as theatre: *Raised by Wolves* generated some powerful visual images—the birth of youth from the the belly of the cockroach, the cockroaches themselves, but the rest was confusion and mayhem. Perhaps its most powerful element was its site—a disused warehouse in the docklands area which is about to be redeveloped as part of Kennett's grand vision for Melbourne. It will become a satellite city of swish apartments with the latest in integrated urban security systems to keep out the underclass and to distract the rest of us, a dizzying maze of enter/info-tainment and sporting complexes. If *Raised by Wolves* had something to say, I couldn't hear it, even without the earplugs supplied by the promoters to stem the sound of Regurgitator.

Raimondo Cortese is a writer to be reckoned with. In *Features of Blown Youth*, he writes with purpose, conviction and a command of the languages and attitudes of youth. Every character has a distinctive and compelling voice, there are no stereotypes or diffuse generalisations and he gives the actors the space to take us inside these people. I was nonetheless disappointed by its unadventurous cinematic realism. Dan Potra's set within a derelict building enabled cross-cutting to occur effortlessly between short scenes in different rooms of the sprawling communal house as our attention was taken like the camera to another scene. I was less worried than some by the play's discursiveness, it augmented the serial feel and the sense that a sequel was imminent. Its narrative strength came from the way it showed the propensity for youth to be preyed on by messianic corruptors.

Shopping and Fucking was slicker and faster and more focused; nothing distracted. The thesis was presented concisely and unremittingly with virtually everything shown on stage. Yet for me there was a paradox in that the two most lingering and telling images from it were not shown—the video of the child playing the violin and the stabbing in the 7 Eleven captured on the security video. Perhaps what I was shown, in the process of confronting me, inured me to keeping on feeling and ain't that the problem, alienation of affect?

Gate Theatre's *Catalpa* was an historical take on the issue but in this case, it was the whales rather than the youth who were destroyed. To confirm Germaine Greer again, the heart of the horror here was the killing of the female whale and her calf, and their deaths stood for the destruction of all the females in the sorry tale.

As a one-man show, it was unremarkable and uninventive, unless you'd not seen the legion of superb Australian one-person shows in the last two decades. The story of the whaling ship that is sent to rescue a a group of Fenian prisoners from a penal colony in Western Australia was framed within a writer's pitch to get his script made into a Hollywood movie. This could have been an intriguing theatrical device but it was awkward and underdeveloped, the writer as a contemporary commentator on the story was abandoned almost as soon as he was invoked and similarly the structure and conventions of cinema were indicated but never really brought in to mediate or construct the story; the idea revealed its limitations when it asked us to imagine Winona Ryder and Tom Cruise as the pivotal characters!

Fruitful collaborations

Anna Forward on Salamanca Youth Theatre's *Bite of the Apple*

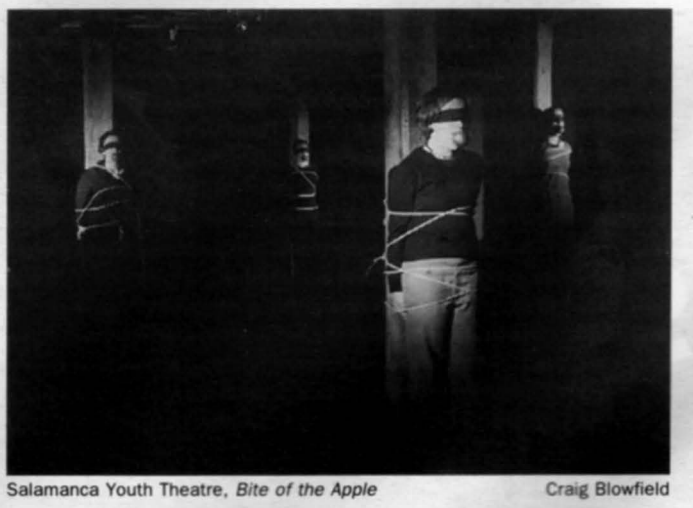
ma-nip'u-la'tion : 1. to treat, work or operate with the hands, especially where skill and dexterity are required.

art :1. the disposition or modification of things by human skill to answer the purpose intended.

Whether or not Salamanca Youth Theatre Company was aware of the parallel nature of these terms, the dual focus of their production *Bite of the Apple* (September 20-22) was wickedly insightful.

The process began with an advertisement inviting arts practitioners between the ages of 18 and 25 to attend a workshop. The brainchild of Salamanca's director Deborah Pollard, this project sought to reconnect with a somewhat neglected age group and promote the potential of young adults in one of Tasmania's high profile theatres. Over six weeks the 20 respondents were put through some of the gruelling paces of Tadashi Suzuki training—pacing and chanting exercises designed to pare performance down to the minimalist rictus of the stage. Exercises were accompanied by intense discussions and individual and group scripting sessions. The result of this workshop was a "grounding" remarkable in such a diverse group of practitioners, and an original script that was excitingly visceral.

The different backgrounds of the artists collided in this very physical atmosphere. While visual artists hoped to express experience on a relatively abstract, technologically complex scale, the more experienced stage performers saw their ideas in Brechtian or Theatre of Cruelty frameworks. The underlying tensions effectively served to enhance a study of the devices of artifice in public life. By the scripting stage the performers were attracted by the abstract nature of the theme of manipulation agreeing that it offered a freedom to move away from their immediate identity and away also from uniform production values of common "teen angst" topics. Performers explored the idea of manipulation through personal vignettes which in turn highlighted the manipulations of prominent figures, accounts and reports, and exposed the interconnected schemata behind the hackneyed rhetoric of media manipulation, the sinister artifice of seduction, and the impassioned power of political terrorism. The product of the experiment was a non-chronological text that brought together a disturbing mix of expressions on the theme: from static installation to active improvisation; from highly organised audience participation to simple amplifications of exercises in movement and verbal expression. Though the staging dynamics were broad, from the outset the project was geared towards a taut and slick final product.



Salamanca Youth Theatre, *Bite of the Apple* Craig Blowfield

For three nights beginning September 20, *Bite of the Apple* took over Salamanca's Long Gallery. Deborah Pollard was delighted with this space both because of its highly relevant origins as a commercial cool-room for apple storage and its evocative architectural dimensions. It was transformed into an unusual performance space with the installation of lighting and ambient artworks using fruit and the body.

The audience were herded into the space like cattle—or tourists. Once inside, they followed the sounds of local band, Head Harmonics, trod allegorical paths of apples and joined processions of performers being ridden like beasts. In the spaces between the building's many columns, cast members, were spotlit like frozen objects installed for inspection and titillation. Then the performers tore through all these "walls" with flippant speech and movement or grandiose installation and projection. Michelle Ferguson swayed Bardot-like to the strains of "I love my motorbike"; Matty Flower the "drag acrobat" balanced in precarious poses. There was a delicious sense of unease, the audience at the mercy of undercutting images—the spectacle of the entire cast fighting viciously over a box of tissues overlayed with slides of Stuart Diver and the Thredbo Disaster; a young woman wrapped in scrolls of paper that scrunched as she read passages from *Genesis*, stopping to bite and slurp at an apple. The apparently open-minded audience tended to laugh self-consciously, while the artists seemed to be laughing more openly and theatrically at the audience's sense of morality and mortality. Throughout, the work abounded with the disconcerting sense of being watched—the cast watched by each other and the audience, the audience stared at, both directly and from above through the unblinking eyes of binoculars and cameras. The performance was intense and I for one was pleased that the cast had decided to stick to a 50 minute format but *Bite of the Apple* was a sensuous production I'll remember for some time.

Bite of the Apple, *Salamanaca Youth Theatre, directed by Deborah Pollard, Long Gallery, Hobart, September 20-22.*

The men behind the woman

Keith Gallasch at Sidetrack's *Nobody's Daughter*

We take off our shoes to enter her room. She's not in. There's a white bed, tall thin white curtain walls right around us, a small desk with pen, paper and red roses, a chair and a video camera on a tripod looking on. We wait quietly, respectfully, in this pristine place. Sound. Light glows to our left. The curtain wall parts of its own holy accord. She enters, she whirls and whirls on the spot, gazing at her mirror self in her compact, self-obsessed. We're not there. A continuous whirling, an uninterrupted speaking, the face mute, the words abstractly anxious, not acted, declaimed: "Who am I, etc?"

Mémé Thorne Melanie Russell

As she whirls her white skirt spins out, its blur picked up by the camera and relayed, impressionistically off-focus, onto the back wall behind her, the image manipulated by a man behind us at the control desk. We are in her room, delicately walled in, with her (will she acknowledge us? will she ever look at the back wall/screen?). We are with her doubly, we see her small self in the room, see a projected self on a wall, blurred, soon magnified, later multiplied.

I won't tell you the story. I don't think I could. It's a postmodern fable that inclines to evaporate just as you think you've got a handle on it. The words stream by, there are situations, characters, dilemmas, but they're largely abstractions, and their meanings shift, and specificity is thin on the ground—we giggle at the mention of Tempe and Sydenham. We grab at aphorisms and quotables, but they're gone. Nonetheless, there is a kind of pleasure in this and it is darkly evident that, as in a Paul Auster novel (or the marvellous Australian equivalent, Bernard Cohen's *The Blindman's Hat*, Allen & Unwin, 1997), unreasoning will and synchronicity and paranoia are at play. She's in a city. She's after a man. He knows too much about her. Therefore, she will murder him.

Between that and the act (if it ever happens) there's a lot of reflection and anxiety—restless thrashing on a bed, giggly sleepwalking, serious writing, panics (hands clawing, foetal folding), all magnified or multiplied on the screen. There's also the city (as there has to be in this genre), images of the woman isolated, whirling in the streets, Sydney distorted into a monstrous, impersonal metropolis as viewed from the monorail in a speeding black and white loop. And there's a transformation: scarf and sunglasses and a deepening American accent—the shade of Gloria Swanson in *Hollywood Boulevard*? Suddenly we're in a different narrative. The preceding tale has been just that, a story, part of a series. And just as you think there'll be no closure tonight, the Real creeps in as the screen wall floods with (is it?) blood clouding through water. Beneath, the woman sits on a low stool, her back to us, legs wide, washing. She turns to exit. Her face is scarred on one side—bruised or burnt, seared with acid? She exits, written out, as elegantly as she entered.

We have been witness to a curious adoration…and a punishment. The woman, this fiction, this daughter of no one, is gazed upon adoringly, like Anna Karena in a black and white Godard movie or a Greenaway subject (the writing on the wall)—risky women. She is idealised in her pristine room and her existential crisis, her vulnerability, her near nakedness. She doesn't know who she is, but she feels threatened by someone who thinks he does. The woman is dangerous. She is misanthropic (feels "resentment in the suffering of others"; believes, "everyone chooses the manner of his extinction", knows, "I wanted him for his dreams not for love"). She is paranoid. She is a potential murderer—"Why does murder no longer seem alien to my nature?". She has been making a fiction. She is burnt (scarred, is she, as if by scalding coffee—Gloria Grahame in Fritz Lang's *The Big Heat*).

She has been observed intimately. But I don't recall her staring at the screen, looking behind, catching herself unawares. Only when she switches persona does she consciously address the camera, even then she is totally masked. She never engages with herself as image, even though the camera is in the room, or is it? Who is behind the camera then, behind the set, the soundtrack, the text? Critiquing the genre doesn't mean that you'll necessarily escape it, just fall more in love with it and the love-hate images that generate so much anxiety and such beautiful aesthetics. Are we in the audience anything other than seasoned voyeurs at the end of *Nobody's Daughter*? The woman says she is a black hole. Hers is the barely suppressed violence…or ours…or the men behind the woman?

Nobody's daughter, take the camera, use it, pare back the words, dance the rest, turn the camera off from time to time, speak to yourself as if we weren't there, in a whisper, we'll still hear you, but don't forget we're there either, intruders, accomplices, confidantes.

Nobody's Daughter is a significant venture for Sidetrack and a rare example of a sustained relationship between performance, projected image and soundtrack. In a performance scene still dominated by the 80s anti-narrative drive for shows composed of radically juxtaposed bits, there's an admirable attempt at the organic without surrendering productive ambiguity. The text, of which there is too much, veers between the exquisite and the mundane and relies too much on abstraction—specificity won't kill its power. Equally, the performance is pitched for too long at the one note, refusing any play between detachment and intimacy. Moments of movement with potential (the sleepwalk) need expansion and recurrence. The relationship between the play's subject and the camera is limited however beautiful and inventive its current use. This is a fine production admired by reviewers and audiences but the distance between good and great is the space to be traversed in the work's next and necessary manifestation.

Sidetrack Performance Group, Nobody's Daughter, *conceived by Don Mamouney in collaboration with the company; performer, Mémé Thorne; text and direction by Don Mamouney; video installation/action, Vahid Vahed; audio and set design, Don Mamouney and Ian Bowie; lighting design, Ian Bowie; costume design, Mémé Thorne. Sidetrack Theatre, Marrickville, Sydney, November 5-23*

Recycling the wheel

Kerry Casey breaks his feet at a workshop in Meyerhold Biomechanics

Collected Position. Ap Khaz, Passil. *That's Russian for "ready, set and go".*

We start, as we will every day, with the feet, the actor's primary connection with the stage. All starts here, movement, action... "Break the feet" will become an insistent refrain.

More dynamic, says Gennadi, not faster, more dynamic.

Now, we are on the edges of the feet; not bare feet—that may be good for a workshop, but how often do we act in bare feet? Shoes, and trousers—trackies are okay but not shorts or tights, for the same reason as bare feet.

It's Monday morning, September 1, day one of a two-week workshop in Meyerhold Biomechanics sponsored by Sidetrack Performance Group during Contemporary Performance Week (CPW 8) and conducted by Gennadi Bogdanov, a director and co-founder of the Moscow School of Theatrical Biomechanics who, according to the blurb, "is perhaps the most sought-after teacher of Meyerhold techniques in the world today".

We stop and Gennadi demonstrates the nature of an actor's involvement with an action. (Gennadi's reference is always to the 'actor' and the 'play'.) A simple rotation of the ankle can be an action (that revered Stanislavskian term). An action...a *Passil*, says Gennadi in Russian, before demonstrating an enviable engagement with his own foot.

Look! Look at your foot. Nothing mechanical. An actor on stage must be egocentric *! Look at what you are doing! Nothing else matters.*

The effects of this looking are manifold: the eyes are driven to work, no vacant gazes as often happens with physical warm-ups; the mind is separated from the body as a doubling process is initiated; and an actor develops intense concentration.

Break the feet. Look at your feet. And, most especially, Nothing mechanical.

Use your arms, "for balance"; put them in different positions, engage them. The whole body.

By now we are on the sides of our feet—*Break the ankles; more dynamic, not faster, more dynamic.* Then we are placing all the body weight on the blade of the foot and stepping over and around it. Into extreme walks. And so on, up through the body: knees, hips, spine, chest, shoulders etc—always watching, engaging the mind through the eyes. No vacant looks here! The mind directs the body through the eyes.

In an article collected in *Meyerhold on Theatre* (ed. Edward Braun), Meyerhold formulated an algebra of the actor: $N = A_1 + A_2$, where N = the actor; A_1 is the controlling brain; and A_2 is that which executes A_1's idea. Biomechanics is the *practical* work, the training of A_2. It is a model of the actor's duplicity.

Realising the need to go beyond the psychological naturalism of his teacher and mentor Constantin Stanislavski to grapple with emerging modern, and indeed ancient, forms of theatre, Meyerhold saw that work had to be done on performance space and on equipping the actor to inhabit it. A_2 had to be developed.

For Meyerhold, between the author and the director on the one hand, and the audience on the other, lies the actor. The actor must know and control *every movement* made on stage. Everything must be conscious. Nothing superfluous, habitual or unconscious! "The essence of human relationships is determined by gestures, poses, glances and silences...Hence there must be a *pattern of movement* on stage to transform the spectator into a vigilant observer."

We take a break. "$7^1/_2$ minutes," says Gennadi. Thinking he is joking, we laugh and break till Gennadi is back on the floor and we meander in. A week later, we learn that he meant exactly that. A precise sense of *time*. He makes no lectures, no remonstrations.

Back to the feet! A stomp, clear and precise. A little tap-step. Then two, then repetition of them—for ages it seems. Then the ensemble. Everyone together. *Listen. Rhythm.*

Look. Use your arms. Your eyes. Listen. Rhythm. We are all tapping together. It's impossible not to send it up. The arms, the feet, the eyes. The masses!

Ap Khaz, Passil. Bend the knees. Deeper. *Ap Khaz* —the preparation before the action. The shift of weight, the knee bend. Make it conscious, deliberate—the body does it anyway. Where Suzuki attempts to deal with preparatory movement and the shift of weight by abolishing them, Biomechanics embraces them. It is more sympathetic to the human body and the actor's needs. The Ap Khaz is similar to Decroux's *diphthong* but has broader applications.

Remembering accusations of "indicating" and "telescoping" in past theatrical lives, some of us question Gennadi about the *Ap Khaz*—the *refusal* (which is just a name!). He plays an action on one of the women (he seems always a character clown) and, when asked where was the Ap Khaz, where the Passil, he gives a gnomic smile and says they may not always be obvious, but they are there; after which he raves about the importance, on stage, of not showing everything (ye olde 'tip of the iceberg').

When we stop, Gennadi lectures us on work and parodies all our hair brushing, hands on hips, lolling tongues, nose scratching etc—a comic routine of all our personal tics. "Only the essential"...and he talks us into the *neutral* position: feet parallel, palms by our sides, fingers open/long, eyes forward, body erect, and knees slightly bent. The bent knees shift the weight forward, so the position is not really "neutral", more like hand-on-gearstick and riding the clutch—ready to go. As on stage, so in the studio, nothing superfluous.

Lunch, and I have soaked two shirts already! After lunch, for the first week, we work with sticks. Starting with simple balances on the palm of the hand—palm wide open. Then the other hand, the feet, shoulder, until eventually we are spinning and tossing sticks. Anyone who has ever balanced a stick will know the visual focus this entails. The mind, through the eye, directs the body's adjustments and, if the mind wanders for just a moment, it all comes tumbling down.

Ap Khaz, the preparation; *Passil*, the balance. When we get to throw the sticks to each other, the *Ap Khaz* has become the timing device—like jugglers, eyes locked on each other and lowering their clubs together to synchronise their timing.

The mornings, for the first week, are increasingly torturous. There's the stretch and backbend work, the constant and prolonged work on the feet, the shoulders and deep knee bends. If someone pulls out of an exercise, they pull out. "Monitor yourself." There is no dictatorial attitude, no psycho-babble; and so we work, each at our own level.

We run and jump on boxes. They slide on the masonite floor of the Turkish Hut at Addison Road Community Centre. "Use your brakes," *Tormos*, the restraint an actor uses to maintain balance, not to shake or fall. Use your breaks to create a full stop—a *stoika*...There are questions about the *stoika*. Is it a freeze or a frieze or...?

No, it is a full stop. *It is the necessary end position, anything else is "formalist"!* (Which Meyerhold is this?)

We spend hours working on falls so that within days a part of our warm-up is to run and knee-slide with back lowered to the floor. Monitor yourself! Actors, like athletes, and their knees...!

We frame our sessions with three-second jumps—Leap into the air and suspend there for three seconds. They vary in number, but often it's seven in tuck position and, say, five open. Landing in squat, preparation, jump—up and down, up and down, struggling to maintain the suspension for three seconds. Any time energy is lagging, Gennadi may throw this most dynamic action at us. The bastard!

Rhythm again! A set of stairs. Gennadi goes to step up and slides off. But it is all controlled. The weight is still on the standing leg. A talk on Chaplin and falls. We spend days on steps and tables, chairs and boxes applying and developing the same principles and physicality. Eventually we combine the objects and create rhythmic and dramatic patterns over constructed spaces.

The afternoons of the second week are devoted to the *études*—practice pieces for actors. When working, Gennadi tells us, he would do a warm-up then an *étude* before the performance. When not performing, he would do his Biomechanical workout and the *études*. They are ways of practising not just an actor's skills, but are mini-plays. "They contain all the elements of a play!"

Seeing Gennadi's video, many are disappointed—the aesthetics, based upon Byzantine iconography, seem so old-fashioned. "Don't you want to take it further?" is a question to which Gennadi replies, through Eugene Ulma, our translator, that for him, the "wheel" is already invented! It is thanks to this orthodoxy that we are able to experience Meyerhold's vision for A_2—the body of the actor; and something of his still living aesthetics.

Biomechanics is, perhaps, the most cerebral of physical performance disciplines. There seems to be a fear of impulse and release techniques. When questioned about impulse, Gennadi's constant reference is to the actor who, during a sword fight on stage, was so "in the moment" that he stabbed his fellow actor. It emphasises constant control, the "mind through the eyes". This may, in part, help to explain the locked-in-time feel of much of the work. The paradigm implies vigilant leadership, the mind, industriously engaged with the worker, the body, for creative excellence. There is definitely no room for anarchy. Improvisation comes, if at all, from the mind being always a step ahead.

If the aesthetics of the *études* seem old-fashioned, look again at the films of Meyerhold's most famous pupil and collaborator Sergei Eisenstein. There, where Biomechanics is most evident, are some of the most striking images and scenes that will ever be invented, where the actor's body often transcends the envelope of naturalism to express a heightened moment of action or emotion.

If in Australia contemporary performance practitioners seem to act as though the wheel has not yet been invented, it is, perhaps, because we are still in a process of inventing our culture. Within Biomechanics are contained studies of all the elements we continue to experiment with: time, rhythm, space and movement, stylisation, the audience-performer relationship, Asian and traditional theatres, popular and mass cultures, new technologies etc. As the Russians invented Modern Art, so their experiments contain and prefigure our ongoing practices.

"Create the *form* and then *fill* it." says Gennadi. Meyerhold never expected the form itself to be sufficient, the actor would fill it anyway. Biomechanics is an exciting, formal training designed to equip actors for a diversity of performance practices. A useful "wheel" to build upon.

Kerry Casey is an actor and physical performer currently developing a work entitled Tongues with singer Annette Tesoriero, composer Vangelis Papageorgiou and visual artist Tony Twigg.

Something's brewing in the Frank camp. Proclaiming itself in search of a new classicism, this company has shifted ground in its latest production, *Salome*, adapted from the novel by Oscar Wilde. A wickedly anachronistic element has crept into their work, creating, amongst other things, a touch of humour sorely lacking in previous productions.

We see Salome with her pet lion—a stuffed fluffy toy. We hear Herod utter suburban moans, shifting from ruler to lovelorn Humbert Humbert in a moment. The sound environment coaxes us into dignified formality, then opens up the music-box lid, and out comes lounge funk along with, I'm sure of it, a pirouetting ballerina somewhere lingering in the wings. (Well, I imagined her there.) And when Salome strips, there she is in a blood red leotard, hair extensions and all, looking like a new version of Madonna. Not to mention the gushing subtitle of the work, 'Oh yes! He will be mine...', appropriated, I believe, from some Disney or related tale. Don't get me wrong. This isn't a mishmash. There's a new depth, a range of emotion and tonality in this production that I haven't seen before. John Nobbs (Herod) is the most successful—achieving new heights as a performer. Lisa O'Neill stuns as the intense and complex Salome. Philip Gillman (John the Baptist) demands more stage time.. All in all, it's a grim little tale about power and the clash of ideologies, framed in a series of tableaux within a space like a medieval painting. I was left however, with a question. Is this new playfulness signalling a way out of or a development from the Frank nexus of classical dance and Suzuki method?

Maryanne Lynch

Salome *Frank Productions, directed by Jacqui Carroll, Princess Theatre, Brisbane, October 28-November 8.*

The butcher, the hand, the chefs, the lady and the pig

Virginia Baxter feasts on *Ferkel*

Having seen *Ferkel* as a work in progress at The Performance Space studio last year and remembering what it did to my appetite, I wimped-out and ordered the vegetarian option from the fleshy ticket seller in the skin-coloured slip. Nothing prepared me for the ambience of the new venue, however...slipping through the gates of St Stephens Church in the backstreets of Newtown, sidling into the marquee for a drink, nodding to the souls in the cemetery, I swept into Richard Montgomery's gloriously opulent setting—lush gold velvet drapes, imposing stainless steel work benches on black and white tiles, Elgar wafting from the kitchen radio. Gee, I should have dressed. Hay bales for seats and tables give it all a homey touch and dinner's on the stove. Enough time to take in the space, peer into saucepans, sniff at aromas sighing from the pans. Real food in a theatre—always a tricky concept.

Suddenly I recall the power of the moment when the meal was served in Nigel Kellaway's *This Most Wicked Body* (The Performance Space 1995) and how the physical presence of restaurateur Gay Bilson at the stove broke the theatre frame, rendered the plate of mussels suddenly real. And tonight there will be more breakages. Virginia Seymour and Craig Diss are real chefs, moonlighting in the theatre. Fred Lang, when he's not doing stand-up, is really a butcher. The designer's a boilermaker. The only performers are Regina Heilmann, playing Lady Macbeth, and prime-mover in the *Ferkel* project, Deborah Pollard, playing kitchen-hand, pondering as she fine-chops a mound of flour, "When you place a chef before an audience, does the flambé become more flamboyant? Does the butcher's knife develop a more showy action?" Me, I'm dealing with my own demons, steering clear of hooks, knives, the gauntlets of chain mail. I come to my senses at the barrow where a small dead pig lies peacefully resting and the forgetting begins.

Did you know that of all meats, pork is the most difficult to digest but once digested, it's more assimilable than others?

In the course of *Ferkel*, you watch a pig efficiently but never coldly butchered. Fred Lang treads this fine-line beautifully. He knows what he's doing. His delivery may be deadpan but you sense he's on the pig's side. Slicing through the head, he holds it gently in his arms and in one move, breaks the bones of its neck, telling us at the same time that sweating like a pig is a falsehood. Pigs don't sweat. And if someone tells you that you eat like a pig, take it as a compliment. Pigs are omnivorous but selective. They eat what they like first, save the least favoured for last.

Regina Heilmann Heidrun Löhr

Regina Heilmann is at the microphone spitting out Heiner Müller's *Macbeth*. Virginia Seymour is at the stove explaining tonight's menu: *cottechino* sausage, followed by pork crepinettes—small flat sausages encased in caul, the belly of the beast—served with a puree of peas and roasted pumpkin. My ear is on the Müller, my eye is on the pig. My mouth waters and it can't be the peas.

The woman next to me has come for the show but also for the food. She recognises the chefs and is not at all fazed by the combination of performance and food. She was hoping for Monday's show—panfried medallions of pork loin with green tomatoes and eggplant kasundi. In fact, she may come back for a second viewing. She's brought her son who's troubled by the nearness of the animal. He's only going to eat dessert from now on. He refuses to believe her when she tells him that jelly is made from the hoofs of animals. He's too young to have memorised the mind-over-matter of carnivorous consumption. Lucky for him there's a choice of desserts—polenta cake with oranges and mint and toffee, or *sanguinaccio*, made with bitter cocoa, walnuts, sultanas and two litres of pigs blood.

Deborah Pollard, a pushy kitchen-hand, turns the tables on Craig Diss, hurling questions at him from the *SMH*'s Good Living section—the part of the paper consumed by more of the people more of the time as dining devours our social lives. "What was the first thing you ever cooked? Quick!" Meanwhile, Lady Macbeth dresses the butcher who will in turn dress the meat. Kitchen-hand: "What's your favourite takeaway?, Eh, Eh?" Lady Macbeth slavers at the chef as she turns the meat, "Who would have thought the old man had so much blood in him, Virginia". The chef silently stirs.

Having ingested him, we are then addressed by the pig in a very clever routine on politics and pigs written by Paul Dwyer and performed by Fred Lang manipulating a fabulous pig puppet made by Russell Emerson. Later Lady Macbeth will undress the kitchen-hand and scrub her down in a tub, hoist her over her shoulder and leave the theatre and we will remember who and where we are.

Ferkel is the sort of work that could go on turning and transforming. It's certainly a pleasure to see it again, to recognise some elements of the original idea and see its development since then. It's a clever, sophisticated work by a strong team with a good central idea and plenty of resonating lines of possibility. And it tastes good. I was thinking that in food terms, it's probably something like a galantine—a dish in which you bone your meat, stuff it with forcemeat made from other animals, add nuts or truffles, eggs, brandy etc and then press it into a symmetrical shape. The trick with a galantine is to get it to hold together in both shape and flavour. If there's a criticism of *Ferkel*, it is though much of the work is coherent and the flavour good, it sometimes feels like a work made from bits. No doubt, some of the difficulty comes with having to serve a meal in the middle of a performance or to deliver a performance in the middle of a meal. But perhaps *Ferkel 3* might look beyond its disparate elements to what binds the lady, the hand, the chefs, the butcher and the pig.

Ferkel, *artists as indicated with Chris Murphy, co-deviser; St Stephens Hall, Newtown, Sydney November 5-16.*

A full house of confessions

Suzanne Spunner joins the audience for Playworks at La Mama

Generous Confessions was a one-day seminar with rehearsed readings of short commissioned works presented by Playworks, the National Centre for Women Performance Writers, at La Mama as an umbrella event of The Melbourne Writers Festival. It was significant because it put resources and focus on Melbourne writers (like any national organisation based in Sydney, Playworks is sometimes accused of being Sydneycentric) and it also added a dimension to the Melbourne Writers Festival which is singularly lacking—a space to consider performance writing.

Under the direction of Melanie Beddie, six writers—Margaret Cameron, Sue Giles, Sara Hardy, Johann McIntyre, Tee O'Neill and Karen Corbett—were each asked to write a five-minute piece which addressed the meaning for them of "theatricality". Playworks' Director Clare Grant admitted that this was "an enormous brief". At the writers' disposal were a group of excellent and generous performers—Peter Houghton, Alice McCreadie, Margaret Mills, Ian Scott and Maria Theodorakis—all well-versed in making an hour or two on a script look like a week of rehearsal.

At the conclusion of what turned out to be quite lengthy performances, discussion was generously mediated by Maude Davey. The works, however, were a mixed bag with only two writers, Sara Hardy and Margaret Cameron—significantly, both experienced writer-performers and highly literate in the exploration of theatre form—filling the "enormous brief".

After the performances, manifestos on the future of working in live performance were presented by performer-academic Yoni Prior, writer-director Patricia Cornelius and director-writer Kate Cherry.

Among her many provocative and thoughtful comments Yoni Prior said:

"I am as consoled as anyone by a nice play...with consistent characters, beginning, middle and end points, pithy dialogue and neat composition. But don't tell me they bear anything but superficial resemblance to existence and please present me with some options".

The beginnings of such well-made plays were in the pieces by Johann McIntyre (*The Miracle of Birth*) and Tee O'Neil (*The Bush at Night*)—not "nice" because they looked at pretty ghastly male characters, however their form was essentially naturalism or realism, and both felt to me that they might just as well be realised as film or television scripts.

Patricia Cornelius, again amongst much more, talked about the primacy of the actor, the mesmerising presence, the body-voice connection. The actor as meta-subject was highlighted in Sue Giles' *A Very Short Play* which animated the censuring, interior voice of the performer. However, in staying within the confines of the device without employing it to interrogate the content, the work became a solipsistic exercise, promising more than it could deliver.

Kate Cherry argued that the place of theatre now was once again to take up social and political protest, to provoke debate about contemporary issues. There was an element of protest in Karen Corbett's untitled confessional but it rambled over a plethora of issues and was not redeemed by the revelation of the Koori connection at the end.

Only in Margaret Cameron's *The Night* and Sara Hardy's *Oddly Lunchbox* did I sense some of the "options" that Yoni Prior asked for. The theatricality of these pieces was contained in the animation of the live presence of the performer making things happen in the actual space of the theatre over time: a woman leaves the theatre part way through a performance; a length of elastic stretches between three people and reverberates across a chain of relationships.

La Mama was the ideal venue for these confessions, its cramped intimacy creating camaraderie. We were all in together, some 60 of us—writers, performers, speakers and audience all facing each other, and we left with some of Sara Hardy's "words that feed her", a desire for "faith, hope, love—and the greatest of these, Full House!".

Papers given at the Generous Confessions *seminar will be published in the Playworks newsletter beginning with Yoni Prior in the December 97 issue. Information: Playworks Tel 02-92648414 Fax 02-92648449*

Dark magic

Artrage prompts second thoughts from Sarah Miller on the monologue; plus new shows from Yirra Yaakin and Black Swan

Georgina Naidu in *Three Weird Sisters*

Did I not say—writing in the last issue of *RealTime*—that the pervasiveness of the one-person show had reached phenomenon status. Proving that I have a certain omniscience (sic) in these matters, the outstanding performances at this year's Artrage were all in the area of the performed monologue.

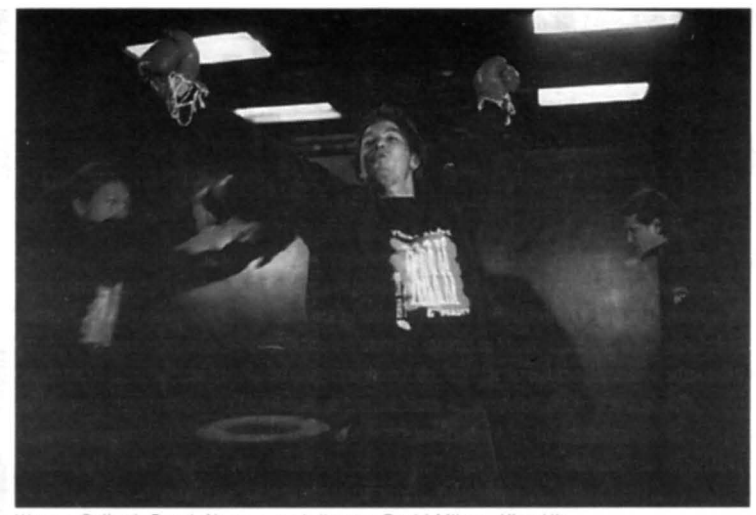
And outstanding they certainly were. From the Toronto Fringe Festival, presented back-to-back and both directed by Canadian director, Brian Quirt, the extraordinary talents of writer-performers Sean Dixon with *Falling Back Home* and Michael Healey with *Kicked*, shared a fascination with language, over-flowing with possibility and presented with a deft physicality. This was no prison house of language. Language flew and climbed to extraordinary heights; embracing the incomprehensible; encompassing both the luminous and the starkly brutal.

Dixon's *Falling Back Home* was an extraordinarily fantastical and poetic work—magic realist you might call it. Dixon weaves words around the generations of 'his' extraordinary family, a family enthralled by and in thrall to birds. From the opening image of his grandfather, whose entire body is shaved on his wedding night by every member of his family, to the birds that inhabit his grandmother's wedding dress and fly around the bridal chamber on her wedding night, to the husband whose snores sound like bird calls, this is a truly extraordinary piece of writing. Dixon performs these fantastical family fables with acute sensitivity and dexterity, pausing occasionally to doubt, to wonder at the 'truth' of this endless storytelling. So simple. So complex. So fabulist!

Michael Healey's piece, *Kicked*, explored much darker terrain: the abduction and murder of a twelve year old school girl. His story is much grittier, scarier, bringing the audience down from the luminous heights to the depths of intolerable and meaningless brutality. Healey performs, primarily, the role of the policeman haunted, both literally and metaphorically, by the murder of a child. He is also the driver of the school bus, a shoe salesman and a doctor. The effects of this tragedy on a community is thus explored through a cast of seemingly peripheral characters. The conceit on which this work turns is an obsession with pop music. It lends (even the Jon Bon Jovi) an extraordinary pathos, humour and complexity to this profoundly intelligent and moving work.

From the writer-performers to the writer-director, another highlight was the trilogy of monologues by Mathew Lucas, a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts. His *Three Weird Sisters*, written for and performed by women, were connected by themes of frustration and thwarted ambition. As a writer, Lucas' writing is clearly 'younger' than that of his Canadian counterparts, but fascinating nonetheless.

Three Weird Sisters was performed respectively by Annette Shun Wah in her first stage role, Laura Black, an actress well known to Western Australian audiences and Georgina Naidu. In *I'm no Imelda* Shun Wah played a kind of generic Asian housewife, demonstrating an obsession with cleaning and shoes. Laura Black's *Rural Woman of the Year* was a brilliant play-off between the ambitions of a small town woman and ABC politics whilst Georgina Naidu's *Second Witch and Lady MacDuff*, the story of an actor still playing bit parts in Perth, was by turns, splendidly theatrical, maudlin and hysterical.



Warren Collard, Derek Nannup and director David Milroy, *King Hit*

More fables from KAOS Theatre with *Buffo*, a light-hearted and tightly performed piece of theatrical buffoonery. Great to see how this young ensemble has grown in skill, commitment and rigour over the past year.

These are definitely the kinds of work that should be promoted through festivals like Artrage. Now if they could just do something about the visual arts program...!

Three Weird Sisters, *Rhinoceros Productions*; Buffo, *KAOS Theatre, Blue Room Theatre, September 18-28*

Artrage Festival, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, October 7-18

Black Swan's *After Dinner*, written by Andrew Bovell was promoted as a brilliant comedy but came across as remarkably dated and curiously under-written. Fans of BBC style comedies such as the excruciating *Men Behaving Badly* or *Pilgrims Rest* would have been in for a treat with this one. Directed by Andrew Ross and performed by Raechelle Lee, Kim De Lury, Helen Buday, Anna Mercer and Ben Rogan, this was snickering at the suburbs at its tackiest. I found myself comparing it—unfavourably—with Sidetrack Performance Group's more up-to-the-moment and ensemble-developed, *sit.com*. An excellent performance nonetheless from Helen Buday in particular and to a lesser extent, naff blokes, Kim De Lury and Ben Rogan. Black Swan's history and charter makes this production an incomprehensible choice.

After Dinner, *Black Swan Theatre Company Subiaco Theatre Centre, October 20-November 15*

Perth's Noongar Theatre Company, Yirra Yaakin, mounted its first 'adult' production, *Runamuck*, for the Festival of Perth in February of this year. *King Hit* is its third production and whilst it's still a tad rough around the edges, there's no doubt that this company has matured extraordinarily in a matter of months.

King Hit is the profoundly moving story of Geoffrey Narkle, a member of the stolen generation and an Aboriginal tent boxer. Performed by Derek Nannup with Kelton Pell (replacing Warren Collard) and Lynley Narkle, this play was almost impossible to sit through. Unbearably sad, its extraordinary achievement was to build the narrative so transparently from beginning to middle to end, so that there could be no mistaking the locus of the pain, but more importantly the anger, the rage and the seemingly incomprehensible self-destructiveness. No, Pauline. No, John, there are no neat, clean, white, middle-class answers to this one but an apology might be a start down a different road.

King Hit, *Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre, Dolphin Theatre, University of WA, October 23-November 1*

A difficult journey

Maryanne Lynch navigates her responses to a new play by Katherine Thomson

The Protagonist

I am a difficult woman. I have a sister whom I love, a place to call home, and a job which pays the bills. I stumble across a conspiracy between local government and property developers. I speak out and am first castigated, then ostracised, by the township. I don't shut up. I don't dress up. I don't cosy up to the people who tell me that they can help me if only I am sensible. I remember another life, another cover-up. I remember my parents' deaths: is it possible to die of shame? No more lies! I have a mission. The Angel of Truth, ready or not. Open the mouth, let it all out, the past is present and the present isn't going to get away this time. You can call me what you like but I'm happy to call myself a difficult woman.

The Critic

I'm watching a play. No, the production of a play. I think that it's a drama, but perhaps it's a melodrama. I'm not sure. There's a woman, and a sister, and an old bloke who's the friend-of-the-family sort, and a Rotarian, and this woman who just appears and disappears, and these shopkeepers, haberdashers, and no one seems to belong to the same story 'cos we've got hand acting, and understated acting and film noir acting and Sullivans acting and ham acting and...next thing you know, the old bloke's pulled out a gun and stuck it in that woman's mouth! And there's this beautiful hull of a shipwreck but everyone's down on the flat 'cept for entrances and exits, so why bother? I can hear a script struggling for breath; I can see complexities and complications; but I can't make out what play this is. A lightbulb goes on inside my head: is this a suburban epic erroneously presented as an Epic of Homeric proportions?

The Punter

She is a cardigan-clad, bow-legged woman standing in a dead hull. The scale's all wrong: she's so small against the beams curving up to the sky. Is she making herself ridiculous? Has she a vendetta? Is she telling the truth? Questions and more questions. Jackie Weaver is playing the woman, Bea, as a mixture of her more famous counterpart, Franca Arena, and Noeline Donaher, all mouth and shoot from the lip. (I've never seen Jackie looking so frumpy.) And yet...there is a nervous fidgeting of the hands and a defensive mothering of her sister and nothing to be gained by speaking out. Intriguing; and the motivations remain cloudy—just the way I like them.

The Writer

There are stories within stories. The first one you know. But then there's the father who suicided because of another cover-up; the mysterious passerby waiting to hear if she is going to be charged with culpable driving (why is she drawn to Bea?); the sister having an affair with Bea's boss; the haberdashers' drowned son; the unrequited passion of the family friend for the sister; and more. How do these stories thread together? What is playwright Katherine Thomson's intent? She says: "It's about whistle blowers". Yes, but I think that there's another theme and it may be the central one. The bankruptcy of community, especially in rural areas where communal traces are still in evidence, and how this bankruptcy permeates all aspects of life—economic, social, political, spiritual, cultural, etc. And the cause of this bankruptcy? There is no simple explanation but economic rationalism looms large in the here and now. Hypothesis: Thomson is sketching one version of Australia in the 90s—a township of unresolved sorrows and ugly desires—with lessons for all.

The Company

This is the premiere production of a new play. The challenges are immediately apparent. New work is so often produced prematurely but the catch is that the playwright often needs to see it up in order to know where to next. Queensland Theatre Company and Melbourne Theatre Company are co-producing the work, building further links between the personnel at each company as well as giving Thomson the chance to refine and revisit her work—a chance that every writer wants. QTC has played it hard this year, bursting onto the local and national stage with success after success. *Navigating*, the second-last play in the season, is riding on a wave. It is easily the most challenging—and unresolved—work of the year, relentless in its plotting and dramatic intensity, and it is just as well that it comes where it does (and surely no coincidence). The production has holes but the script allows no exit.

Navigating, *Queensland Theatre Company, Suncorp Theatre, Brisbane, October 16-November 1; Melbourne Theatre Company, November 11-December 13*

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OnScreen

film, media and techno-arts

Feature

Dreammaking

Catriona McKenzie interviews *Radiance* director Rachel Perkins

Radiance, *written by Louis Nowra, is the first feature for director Rachel Perkins. It is the story of three sisters who are brought together after the death of their mother. These three very different characters thrash out their differences in a drama that is both moving and funny.*

CM How did Radiance *come about? Did you see the stage play?*

RP No. Trisha Moreton, my cousin, was doing her end-of-year show at Eora, in Redfern. Trisha was one of the last performers and she stood up and did May's monologue from *Radiance*. Her performance was stunning and I thought, what an amazing text. The next day I rang Louis Nowra about getting a copy of the play with a view to adapting it to a half hour. Louis was only interested in doing it as a feature, and if I directed. So I approached Andy Myers and Ned Landers about producing it and we developed, adapted and financed it quite quickly from there.

CM How did you find the process of adaptation from stage to screen?

RP Quite difficult because I'd never adapted anything, I'd never done any drama or written anything. So Louis wrote up a first draft, and, from that point, Louis, Ned Lander, the producer, and myself sat down on a daily basis and worked through the adaptation. We knew we wanted to go into production quickly and that was the energy which drove us. That may be one of the project's downfalls—that we didn't spend enough time developing it. Anyway, I didn't want to lose the essence of the play and I didn't want to open it up too much because that was the beauty of the original text I suppose, but I started getting nervous that it wasn't 'filmic' enough, so I got all these books—you know, like Linda Seger's *How to Adapt your Film*—and I'd sit down with Louis and I'd say, chapter by chapter—"Have we done this...?" He put up with me doing graphs and charts and stuff like that and came up with the final draft which we took into rehearsals.

CM You had a long rehearsal process. How did it go with the actors?

RP I hadn't directed anything before and we wanted to involve the actors in the adaptation, so we decided on a long rehearsal process—five weeks, which is quite long. We could have brought them in earlier but we didn't confirm our cast until quite late in the piece.

CM How was the casting process?

RP Interesting. There's a limited pool of Indigenous actors—women—and we'd tested 20 and still not come up with an ensemble that worked. Fate stepped in because originally it was Trisha who attracted us to the project but because she was my cousin and not a professional actor we were hesitant to use her. Finally in the last hour we went back to her and said "Do you want to do it?". She said, "Yes, I knew it was mine anyway even when you knocked me back the first time". Deb Mailman came into it quite late. We went up to see her perform Nona in the QTC production of *Radiance* and she was so amazing, we cast her immediately. We always wanted Rachel Maza, but originally we thought she might be May so we re-jigged it and cast her as Chrissie, Trisha as May and Deb as Nona, and that really worked.

Radiance was also a low budget film—1.4 million dollars—so we were always looking at ways of cost-saving. We did all the pre-production out of my two-bedroom house and we cut on film for eight weeks. We used a small crew and shot in the studio for half the shoot, then on location for the rest of it. We're also doing some of our digital stuff through the Film School.

Radiance is unique in some ways because, unlike a lot of other Australian films being produced at the moment, we don't have a distributor locked in. That was a big issue for us because it meant we had no guaranteed release at the end of the film and no guaranteed returns for private investment which formed half of the budget. It was radical but we felt we couldn't wait for a distributor to make up their mind so we just went ahead. What we're doing now is finishing the film, then we're going to auction it off. We have interest from a couple of distributors and we're talking about launching it at various festivals overseas. It's a dangerous approach but Australian feature film production is so dependent on distributors. If you don't get a distribution guarantee, you don't get a film—the FFC won't fund you, the AFC won't fund you. So our filmmaking is in the hands of three or four distributors, unless you go internationally and that's even more difficult. We might not get a distributor at all—but we probably will.

CM How has the feedback been?

RP Good. We always wanted to bring a lot of people into the screenings and it's paid off. From rough cut to fine cut it's changed a lot in terms of the pace and content, and that's been good.

It was hard because it's got no stars in it. I'm not a known director, it's about three Aboriginal women—not exactly what you'd call "marketable". You know, originally we were thinking of casting a bit of a star to make it more attractive but we thought that's not what this film's about. It's a small film about three Aboriginal women—we should keep to the integrity of that and hopefully that integrity reflects in the product and people will be attracted to that.

CM How was the directing process?

Rachel Perkins

RP Well, I'd never directed drama before. Usually what happens is you make a 10-minute film, then a half hour, then 10 years later you make a feature. I was terrified about working with actors because I knew nothing about acting at all. I started reading Stanislavski, terrified that I'd have to know all this stuff. The start of rehearsal was particularly terrifying—you know actors are known for saying, "You can't tell me to be happy, you've got to tell me what my motivation is". So the first and second days we all sat around and read the script and we're all putting off getting on the floor. Finally on the third day we started mucking around. I said, "Is this it?—you do something, I comment on it, we change it. Is this how you do it?" I don't know what method we used, but it worked.

I wouldn't have been able to do that so easily if I'd been working with more experienced or white actors but it was the fact that we were all comfortable with each other that we could work together easily. Without that supportive cast it would have been a disaster. Having the five weeks rehearsal meant we were prepared when we went into production which was good for the crew, who were really experienced.

CM Obviously blackfellas were in front of the camera. What about crew? You worked with Warwick Thornton, it was his first feature. How was that?

RP Because I was beginning, I wanted to have someone there on my own level who I could relate to. That was why we used Warwick apart from the fact that his work is *really* good. We had a unique way of communicating, sometimes it was grunts, but we could work that way and be comfortable. We need to develop an industry for ourselves as Indigenous filmmakers—and the way of doing that, apart from training schemes and initiatives, is to work with each other.

CM What other Indigenous crew were involved?

RP That was pretty much it. We tried to get more people but for a number of reasons it didn't happen. That was disappointing but when you look there isn't a lot of Indigenous

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Feature

Dreammaking

• *from page 17*

crew experienced in a lot of the roles, like Sound Recording, Camera Assisting, Art Department. It was hard to crew those roles. That will change the more drama we do.

CM Given the current political climate, how do you see the next five years in terms of Indigenous productions and our participation in the industry in general?

RP We've had a lot of training opportunities but what we need now is production opportunities. We need more high-end documentaries, more drama and I think it's up to us to create those opportunities for ourselves in an industry framework. There are a number of gaps which have to be filled for that to happen. We need more producers and script writers. Initiatives at the AFC have developed directors but not producers and writers and those are the key roles to start projects. The other roles flow from that. The broadcasters also need to make a bigger commitment to buying Indigenous-sourced product. The ABC and SBS need to increase their participation in that area.

Deborah Mailman, Rachel Maza and Trisha Moreton in *Radiance*

CM How do you see the role of the AFC?

RP They've played a big role in terms of Indigenous initiatives. They've developed six directors every year and organised industry attachments with Indigenous personnel, but I think the bureaucracies have to make themselves accessible to writers, and not just wait for projects to come in. One of the ways to do that is to have Indigenous people working at the AFC who know the industry in terms of Indigenous people and what they're doing and develop those individuals. Those white bureaucrats also need to know who's out there too because at the moment their attention is the non-indigenous, independent sector. They need to find out who is in the area. That includes the state agencies. They need to make more links with the Indigenous filmmaking community and I don't think they have that much.

NIMA (National Indigenous Media Association of Australia) is still in its embryonic stages. It's been around for three years. It's got a bigger role to play but it's like we're setting up an Indigenous AFC and the AFC's been going for 20 years now and it's finally got its shit together. I think it will take a long time for NIMA to satisfy the vision we have for it. We want it to be a place which creates opportunity for Indigenous filmmakers. NIMA has to form an Indigenous distribution network and stronger links for our own industry and also bring Indigenous filmmakers and the mainstream industry closer together by making closer links with ASDA and SPAA and the ABC and SBS, Commercial TV Production fund.

CM What are your plans now?

RP I've got to go back to the ABC for another six months. I've got a 10-part, half hour per episode documentary series that's going to be in development soon. We're negotiating to do a drama series with the ABC, we've got another in-house series of *Songlines* coming up. That's 20 hours of production. We want to get into one-hour documentaries now, start doing a series of those for the 1998–99 financial year. The ABC has about sixty Indigenous staff, so we'd be looking to maintain and increase that over the next ten years and increase production. I also have another feature in development, plus I'm negotiating at the moment for a four-part, one-hour drama series for me to direct. So there's a lot happening.

CM George Miller believes cinema has become the new secular religion and we, as filmmakers, are the new priests. Did you see his 40,000 Years of Dreaming?

RP No.

CM I think the title's interesting. He uses it as a catchphrase for the whole of Australian cinema. It makes reference to the history of Aboriginal Australia without really engaging with what that means in the 90s and I think that's indicative. 'Indigenous' has become the focus of the nation's energy without mainstream Australia really understanding why. Do you see this reflected in the cinema?

RP I think it's only now that we're starting to make an impact in terms of Indigenous representation on our screens. I think we're seeing the fruits of the last 20 years now. There's two things—there's the community-based sector where we make things for our own people and then there's the sector where we're making films for a nation-wide audience. I think that the second sector is what we'll see happen now in terms of getting out top, high-end production onto national and international screens. I think we're going to see political and entertainment type programming coming from Indigenous filmmakers, and a different perspective on Australian settlement and on what it means to be Aboriginal today and in the future.

CM With the 2000 Olympics coming up, the government needs to be seen to have solidarity. I think it will translate to the screen.

RP Absolutely, and I challenge Indigenous filmmakers to make films about what's happening now because I think a lot of them take the easy path. We should aim at showing a different side of what the government is pushing.

It's very difficult to make films that are against the government line when you're government funded. The Reconciliation Council hasn't funded anything which is critical of the Australian government or the current situation, They've funded all positive image stuff, mostly produced by white media houses. I think we're heading for a time of confrontation, particularly around the Olympics where everyone will want it to be nice and happy and just about sports. We'll want to exploit that opportunity and use it to put our issues on an international stage.

Maybe I should be doing something on Jabiluka or Native Title. I think it's a constant conflict for Indigenous filmmakers—what sort of films we should be making and what will be most beneficial. Do I do entertainment drama or hard line political stuff?

CM I don't see cinema, or even television for that matter, as just entertainment. I think it can be more than that. There is an effect. Look at the situation in the United States.

RP Absolutely. They have sitcoms and drama. African-American people get leads in films.

CM Did you watch Eddie Murphy's Boomerang *last night? It had a completely black cast—I think there was one white woman in it; she was a waitress. It was a salient comment.*

RP I think that goes miles for making a difference. It not only makes Indigenous people feel they have a place but makes white people accept them more. It's hard to define but if you look at American TV, they have the quota system for black cast in film and TV, so you see black judges and policemen. I think it makes a big difference.

CM If you accept the notion that cinema is the new religion, we can take it further and say it affects our ability as a people to dream new ways of being. What's open and available to us—the possibilities. We have to be allowed to dream.

RP Yes. At the moment it's like Terra Nullius on the screen. Frieda Glynn who had the vision for CAAMA (Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association) would go to the cinema in the 60s and watch all these movies and she loved them all but she didn't feel part of it. There was never anyone like her on the screen, so she started CAAMA to put Aboriginal people on screen. It's still relevant today and we have a responsibility to it. That's what I want to do...and try to make some money.

Catriona McKenzie is a young filmmaker. Her first film, BOX, *recently premiered at* The Festival of the Dreaming. *She is currently planning her next short film.*

The OnScreen supplement of RealTime is funded by the Australia Council, the federal government's arts advisory body and the NSW Ministry for the Arts.
RealTime acknowledges the financial support of the Australian Film Commission and the NSW Film & Television Office.

OnScreen is submitted to the following for indexing:
Film Literature Index, Film and TV Center, State University of New York at Albany, Richardson 390C, 1400 Washington Ave, Albany NY 1222 USA;
Film Index International, BFI Library and Information services, British Film Institute, 21 Stephen St, London W1P 2LN, Great Britain;
International Index to Film/TV, FIAF Periodical Indexing Project, 6 Nottingham St, London W1M 3RB, Great Britain;
APAIS, National Bibliographic publications, National Library of Australia, Canberra ACT, Australia 2600

Review

Questions of nation and neglect

Raffaele Caputo compares three episodes from the *Century of Cinema* screened on ABC TV

This review focuses on three of the BFI-commissioned *Century of Cinema* documentaries recently screened on ABC TV—*A Personal Journey With Martin Scorsese Through American Movies*, Nagisa Oshima's *100 Years of Japanese Cinema*, and George Miller's *White Fellas Dreaming*.

Not entirely a new problem, there appears an unavoidable question to be asked of the documentaries: What is missing? It is one of the concerns expressed in critiques by Brian McFarlane ("Typically British") and Chris Watson ("Cinema of Unease") in a forthcoming issue of *Metro*, no. 113. Neither McFarlane nor Watson is in disagreement with the central theses presented, but generally agree that the documentaries are compromised by their neglect of the crafty contributions made to national cinemas through genre filmmaking—melodramas and comedies in the case of McFarlane; a substantial log of films from the adolescent or teen movie sub-genre in the case of Watson. (In these and other documentaries of this sort one can safely assume that also in neglect, in large part, are experimental film movements, the contributions of various socio-cultural groups—Indigenous, gay, feminist filmmakers—and, ironically, the documentary form itself.)

McFarlane and Watson's articles are inclusive and corrective, but impotently so, because born of a kind of tautology in the sense that neither engages with the problem of defining national cinema, or, more broadly, with the question of historical method. In brief, a national cinema is typically defined by (i) its feature film industry and (ii) the distinctiveness of its feature films, which also means their non-genericness, and, by extension, the distinctiveness of cinemas other than American. Hence the tautology: the fact of neglect within a 'study' of a national cinema is underscored where national cinema by definition necessitates the probability of 'neglect'—that is, through selection. So too with history: to select or sift through films, events and individuals is a central, if implicit, condition of the historian's craft.

The first point is of no surprise then. Of the three documentaries under review, in Scorsese's genre is one of the central edicts of American cinema, it simply cannot be ignored; whereas in Miller and Oshima's documentaries, genre is something annexed to a national film industry but not a defining characteristic. Overall it would be wise to resist any thought that the BFI documentaries lay claim to completeness or objectivity. To entertain such a claim would imply that film history and the concept of a national cinema are somehow identical (rather than complementary), wherein national cinema is a priori conceived as a whole equalling the sum of its parts.

Contrary to expectations, mostly my own, these *Century of Cinema* documentaries are not quite as normative as they may at first appear. For one, there is certainly no contrivance of detachment: the makers are definitely aware of the role of selection, of having to make choices, of delimiting the perspective. Martin Scorsese admits it from the start: "I cannot be objective here...This is like an imaginary museum...we just can't enter every room". And it is selection partly of a personal nature and partly based on an established canon. Thus what we have here are narrators who, despite some display of modesty, are acutely aware of being major players within larger narratives. It makes for a fruitful configuration of a personal, somewhat ritualistic, spiritually elusive micro-history of the maker tangled up in the macro-history of social, industrial and conceptual concerns of a national cinema.

If we are to look for a common element between the three documentaries then it is in what binds the micro and macro histories. Remarkably, all the makers, at some point in their documentaries, make use of a kind of tableau vivant of the cinema-going experience of their youth. Each in their own way gives a highly descriptive and emotionally charged set-piece of their primordial fascination with cinema. Scorsese tells of the spell cast by the black and white stills of the only film book he could find in the New York Public Library, *A Pictorial History of the Movies* by Deames Taylor; of having borrowed it several times over, resisting the temptation to steal its pictures, and of confessing to once or twice giving in to the urge. And then of the impact of seeing King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* when he was four years-old, taken by his mother because it was condemned by the Church. Similarly, George Miller elaborates on how The Star Theatre loomed large during his childhood in the 'never-never' town of Chinchilla, Queensland. The Star was a sanctum, particularly the space beneath the screen where he could sneak to when not having the admission price or when the movie was forbidden to children. Understandably, in a town where his family took pride in possessing the first flush-toilet, the Saturday matinee was for Miller a "ritual more compelling and awe-inspiring than church". And for Oshima the key moment is seeing Keisuke Kinoshita's *The Garden of Woman* in the spring of 1954, a film about a young school girl disobeying a cardinal rule and challenging the authority figures of her school. Undecided about a career in film, for Oshima *The Garden of Woman* convinces him of "what can be done with film". Like Miller, cinema unsettles his view of the world, and in the same year as Kinoshita's film, Oshima becomes an assistant director.

From this personal perspective, no matter how comprehensive the macro-history, the whole is always something more, and something other, than the sum of its parts. Each description or re-enactment is remarkable also for its consistency of theme, not of mere enchantment with images, but of experiencing guilty pleasures, of tasting forbidden fruits, and of breaking codes.

Take, for instance, the way *White Fellas Dreaming* is schematised: it works by a series of narrative blocks, each block announces a theme-subject (landscape, sexuality, women, bushrangers, the Aboriginal people etc), and each tells a potted story of 'progress' from (a sometimes naive) early Australian cinema to (a sometimes wiser, liberated) contemporary Australian cinema. There is continual reciprocity between the past and present, between the subject matter of the films and the society; a reciprocity which is particularised by films marking turning points, ruptures, gaps, or challenges to established attitudes (especially the films of the 1970s onward in relation to those of the 1930s). But these are turning points, ruptures, and challenges that look to the continuity of 'something else' or 'other'.

Like Scorsese, the tableau is for Miller not only personal and emotional, it is decidely spiritual and common to all. But there is a difference; Miller is obliged to paint with very broad brushstrokes and it tends to be at a cost, for the individual's role in the flux of phenomena is somewhat subordinate to a grand purpose. For example, rarely does Miller make mention of the creative contributions of individual directors—an "unwitting servant" of a universal storytelling tradition is how Miller characterises himself with the making of *Mad Max II*. There is the sense of the personal-spiritual linked to the struggle for self-definition of a nation, but the relationship is unilateral. One cannot help but feel that the advance billing of *White Fellas Dreaming* somehow ends up swept aside in the call to nationhood; and it is ambivalent, especially with Joseph Campbell at his side, whether the concept of nation is not actually antithetical to a universal storytelling tradition.

In contrast, when it comes to the traffic between the past and present, between the films and the wider world, Scorsese emphasises the individual above all else. (Perhaps it's because he gets to play in the greater part of the playground: *A Personal Journey* is made up of three one-hour parts rather than the customary one-hour episode.) Nonetheless, like Miller, Scorsese works in blocks and, here too, each block is marked by turning points or ruptures. But what gives meaningful synthesis is the role of the director.

Scorsese's three-part documentary is a highly systematic combination of already-known ideas, facts and contexts. The first part deals with the rise of the studio system, describing the vertical integration of production, distribution and exhibition as necessitating conventions and stereotypes. Hence, genre is pivotal. The second part tackles technology and narrative techniques: the invention of visual grammar such as cross-cutting and the composition of shots, then the coming of sound, followed by the three-colour process and the wide-screen format, and then of course the arrival of the computer. And the third part takes on the decline of Hollywood and the concomitant breaches of the production code. The showmen of the studio era are now gone and the agents haved moved in, Hollywood is no longer the hub of production, shooting goes on location, a gritty realism creeps in, and issues once deemed too controversial are now taking a privileged place on the screen.

Each part leads into the next and the whole becomes a progressive reconstruction of American cinema from the silent years right through to the cusp of Scorsese's own generation. But not for one second is the reconstruction anonymous. For Scorsese there is absolutely no question of who holds proprietory rights to the story. From the moment he concurs with Frank Capra—"Art should be one man and that man is the director"—the cumulative effect tends to be an obsessive roll-call of pioneers, innovators and code breakers. Under Scorsese the director is like a personification of fertile anarchy: each part is further subdivided into manageable blocks having to do with the responses of various directors to technical limitations, new inventions, commercial imperatives and the restrictions of established beliefs. (To which Scorsese provides his sometimes peculiar labels—"The Director's Dilemma", "The Director as Smuggler", "The Director as Iconoclast", and so on.) So no matter who controls the studio, the mainspring of film production is the director; no matter the conventions of the genre, the mainspring of creative interpretation is the director; no matter who invents the technology, the mainspring of its use is the director; no matter how the times "they are a-changing", the mainspring of loosening the production code is the director. Without the figure of the director all else would be mere chronological data.

There's no need to single out names, it's enough to say that this documentary is made up mostly of an established canon—it's like a film course in American cinema. Even so, surprisingly, there's still something worthwhile in Scorsese having drawn our attention to the director once again. Paradoxically, by asserting self-expression so strongly he seems to successfully liberate the figure of the director from the narrow confines of auteurist theory. Indeed, his view is a little less than theory, a little less dogmatic. As he takes us through the journey it becomes very apparent that the director is not an invariant, autonomous being, but rather one that allows a search for unity-in-diversity, and which manages to have the viewer enter into spiritual communion with the movies. His final words are worth quoting at length, words which remind us of Scorsese's experience of *Duel in the Sun*, a film in conflict with the Church, and which answers the puzzle of a four year-old: "I didn't really see a conflict between the church and the movies, the sacred and the profane...both are places for people to come together and share a common experience. And I believe there is a spirituality in films, even if it's not one which can supplant faith...It's as if movies answer an ancient quest for the common unconscious, they fulfil a spiritual need that people have to share a common memory".

Of the three, Nagisa Oshima's *100 Years of Japanese Cinema* appears as the most conventional. There is a greater sense of detachment, of films, individuals and events speaking for themselves, of the history of Japanese cinema unfolding naturally. And, correspondingly, there is no sense at all of to-ing and fro-ing between the past and present; the account is strictly chronological. Oshima simply begins at the beginning and moves in one linear direction, through successive dates and rather predictable stages—"First Golden Age of Japanese Cinema", "Second Golden Age", "Third Golden Age". Moreover, unlike Miller and Scorsese, Oshima is never once seen on screen as a narrator-presenter, he instead employs the voice-over, a cherished device of the documentary form.

But it's perhaps because of these normative conventions that this documentary is of greater fascination. There is a moment of shock in which it seems that all these normative conventions are a pretense. It is of course the moment when Oshima refers to Kinoshita's *The Garden of Woman*, for he shifts from the third-person narrative voice to the first-person. And it's a shift he deliberately draws our attention to: "I saw this movie in the spring of 1954. Please forgive the shift to the personal first-person, but it is the year I myself became part of Japanese cinema". The viewer is suddenly jolted out of complacency with an account that had been unfolding of its own accord.

When for a time it appeared that the micro history was non-existent, without warning, it is centre stage. The 'I' has a kind of double inflection: it's as though Oshima is saying "I make history (as a player)" and then again, "I make history (as narrator-historian)". The striving for objectivity and completeness is made incompatible with his own irreducible perspective—all history is its presentation, all history is not without its presenter. (The documentary is after all given the sly title of "Nagisa Oshima's 100 Years of Japanese Cinema".)

Oshima returns to the third-person on the grounds that by the 1980s he has moved to France to make *Max Mon Amour*; an elder-statesman but no longer a part of Japanese cinema: "while naturally an Oshima film, I'm not sure I can consider it a Japanese film". But the 'damage' is already done, the shift reflects back on the reconstruction so far, all that has gone before is now under question. Equally, all that will follow is of no fixed abode.

Few documentaries on the cinema are as neat as this and yet few are as problematic. For where in Scorsese and Miller fixed points of the compass are happily reached, in Oshima the fixed points are taken a step further. They cannot be viewed independently

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Essay

Prophetic postscripts

Eddy Jokovich looks at two recent films on the Balkan conflict

In 1989, when Alexander Dubcek took to the podium to declare the success of the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, Europe was looking towards the burgeoning star of unification and the application of democracy throughout the continent. Now that the chasm between the East and the West had purportedly been bridged, the immediate post-Cold War era was replete with an overwhelming sense of optimism gathering speed towards the new millennium—the Eastern bloc had been shattered, Romania being the exception to a bloodless changeover from central authoritarianism to free-market capitalism. As Europe rejoiced in this process, the West fancifully assumed that the fall of the regimes in the East, and the signing-off of the Soviet Communist Party in 1991 would lead to a stability never before seen in the region; the lure of market consumerism would guarantee this stability, and the imposition of economic 'shock-therapy' under the banner of free democratic reform would alleviate the decay of decades of social and economic neglect.

Pretty Village, Pretty Flame

In the background of the illusory facade, Yugoslavia hosted a menacing game of competitive nationalism where dissatisfaction with the management of economic affairs between competing national and political groups led to a breakdown of the political and social system. The ensuing political impasse resulted in the eventual secession of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina from the federation, all of whom sought seats in the safe European home—the European Union.

As the grand architect of the wars in Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milosevic had other ideas. The notion of political union with mother Europe had the stench of bourgeois idealism—for him, the Slovenes and the Croats could go to their European home, but all Serbs had to vest their interests in a unified Serbian homeland.

To achieve his will, Milosevic unleashed the beast of radical ethnic nationalism via his apparatchiks and other sycophants keen to maintain a regional hegemony for their political masters and hence, control of economic and physical resources after the collapse of Yugoslavia.

After the wars in Slovenia and Croatia, Bosnia disintegrated and became a den of human depravity, where displaced and bewildered communities struggled to come to terms with the destruction of their country. Ethnic cleansing was introduced to the lexicon of the mainstream media, with television screens depicting the horror of social upheaval, the images of rape and torture, detention camps, emaciated prisoners, shelled town houses in obscure villages and sporadic mortar-blasts in the centre of Sarajevo.

★★★

As the media images of these conflicts recede from the public memory, two new productions, *Exile In Sarajevo* and *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* remind the world of the evil that hovered over Bosnia, the results of political ineptness and global complacency.

Exile In Sarajevo, directed by Tahir Cambis and Alma Sahbaz, is a powerful documentary exploring the rapid decay of a civil society and the effects of warfare on a community priding itself on a history of multicultural existence and an essence of cosmopolitan Europe. Cambis, a Melbourne-based actor, spent the final six months of the war documenting its effects on the people in Sarajevo and Gorazde, a southern Bosnian town that suffered a fate even worse than that of Sarajevo. On his arrival in Sarajevo, he hired sound-recordist Sahbaz, whose influence as a local Sarajevan became a striking feature of the production, eventually leading to her becoming co-director. Their documentation portrays the daily struggle of families attempting to bypass the effects of nationalism and war, their resistance to the brutality of extremist paramilitaries, and their obstinate desire to maintain semblances of normality in the face of adversity.

The candid and personal approach of the film is exemplified by two characters, Zemka, whose young daughter is caught in the cross-fire of a sniper attack, and Amira, an eight-year-old who witnessed the murder of her family and rape of her mother. Cambis commenced the production as a personal exploration of his family history in Bosnia, but after meeting Sahbaz, and his contact with Zemka and Amira, redefined the documentary as a record of the struggles of the Sarajevans, the dismemberment of Bosnia, and the persistent procrastination and duplicity of the United Nations and NATO.

Despite some technical deficiencies, *Exile* is a substantial documentary, showing the soul of a city under siege and scenes of passion and people that were never depicted by international media crews obsessively searching for the images that reflected upon the pretence of 'ancient ethnic hatreds'—death, mutilation, destruction, rape, iniquity.

While *Exile* predominantly deals with the break-up of a cosmopolitan society in an urban city, *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* explores the frictions that develop between the Serbs and the Muslims during the Bosnian war in a remote Bosnian village, specifically between Halil, a Bosnian Muslim, and Milan, a Bosnian Serb.

The third feature film directed by Srdjan Dragojevic, *Pretty Village* is a political satire that epitomises everything that went wrong in Bosnia—political bastardry, wrongful accusations and the resultant counter-accusations, arbitrary theft of neighbours' possessions, wanton destruction of village houses, expulsion of communities—a response to the state-sponsored propaganda that bellowed the mantra that the (fictitious) enemy was about to strike, and it would be better to kill before being killed.

As children, Halil and Milan explore the remnants of a derelict tunnel, another monument created in the name of Brotherhood and Unity, the catchcry of Tito's Yugoslavia indicating the singularity of the disparate groups scattered throughout the country. When contemplating the contents of the tunnel, they believe that there must be a sleeping ogre inside, and if it awakens, it will release terror upon the entire village and kill the inhabitants. It is, or course, the nationalistic ogre suppressed by the Communists during the Tito years. That was 1980. Come 1992, the monster rears its ugly head as radical nationalism, and the myth that Halil and Milan mused over as children becomes reality—the ogre has indeed been released upon the village and with that, its full fury upon the inhabitants.

During a brief skirmish, Milan and his group of paramilitaries are ambushed and flee into the tunnel, safe from the ogre, but not from Halil's cohorts who now cover both exits from the tunnel. The erstwhile friends now inflict psychological terror upon each other, determined to somehow outwit the other—friends who now refer to each other as 'Chetnik' or 'Turk', derogatory references to Serbs and Muslims respectively.

The drive towards a breakdown of personal and communal relationships in Bosnia is the underlying theme throughout *Pretty Village*—how can harmonious relationships break down so arbitrarily through malicious propaganda promoted by self-obsessed political leaders? How can personal vendettas and acrimony from decades ago so quickly envelop contemporary enmities with disastrous consequences?

Both *Exile* and *Pretty Village* ponder the futility of ethnic and national rivalries, and focus upon those who never asked for war, but were dragged into the quagmire by their nefarious leaders who claimed that each nationality would be better off without the other. People were bewildered by what was happening in their communities—afraid to go to war but, afraid not to go to war lest, as their leaders propagandised, others confiscate their worldly possessions. In a country such as Bosnia, exclusive national enclaves were never going to be created without bloodshed.

Cambis and Sahbaz present the contrast where, during the most televised conflict in the twentieth century, the world stood by, allowed such atrocities to occur and absolved itself from all responsibility. When the time came to eradicate the small-time nationalists and the generals that painted in blood, the world was found wanting. In the eyes of the UN, Bosnia was not worth saving—the conflict became an 'ethnic' dispute between 'age-old enemies', who had nothing but an evil and barbaric history. The West, with its rhetoric of being the vanguard of civilisation, dithered and decided that, indeed, the world is civil, but some people are more civilised than others.

In their book *War and Anti-War*, Alvin and Heidi Toffler reflect upon a future world where smaller autonomous and rival nationalities compete with each other over diminishing resources. The fragmentation of Yugoslavia offered a microcosm of the Tofflers' musings and a snapshot of what happens where a civil society collapses so haplessly.

Exile In Sarajevo asks questions about the type of future that exists for Europe. In time, historical analysis may well show that the events in Bosnia in the 1990s were an unfortunate harbinger of what Europe might be in the new millennium.

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Review

Questions of nation and neglect

• *from page 19*

of the individual consciousness arriving at them. They are fixed points resting on shaky ground, as shaky as some of the events in Japan's history described by Oshima—the 1923 earthquake, the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the mass protests of 1960.

The beauty of that slight, modest shift in narrative voice is how it simultaneously functions as a point of arrival and of departure, in line with the framework Oshima has found most significant. Under Oshima, Japanese cinema is one conveying a sense of individual filmmakers whose feeling for their work and beliefs are radically different from the mainstream of Japanese society. Like that shift, incompatibility, conflict or tensions are inevitable when prevailing social and cultural attitudes fail to keep up with individual realities and modes of expression.

The gaps may yawn wide in each case, but at least with Oshima, if not the others, there's an definite understanding that it cannot be otherwise. This is the virtue of these documentaries, not their compromise; for the tableau device that they all share somehow takes account of the gaps. It binds them together and has the express purpose of giving to the viewer a glimpse of the elusive motor of an historical chain.

The Century of Cinema *series screened on ABC TV. Tapes of the episodes on Australian, New Zealand and British film and* A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese *are available from ABC shops.*

Report

The two cultures re-animated and perverted

Darren Tofts interrogates two key events at the Interact Asia Pacific Multimedia Festival in Melbourne

(Crack the) Binary Code

Multimedia's status as art, and its relationship with extant art forms, were the main items on the agenda at (*Crack the) Binary Code*. Its principle focus was to bring these two spheres together, and redress the biases which still see reviews of CD-ROM relegated to the computer pages (as if to foreground this prejudice, Deborah Bogle's profile of the event was demoted from the weekend *Australian*'s glossy magazine to *Syte* the week before). The circulation of this issue throughout *Binary Code* was problematic in that it reinforced the very factions the symposium was attempting to merge. In this it had the unfortunate effect of reanimating, rather than exorcising, the shade of C.P. Snow and his "two cultures".

The opening session, in particular, smacked of a literate/post-literate détente, in which two incongruous world orientations debated the role of multimedia as an "add-on" to established art forms. Peter Craven declared that he was an "improbable person to be addressing a conference of this kind", and that multimedia was "largely lost" on him. Multimedia criticism does not count as one of Craven's contributions to Australian letters. He did, though, make one decisive contribution to this symposium, for in repeatedly referring to James Joyce, he introduced a more palatable talisman than Snow, which shifted the subtleties of the convergence debate into a more constructive orbit. This was consolidated by Philippa Hawker's engaging discussion of Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film *Romeo + Juliet*. Hawker explored the convergent relationships forming between literary, filmic and multimedia practices, noting, with exemplary admonition, that there are many similarities and differences between the experience of literature, film and multimedia. It was just this ambivalence that was needed to crack the binary code.

The dynamic of ambivalence was picked up by Bill Mitchell in a fascinating account of his *Palladio Virtual Museum* project. Mitchell spoke of complementarity, and the creative unease involved in exploring the interface between the physical and the virtual (he also invoked Joyce as a tutelary presence, comparing his own work in progress to the textual editing of *Ulysses*). This was an inventive concept that found resonance in Michael Hill's witty and satirical incursion into the great divide between contemplation and distraction in multimedia art. Hill recalled an online performance of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* in the "waiting room" of The Palace, which is as good an example of the tension between stasis and movement as you will find. The challenge of staging a play, in which "to be there" is everything, in the "no there, there" zone of cyberspace, beautifully demonstrated what Mitchell called "magical moments", epiphanies born of unease, where innovative possibilities are glimpsed.

Ambivalence also exerted a force in the discussion of multimedia criticism. In drawing attention to the hybridity of the medium, artist Peter Hennessey articulated the need for a syncretic critical language, one which drew on established discourses and blurred their conceptual and lexical boundaries. This was admirably demonstrated in Justine Humphry's inventive reading of the CD-ROM game *Myst* in the context of the Mars Pathfinder mission. Humphry drew on cultural theory in apposite ways, to project *Myst* as a narrative of loss and yearning for new spaces of discovery. Hennessey's invocation of a hybrid form of criticism attests to the need to get beyond the divisive switching between new media and established art, as if they were the only terms of debate in the discourse surrounding emergent art forms. McKenzie Wark, a writer not present at this symposium, has effectively discussed multimedia art in terms of a "new abstraction"; a resonant idea that has significantly broadened the debate in ways canvassed by Hennessey. As Stephanie Britton also observed, there is in fact a distinctive form of multimedia criticism, that draws, in part, on the critical languages of the visual arts, film theory, and, I would quickly add, literary theory (it's no accident that Joyce and Beckett kept elbowing their way into the discussion).

Under the panoptical gaze of his camera, ABC TV's Stephen Feneley admirably played the role of luddite uninspired by new media art. While diverting at the end of a long day, all the head-high tackling about ART distracted attention from the more substantive issues of dissemination and distribution, and the appropriate place for experiencing multimedia art. Access, Britton reminded us, is the most crucial issue of all. The idea of a public sphere, what Geert Lovink usefully described as a "third space", is the promise of the internet, and it is perhaps this space that holds the greatest potential for achieving the kind of dissemination necessary to reach a mass audience, and thereby form a culture of multimedia art and criticism. A related issue was identified by Mike Leggett, who drew attention to the curatorial process, drawing on his experience of putting together *Burning the Interface*, the first international exhibition of CD-ROM art. The key for Leggett, as with Britton and Lovink, was the dissemination of multimedia art into public spaces. Leggett, too, discussed an idea that should have been the subject of more substantial attention, that of the social responsibility of nurturing a culture of multimedia art.

Is multimedia art part of the historical tradition of poesis, or aesthetic-making, or is it an aberrant technological cool, undeserving of artistic value? experimenta's Shiralee Saul had the final word on this imbroglio, turning the tables on the art debate in a fit of pique ("Let's face it, contemporary art is dead, or is at least looking a bit peaky"), then asking what could only be described as a rhetorical question: "Does art deserve to be revitalized by multimedia?"

For a different type of audience *Binary Code* would have been a solid and informative introduction to the key issues in the multimedia debate. I'm not sure how many of the *Interact*-going general-public were in attendance, but most of the people there seemed to be from the media arts community, for whom much of the discussion was already very familiar. That said, symposium co-ordinator Kevin Murray and the Centre for Contemporary Photography (CCP) have maintained an important public dialogue concerning multimedia art. In this they achieved one of their key themes, namely, the consolidation of a dedicated practice of multimedia criticism.

Altered States; Psychotropic Visions and the digitally-corrupted gaze.

A word from the wise to the unwary: don't ever go to trade fairs without a floor plan. The *Interact* Multimedia jamboree was predictably overwhelming, and orienteering without a map was not the way to go. When I finally located experimenta's *Altered States* exhibition it was like happening upon a refreshing oasis of culture in that arid plain of corporate logos and disposable marketing kipple. I felt secure in that fortress of solitude where no-one was trying to sell you anything to polish your benchmark or economise your scales. It's too easy to succumb to this kind of cynicism, and to do so actually detracts from the significance of experimenta's achievement with *Altered States* . Multimedia art is still finding its public, and *Altered States* has successfully furthered this process with a succession of important exhibitions conducted and hosted over the last year (*Burning the Interface, Cyberzone, Cyber Cultures*). The issue of where to locate multimedia art is a contentious and ongoing one, and would-be critics of *Altered States*' presence at *Interact* should exercise caution. It seems to me that no context should be left unexplored in the project of raising public awareness of, and familiarity with, multimedia art. experimenta's decision to stage *Altered States* as part of *Interact* is to be applauded for this very reason. *Altered States* declared, by the very force of its presence, that multimedia art should be taken just as seriously as any other use of multimedia technology, and, moreover, indignantly declared that there is a thriving culture of multimedia art that people need to get up to speed with. This was cleverly suggested by Peter Hennessey's design for the *Altered States* stand, which ingeniously mimicked the general exhibition principle of an attractive display. The assemblage of video and computer-based work as a contemplative circumference around the larger, unseen installations (concealed by heavy black curtains) surreptitiously guided you into a journey of discovery, transforming informania into curiosity.

Tactical appropriation did not stop there. Most of the software being touted by the corporate spin-doctors as pixelation for profit margins had been used for quite different purposes by the artists exhibiting in *Altered States* . Recognizing the cross-over between corporate and artistic contexts of use confronts us with the issue of the perverse. Any poetics of multimedia art has to incorporate an understanding of its perversity, its realignment of multimedia as an instrumental technology, a shift away from utility to a poetic process of organized violence. At one point I found myself trapped in a parallactic freeze-frame, seeing QuickTime VR promoted as a useful navigational device, and at the same time a portal to other worlds in Lindsay Colborne's ludic *The Pursuit of Happiness*. I wondered if the purveyors of QTVR also noticed this. Given the unfortunate ambience of two different cultures within the temporary autonomous zone of *Interact*, I suspected that they probably had not. The good people of experimenta clearly had. *Altered States*' subtitle ("Psychotropic Visions and the digitally-corrupted gaze") promised a different way of seeing, its product of the month being perverse corrective lenses. In the context of *Interact*, then, *Altered States* was a tableau of disruptive interventions into the normative language of multimedia.

The lexicon of multimedia art as it currently stands was well represented in *Altered States*, and visitors to the exhibition were treated to one of the classics of the form—Jon McCormack's *Turbulence*—as well as new works by established and emerging artists. Computer-generated animation was admirably represented in Peter Hennessey's haunting surveillance installation *pH7.2-Watchtower*, Tina Gonsalves' *Alchemical Process of Becoming*, Dorian Dowse's awesome *OmTipi*, and *PsyVision*, the dynamic PsyHarmonics/Troy Innocent collaboration, probably the first example of digital fusion. Interactives, synonymous with multimedia art for many, revealed an interesting cross-section of degrees and kinds of user involvement. Rebecca Young's Prozac-inspired allegory of sedation and aggression *Are You Happy Yet?* required minimal interactivity, yet had a few surprises up its sleeve. Naomi Herzog's brooding anatomy of mind and memory, *Mined Fields*, invited the user to work through a range of dungeon-like spaces, prompted by a macabre interface of severed heads. Lindsay Colborne's road trip to *Nirvana, The Pursuit of Happiness*, Norie Neumark's *Shock in the Ear*, and Mindflux's reflexive laboratory of artificial life, *Mutagen*, were more beguiling works that required a higher degree of conceptual interactivity and the patient development of navigational strategies. Tim Gruchy's cyberspace jam, *Synthing*, was the most fully developed example of an immersive environment. *Synthing* ingeniously converges the architecture of the intelligent, sensory space and the aleatory sound event. Get two or more people happening in there and you have an ensemble postmoderne. I never get tired of engaging with Jon McCormack's monumental *Turbulence*, which seems more and more like an immersive experience with every welcome return. *Memespace*, Troy Innocent's latest zone of otherness, is also a transitional work, which re-defines the interface in its use of a topographical bas-relief map, rather than the screen, as the nodal connection to his world.

While there was a strategic importance in exhibiting *Altered States* as part of *Interact*, there were also considerable drawbacks. The degree of ambient noise made it very difficult to really get involved with many of the works, particularly the terminal based interactives, and especially the ones that were new to me. Works like *Turbulence* were not given their best showing, as there was far too much light and unwanted noise. The absence of explanatory signage (which was used effectively in *Burning the Interface*) unfortunately compounded the confusion of newcomers to many of these works, who felt unclear about what (or why, in at least one instance) they should be doing.

These drawbacks aside, *Altered States* was an important initiative that will have at the very least succeeded in exposing several thousand people to the exceptional work being done by Australian artists in this form.

(Crack the) Binary Code, *co-ordinated by Kevin Murray, Centre for Contemporary Photography*

Altered States; Psychotropic Visions and the digitally-corrupted gaze, *presented by experimenta media arts*

Interact Asia Pacific Multimedia Festival, *Melbourne Exhibition Centre Auditorium, October 30-November 2 1997*

Darren Tofts' Memory Trade. A Prehistory of Cyberculture *(with artist Murray McKeich), will be published by 21C Books in February 1998.*

Report

(In)forming the nation on the goat tracks of the virtual community

Christina Spurgeon on the implications of the launch of the Department of Communications and the Arts' *Artsinfo* website

Artsinfo is a substantial new information service developed by the Department of Communications and the Arts for the cultural sector. In Canberra it is also regarded as the policy initiative which has given substance to the rhetoric of bringing together the communications and arts portfolios.

Among other things, *Artsinfo* provides computer-based access to information on the many thousands of grants, services, and business development programs offered across all levels of government, as well as through corporations, foundations and other non-government bodies.

Artsinfo came out of the Coalition's election platform, "For Arts Sake". This policy emphasised access, equity and market development. It was supported by a $60 million funding package over three years. This included an amount of $4.5 million to the Department of Communications and the Arts to streamline institutional arrangements across the cultural sector, and to develop a one stop arts information shop. A team in the department co-ordinated work on *Artsinfo* which was outsourced to a host of specialist consultants. A year in development, *Artsinfo* was launched by the Minister, Richard Alston, in August 1997. The project is well-funded to 1999, after which time it will be reviewed.

The amalgamation of the communications and arts portfolios in 1994 came as part of the Keating Government's *Creative Nation* initiative. The synergy of these two policy areas for cultural development had previously been argued for many years. It was most cogently described by Stuart Cunningham in his book *Framing Culture* as a key means by which the cultural mandate of the Commonwealth—to foster the formation of an Australian nation—could be most effectively exercised.

Artsinfo does indeed appear to give substance to this rhetoric. It uses communications infrastructures to create and extend cultural and other transactional spaces of "the nation" across the natural geography of the continent. In this respect the *Artsinfo* story is similar to other stories of communications development in Australia.

However, there are also important differences. The "nation" is not produced here from investment in physical labour or infrastructure. Rather, *Artsinfo* seeks to add value to existing public stocks of cultural and communications capital. Paradoxically, under the Coalition government, many parts of the underlying communications infrastructure are in the process of being alienated from the 'public good' objectives of nation-building. For this reason *Artsinfo* tells of the 'weak' nation-building strategy of the Coalition government.

It also speaks of the general trajectory of economic development which is being pursued by many governments around the world. This particular vision of development can be summed up as the 'information economy'. In this scenario national economic growth is achieved through open, international markets and greater economic reliance upon communications. Indeed, the Howard government recently established the National Office of the Information Economy as a separate entity within Richard Alston's portfolio.

So, like *Creative Nation* before it, *Artsinfo* has a strong business and export orientation. It aims to "inspire action", and open doors to "national and international opportunities for a diverse range of cultural activities".

Artsinfo was launched at the computer game theme centre Sega World, in Sydney's Darling Harbour. A real time video signal was digitised for internet distribution so that *Artsinfo* could be simultaneously launched in a number of regional centres, including the Lismore campus of Southern Cross University, where I was involved in hosting the launch.

Preparations for the regional launch began about a fortnight beforehand. Invitations went out to local arts and media organisations. A suitable computer lab was found and the necessary software needed to view the launch was downloaded from the internet. The network was configured and the connection with the *Artsinfo* server tested. In effect, we were getting ready for the arrival of real time digital video in Lismore.

Coming live over the internet, the videostream had amazing textual qualities. The moving images seemed quite unreal, due in part to the compression techniques required to cram so much data into efficient (and in this case, available) channels. They unfolded in unpredictable ways upon the screen as patchwork puzzles of time. This strangeness was frustrating, but also exciting to experience.

Our view into the launch was provided by a single, fixed camera. Against a plain, black backdrop we could make out the torso and head of a woman. The presentation was simple, but suited to the bandwidth limits of the internet. However, details were washed out with eerie results: could that faceless bureaucrat really be Cathy Santamaria, the country's most senior arts administrator? At least we could hear her clearly. Not so the Minister, Richard Alston, who was off-mike for much of his speech. We respectfully strained to hear what he said, for most of it. I was reminded of a time when people would gather outside electrical stores to watch television, with interest, awe and fascination.

But our gathering was not entirely made up of inquisitive passers-by. The *Artsinfo* launch, like the service, aimed to include this assembled group in the national arts and cultural industries "loop" of people-in-the-know. The launch also situated us in relation to other local and global possibilities of community.

A small wave of excitement ran through us when our role as witnesses to the *Artsinfo* launch was acknowledged by the Minister. I felt momentarily included in the elusive global village of the information economy. I was simultaneously a participant in this particular formation of national and local arts communities. However, these impressions of the global, national and local, mediated by the narrow bandwidths of the internet, were fragile and fleeting.

The importance of ongoing national government support to the development of national culture is clear. Perhaps not so well understood is the importance of communications infrastructure.

It remains to be seen how developments like an open market in telecommunications, the partial privatisation of Telstra, and the sale of the National Transmission Agency (which owns most ABC and SBS transmitter sites), will actually affect the quality, diversity and accessibility of cultural and communications services, especially in regional and remote areas. The *Networking the Nation* initiative, to be funded from the Telstra float, addresses these problems by directing resources for infrastructure development to those regions and populations in greatest need. It has the potential to facilitate some interesting, important and long overdue projects, especially from Indigenous communities.

No doubt, important and complex consequences for national culture will arise from the alterations to Australian communications described here. An important threshold question to emerge from this term of the Howard government is the extent to which national public culture can be sustained and developed on the basis of privatised communications infrastructures.

The experience of the *Artsinfo* launch highlights a further paradox here: the first "public" experience of live digital video reached Lismore on the goat tracks of the virtual community, the internet, and not by means of the much-touted (mythical) information superhighway. In this respect *Artsinfo* is an interesting model of development to emerge from cultural policy. Other initiatives, for example the *Australian Cultural Network* which aims to provide internet access to public cultural collections, are also being produced from this mould.

Artsinfo marks the shift in the roles of government in both policy fields of communications and culture. But it also serves to highlight the continuing and important role of the Commonwealth in making the nation. It is a risky venture largely because the direct returns on this investment will not generally be measurable in dollar terms. It is also a valuable and timely "public good" service which only a central government can provide.

Artsinfo *can be accessed through the world wide web and is available at:* http://www.artsinfo.net.au. *A free telephone service, staffed by operators trained to interrogate the database on behalf of callers, has also been established (tel 1800 241 247).*

The writer thanks participants in the LINK discussion list for comments and suggestions, especially Julian Thomas, Tom Worthington and Roger Clarke.

Report

Three New Media Arts Fellowships announced

Linda Dement, Stephen Jones and John Gillies to realise major projects

On October 29, the Australia Council announced three New Media Arts Fellowships, worth $40,000 a year over two years.

New Media Fellow Linda Dement, whose CD-ROM work *Cyberfleshgirl monster* was featured in last year's *Burning the Interface* exhibition at the MCA, will develop a literary-digital multimedia work in collaboration with avant-garde New York author Kathy Acker. Acker will provide the text, and Dement the images. The collaboration will take form online and on CD-ROM, and the work will be submitted to galleries and electronic arts events.

Fellowship recipient Stephen Jones is a video artist of 20 years standing, and member of groundbreaking techno-arts and music group Severed Heads. Jones will develope an interdisciplinary opera *The Brain Project*, originally inspired by Michael Nyman's operatic interpretation of neurologist Oliver Sachs' *The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat*. The work will involve on-stage computers driven by performance and used to present illustrative material, dance and vocal work.

Video artist John Gillies will devote the fellowship to complete a large body of solo and collaborative performance work, with a focus on a fusion of sound and image, as in the work *Tempest*, a video installation of an electronically generated thunderstorm. The work will represent the culmination of 10 years of research, and will be presented in gallery, performance and screening situations. *RT*

Reprieve or temporary salvation?

The federal government's response to Gonski

The recent Screen Producers' Association of Australia conference, held in Melbourne in November, was the platform for the Commonwealth government's most recent official response to the recommendations of the Review of Commonwealth Assistance to the Film Industry, known as the Gonski report. The report was completed in February 1997.

In his speech to the conference, Senator Richard Alston, Minister for Communications, the Information Economy and the Arts, made several key announcements pertaining to the report's recommendations:

• In reference to Gonski's recommendations on the future for Film Australia (FA), Alston announced that the government will continue Film Australia's National Interest Program (ie its documentary production function) at current levels of $6.4 million per annum from 1999–2000 to 2002–03. After consideration of the advice from a recent post-Gonski scoping study to examine the feasibility of privatising Film Australia, the government will retain FA as a Commonwealth-owned company. FA will continue to operate as an integrated operation (retaining its marketing, distribution and archiving functions), and retain its Lindfield site.

• The Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF) will retain its distribution and marketing activities.

• The Film Licensed Investment Company (FLIC) model proposed in the Gonski report will be piloted for two years from 1998–99, while the current 10BA and 10B tax concessions will be retained. According to Alston, the pilot FLIC will be able to raise concessional capital of up to $40 million over two years.

In regard to the screen culture sector, the Senator noted in his speech that "the Government does not support Gonski's recommendation that the AFC re-allocate funds of $2 million from screen culture to script development. However, there are benefits in a more co-ordinated approach to support screen culture and I will ask the Department of Communications and the Arts to look at ways of increasing efficiency and effectiveness in close co-operation with the AFC, the AFTRS, the NFSA and the screen culture sector. I will also be asking the AFC to examine how it might increase funding for script development".

Bob McMullan, Shadow Minister for Industrial Relations, Finance and the Arts also spoke at the SPAA conference, responding to Alston's announcements. McMullan contended that the "proposition that 10BA should continue until the FLIC proposal has been tested is government code for 'we will keep FLIC until after the election'". Similarly, McMullan claimed that Alston's announcement—that arrangements for Film Australia and the ACTF will not change—is an example of the government's tactic of fanning damaging speculation and then expecting applause when the status quo is maintained.

McMullan canvassed a range of film funding options to be discussed at the Labor Party's National Conference in January 1998, during which official policy will be ratified. He expressed his special concern about documentary funding, noting, in particular, the deleterious effects of cuts to the AFC, and the effective freezing of funding to Film Australia. McMullan also singled out for comment cuts to the AFC's Special Production Fund, noting that the fund "will be a special priority for us when we announce our policy in 1998". *RT*

Column

bit.depth

Loving your Mac and losing it: Jonathon Delacour

In the four years I studied chemistry at Sydney University in the late sixties, nothing affected me as profoundly as working in a shipyard during two summer vacations. Employed as a boilermaker's assistant, I carried the tradesman's tools, set up the cutting and welding equipment, and did my best to keep out of his way and not make a fool of myself. Five or six days a week for one of those summers, Robert and I joined a team who took a ferry from Balmain to Garden Island and spent the day on the aircraft carrier *Melbourne*, in dry dock for repair after slicing the *Voyager* in half.

Overnight I forgot about quantum mechanics and organic reagents, worrying instead about measuring the length of a weld accurately and setting the correct mix of oxygen and acetylene. I'd had to join a union (the Federated Ironworkers of Australia) and was immediately inducted into the mysteries of demarcation disputes, getting into serious trouble for moving a ladder ("Painters and Dockers' work, son," explained Robert after defending me from the foreman's wrath).

"Uni Jon" they called me, with a mixture of affection and derision, their respect for my intellectual achievements tempered with amazement at my ignorance of life's realities. Robert and I spent one memorable morning chatting while we waited for a painter and docker to deliver a fresh acetylene cylinder. He told me about the great love of his life: a woman a few years older with whom he had been desperately in love. He'd wanted to marry her but she kept putting him off, breaking up with him then returning to resume the relationship, before leaving once more.

Eventually he cut his losses, transferring his attention to another woman, someone he'd known socially for some time. They married and, at the time Robert was telling me this story, had three children. "But what happened to the other woman," I asked, "the one you really loved?"

"I realised I couldn't rely on her," he replied. "She was beautiful, smart, witty, great in bed. I've never met anyone like her. But she was always making promises she couldn't keep. She drove me crazy. I simply wanted to love her and she broke my heart. So I married someone else."

At 19 I believed absolutely in the grand passion, although I'd never experienced one. I thought that Robert—by following his head rather than his heart—had been unfair: to his capricious lover, to his wife, and to himself. I resolved that I would behave differently if faced with a similar choice.

Needless to say, I was wrong. The choice, as is turned out, was not between two women but it involved a grand passion nonetheless—my more than 10 year love affair with the Macintosh. The relationship began to sour two years ago, when my employer at that time supplied me with a PowerBook 5300. I'd been using my own PowerBooks happily for years but this turned out to be the computer from hell. Over a six month period, the keyboard, LCD screen, modem port, and finally the motherboard were all replaced. My experience was not unique, the 5300 series was the subject of a humiliating recall that cost Apple over 60 million dollars.

About the time I left the company to freelance, I received some money from the AFC to create a web-based hypertext narrative. Included in the budget was an amount for a notebook computer (to be sold at the end of the project with the proceeds returned to the AFC). Instead of a PowerBook, I bought a Toshiba notebook running Windows 95. This meant I could create the text and graphics for the web pages on my Macintosh 8500 desktop machine while checking how the site looked under Windows. I could use the Macintosh as a content creation platform and the Windows machine to check how the project would look to 90 percent of personal computer users. My compact with the devil had begun.

From there it was a gradual slide into hell. I transferred my calendar and contacts database to the PC so that it would always be available. Since I work as a freelance writer and charge for my time, I needed an accounting program that tracked and invoiced by time. QuickBooks Pro was perfect but Intuit, the developers, had just announced that they'd no longer be developing a Macintosh version.

Michael Hill and I had developed a concept for an online chat game and were seeking out potential partners. All the 3D chat spaces had Windows-only client software. My friends, who'd been using Macs for years too, began to switch to Windows. Every application I used on the Macintosh was available for Windows too: Photoshop, Director, Inspiration, Storyspace, DeBabelizer, FileMaker Pro. In every case the Windows version turned out to be as good as or better than the Macintosh original. Worse still, many fine software applications were only available for Windows.

I'd been using Nisus Writer as my word processor for nearly ten years. Nisus Software bet the farm on a new Apple technology called OpenDoc by releasing an OpenDoc compliant version of Nisus Writer. It was disastrously buggy. Not long afterwards, Apple abandoned OpenDoc (and the developers who'd spent millions of dollars building OpenDoc software). I needed a replacement word processor. Microsoft Word on the Macintosh was awful but the PC version turned out to be surprisingly good.

That left the internet, which I was still accessing from the Macintosh. A few months ago I bought the Windows version of Eudora, switched my e-mail to the PC, and the migration was complete.

Over the past couple of weeks, as I've been thinking about writing this piece, an e-mail list (Windows-Newbies) and a web site (MacWindows) have sprung up: the former for Macintosh users making the switch to Windows, the latter for Mac users who want to (or must) use PCs too. Windows-Newbies is fascinating: the people on the list are technically sophisticated Macintosh users struggling to come to terms with how Windows is better, or worse, or simply different. Their humility and openness to new experience is refreshingly different to the Macintosh or Windows fanatics who scream abuse at each other across a gulf of ignorance, incomprehension, and intolerance.

What's Windows like? It's OK. Usable. Once you're inside Photoshop or Director, it doesn't really matter anyway. Windows is ugly to look at (but you get used to it), its memory management is appalling (I regularly run out of memory although I have 48Mb of physical RAM), it lacks the seamless elegance of the Macintosh OS. I like Windows well enough, it does the job. But I don't love using it as I loved the Mac.

In years to come, the Macintosh saga will be studied—as one of the great marketing failures of the 20th century—in business schools all over the world. Anyone who has used both knows that a Macintosh is superior to a Windows PC but Apple has never been able to persuasively communicate that difference. As Macintosh hardware sales began to decline, software developers scaled down or abandoned their commitment to the platform, sending hardware sales into an even deeper downward spiral.

I still use my Macintosh 8500, for video capture and to work in Japanese (Apple's Asian language support remains unsurpassed). I'm sentimental about the Mac: every morning when I log on to the net via the PC, I read my e-mail then immediately check out the *Macintouch* and *MacWEEK* web sites to see what's happening in the Macintosh world. I'm hoping against hope that Steve Jobs will turn Apple around, that Rhapsody will ship, and that—like the prodigal son—I can return to the Macintosh fold. But I'm not holding my breath.

So, you might ask, if the Mac is so much better and I loved it so much, why did I switch to Windows? Well, Robert was right, all those years ago. "Sometimes," he told me, as we stood on the deck of an aircraft carrier in the brilliant summer sun, "you have to settle for second best".

Column

Cinesonic

Socked and soaked, surrounded by sound: Philip Brophy

Surround sound is not only the most under-theorised aspect of cinema (it rarely rates a mention in the preceding half century of film theory written by deaf mutes), but is also the marker of change for the radical transformation of psycho-acoustics and aural phenomenology in the social unconsciousness of tactile listening. It is hard to think of contemporary developments in musical/audio-visual consumption, playback systems and broadcast diffusion which do not actively address issues of spatialization, environment and emersion.

The critical problem—a delicious one—is that the listening experience is always full. It arouses and numbs with full effect. Its presence engulfs so that one becomes one with the sound, installed in its acoustics. It gets me wet. Yet noble intellectual pursuit—that effete, winged flight whose only material effect is the wind from turning the page of a book—has mostly resorted to either immaterial poetics (how beautiful sound is) or tedious conspiracy theories (how controlling sound is) in a vain attempt to articulate the 'power' of sound. Both miss the simple point: sound *is* power.

As essays, installations, radio works and other texts grow in number to collectively rout sound into some kind of new adventure playground, the supposed forefront of Sound Art proceeds as if the preceding thirty years of Experimental Music has not happened—or, it is locked in a grim, frozen time warp. Architectural discourse, global concern, social theory, urban design, poetic reference, landscape inquiry, body politics, arcane history—all are invoked to evidence intellectual depth (and certainly there can be engaging thoughts in such a practice) but actual *sound* is all too often employed as a lexicon of effects which narrowly represent and demonstrate extant concepts, occasionally stumbling over obvious correlations (usually tagged by words like 'voice', 'talk', 'ear', 'listen') and holding them up like marvellous discoveries. Granted that any attempt to theorise the complexity of sound deserves support under the tyrannical cult of the eye, but this kind of acultural armchair ponderousness is irritating and stultifying despite its concerted aim to explore the environmentalization of sound.

Why does little of this intellectual pursuit of the acoustic engage me? Why do I find its aural practice so suspect? Simply because the *experience* it grants me is thin, anaemic, withered, pasty. Because the power of sound—the fringes of its energy field, the verticality of its sensuousness, the density of its aura—can sometimes be enough by itself. Because I have encountered the power of sound in other environments and situations which lay bare the complexity of its operations like a freshly filleted living body. Subsequently, my views of surround sound in the cinema are as much shaped by the terrain of unexpected aural experiences as by the formal engineering of the soundtrack. In the unconsciousness of my own tactile listening—those unprivileged moments when and where sound snares me and activates my sense of sonar-physical presence—many audio-visual experiences have carved up the audio-visual corpus and exposed its fluid machinations. Some examples...

Doing some post work in an outer Sydney editing facility, I wandered into a larger mixdown room. No-one was present, but a large video screen projected an episode of (from memory) *A Country Practice*. At first I thought it was silently playing, but then I noticed that the only sounds being audited through the mixing desk were foley effects—footsteps, clothes rustling, the odd hand on a door knob. The world of a low-key serial TV drama was suddenly transformed into a dimension of subterranean activity where I could hear the minutiae of human presence—its slight and momentary impression on space itself. Like the haunting moments in *Carnival of Souls* when the woman suddenly hears no sound, triggering an awareness of her displacement from the world and forcing her to experience an abject invisibility in the face of others. Watching *A Country Practice* this way was like being erased from the world. Through a radical imbalance of sound, I inhabited a space of which all on-screen action and activity was totally unaware (they kept on talking to each other wordlessly), divorcing me from the depicted, driving me to the de-mixed. Such is the spooky joy of foley work: conjuring ghostly essences by imaging the sound of an inaudible human on the audio-visual screen.

When Masona took centre stage at the Punters Club, Melbourne, he stood in front of a row of effects boxes lined at his feet. Not a guitar in sight. Typical of the sardonic mimicry of Osaka and Tokyo noise performers, he theatrically clutched the mike like Iggy Pop, screamed, then held both hands in the air. At that instant, the most deafening, physical wall of noise I have ever encountered filled every molecular crevice of the space. Masona stood quivering, like he was being electrified by the sound. I stood still because the density of the frequency range felt like I was hearing every sound in the world, simultaneously and at full volume. An amazingly crystalline and liberating statement of noise, generated by a single gesture: the stamping of the 'on' switch of his chained effects boxes. Again and again, Masona turned on and off the essential totality of noise with command and precision. A single maniacal being—far from the pathetic cool of pithy 'industrial' acts—he reduced rock to its most binary form: loud noise that engulfs the body and traumatizes it beyond movement into a state of critical inertia. That image from *Shine* comes to mind—arms out-stretched, ecstatic, triumphant, listening to 19th century music on headphones, a weedy figure of humanism. Give me Masona any day.

Having read about the new B.A.S.E. system (Bedini Audio Spatial Environment) and its ability to illusionistically convey an 'ambisonic' and/or 'holographic' image of sound in space (recording pursuits explored throughout the 80s but with limited results), I eagerly sat down to watch *Star Trek V*. An hour into the film—and after the only interesting sonic moment was hearing William Shatner sing "Row Row Row Your Boat"—some alien dude appears who can read people's minds. Cue for a close up of his eyes and a deep rumble starts to fade up. OK, this must be the showcase of the B.A.S.E. system. Suddenly: a deafening crack as the speakers in Greater Union's main theatre blow. The rest of the film emanated from what must have been the odd remaining tweeter, rendering the whole soundtrack like what you would hear if someone was watching a video and you rang them up and heard the TV in the background through the phone. What with the undying cultism of *Star Trek* and its alignment with the revenge of computer geeks, I guess this was a visionary statement about what would become sound on the net: tinny, bitsy and shitty.

Being late for the Salt & Peppa concert at the Tennis Centre in Melbourne meant missing out on the support band. But rolling up to the front there wasn't a soul in sight. Like, no-one. Nor could I hear any deep rumble—that thrilling premonitory sensation that you're about to partake of a live event. Figuring I have the wrong night, I approach an open door. A solitary guard looks at my ticket and points me in the direction of the stalls entrance. I open that door, and move down some stairs. A deep rumble is faintly felt. I get to a sealed door at the end of a corridor. I open it: the sound hits me hard in the stomach. I'm standing at the back of the stadium's upper tier, looking down on a packed audience of screaming teen girls (a few guys here and there) as Salt & Peppa are humping on stage to a ground-shaking bass rhythm. Dazed and disoriented, I wind my way down the steep steps to eventually reach the concrete floor. As I touch hard ground—still being pulverized by the deepness of hip hop incongruously pumping through a hard rock sound system in an outdoor tennis court sealed like a bunker—I thrill again to the effect of entering into sound, of passing through a porthole into an alien aural dimension. It's like being thrown into a strange liquid.

Hip ad directors still think it's cool to portray 'the city' as a cacophonous din of pressurised activity. As if Futurism never happened. As if we haven't already seen the stop-motion cinematography of *Koyaanisqatsi* a million times. As if there can be no pleasure in the existential bustle of massed shoppers or any emotional thrill in window shopping. Nothing clears my head more than to sit in the middle of a busy shopping mall (Bourke Street mall near Swanston, in Melbourne, is the best) and float on its undulating bed of noise. A Golden Hits radio station can drive me crazy, but 10 clothing stores all playing similar but different tracks out into the street is, as Neil Diamond says, a beautiful noise. Buskers, who are irritating at the best of times, compete with each other and effectively cancel out the other's identity so I can absorb their presence as an abstracted, free-form concatenation of events. Barkers speaking through cheap portable PA amps vie with each other in a wind-strewn dub mix of babbling Australian vowels, harshly distorting through badly-EQ-ed speakers. And nothing beats occasional low frequency waves as trams pass by, rhythmically clanging their metal bells as they absurdly traverse a mall which is closed to traffic but open for people to walk down—so long as they look out for the trams. All I have described is pleasure, not pain. Nor is it the outmoded celebration of an anti-music aesthetic. The outdoor shopping mall and its desperate pneumonic strategies to aurally direct and acoustically soothe the city worker/consumer exacts a total collapse through the overload of information in a sonically saturated spatial domain. This is the free-market of sound, the Tin Pan Alley of consumption, the cacophony of the social. You're soaking in it.

These kinds of experiences (articulated above as purely personal reflections) effect my perception of cinema's audio-visuality. Through such experiences, one can un-watch a film, re-hear its sound design, actively imagine its potential as much as be engaged at the level of its manifest production. One can use their sonar-spatial overload as a reservoir of aural events that can be folded into the cinesonic experience and the eventfulness which is granted by surround sound's active placement of the auditor within the film's expanded diegesis. Filmmakers like Alain Robbe-Grillet, Margueritte Duras and Stan Brakhage each valiantly and effectively argued against the pursuit of objective authoring and rendering in their cinema. Their preoccupation with multiple and simultaneous memory planes, spatial environments and audio-visual sensations constitutes a fascinating and oft-overlooked recourse to exploring phenomenological multiplicity without resorting to the tackiness of 'dream' metaphors or drug-induced visions. We have yet to fully apply models of surround sound (in either cinema, multi-media, radio or sound installations) to their concepts which intuitively prophesied the rampant and excessive audio-visuality which now governs the most casual of urban experiences.

Newsreel

screenarts ***online digital art exhibition directory***

ANAT, in collaboration with the Media Resource Centre, Adelaide, and the Sydney Intermedia Network, is developing a website directory dedicated to the presentation of Australian screen-based digital art on the web.

By facilitating centralised access to the range of Australian screen-based work available online, *screenarts* will promote Australian screen-based artists, as well as assisting in the development of informed and critical debate for art and technology in Australia.

***screenarts* will function as a database directory with links to 'live' web sites. It will include the capacity for visitors to register their names and contact details in order to receive updated information via an automated email service. The front end will also offer visitors the opportunity to submit details of exhibition activity to the co-ordinator for possible inclusion in the Directory. A search or 'worm' facility will enable visitors to search for particular exhibitions or events and to locate work by specific artists.**

Body of Information*: Australian video and interactive work in Canada*

ANAT's Amanda McDonald Crowley has been invited to present a program of Australian video and new media artworks at Gallery Connexion in Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada. She will present an overview of video and new media practices in Australia.

New Brunswick has been touted as a great centre for new technologies, evidenced by the fact that Frank McKenna, the former premier of the province of New Brunswick, has been able to lure so many important players in this industry to the province. The general feeling in the arts, however, is that they have been left behind on the so called information highway.

***Body Of Information* is an eclectic selection of work which interrogates a range of issues faced by Australian artists; exploring identity, critiquing the decentred subject, interrogating heritage, tearing up conventional notions of interface design and colonising the information body of digital media. The intention is to provide an insight into Australian digital and screenarts practices at a time when artists are questioning the impact of information technologies on local identity and the body: texually, culturally, politically and in flesh-form.**

Works shown will include *Astroturf* by Ian Haig, *primal debug* by Lynne Sanderson, *My memory your past* by Moira Corby, *Decoy* by Derek Krekler, *Elective Physiognomies* by John Tonkin.

A virtual writers-in-residence project

Rapid changes in electronic communication systems, ways of interfacing, responding to ideas and disseminating information necessitate that new forms and genres of writing are invented.

ANAT, as a joint initiative with the Adelaide-based Electronic Writing and Research Ensemble, and with support from the Australia Council's New Media Arts Fund, commissioned Perth-based writer Josephine Wilson and Brisbane writer Linda Carroli to undertake 'virtual' residencies simultaneously from August to October. The writers worked collaboratively via the internet to produce work hypertextually. The texts are fiction, theory and hybrids creating truly cross-disciplinary work.

These residencies provided an ideal opportunity for two skilled writers to explore the practices of writing by embracing the new technologies of networking which link disciplines and geographies. The idea was to forge links between the literary, the artistic, the scholarly, the community, and industry. This project has been supported by the New Media Fund of the Australia Council and can be found at www.anat.org.au

AFC National Survey of Feature Film and Independent Television Drama Production

Figures released today by the Australian Film Commission in the 8th annual National Survey of Feature Film and Independent Television Drama Production indicate that while total expenditure on feature film and television production in Australia increased last financial year from 1995/96 levels, Australian feature film production was still less than that recorded in 1993/94.

See *AFC News*, October 1997.

Book review

When UBU was king

Brian Doherty plays detective on a significant new book on Australian film history

Peter Mudie, *UBU Films: Sydney Underground Movies 1965–1970*, University of New South Wales Press, rrp $45

UBU is a scene. It is cunningly disguised, of course, as a film-makers' co-operative...But UBU is really a scene. From a bizarre, three-room basement in the wasteland of Redfern, which is littered with posters, newsheets, film reels, cartoons, comic strips, pop art, strobe lights and the other high-explosive gear of instant-media it runs light shows, holds happenings, produces pop groups, runs discos, shows films, prints posters, issues a newspaper and generally acts as the Alfland extension of the international underground.

Craig McGregor, *Australian Art and Artists: In the making*, Thomas Nelson (Melbourne, 1970)

UBU films was an extraordinary business partnership formed in 1965 by Albie Thoms, David Perry, Aggy Read and John Clark. In five short years until 1970, this group, along with their many close associates, were deeply implicated in the honourable task of corrupting the values of a conservative Australian culture and replacing it with a radically democratic, fun-loving, sexually liberated, psychedelic youth culture that adopted the term 'Underground'.

Just over 300 pages, many in full colour, *UBU Films: Sydney Underground Movies 1965–1970* documents the history of UBU films in photographs, newsletters and film stills, opening invitations, censorship notices, cartoons and even business cards. The daunting task of compiling and presenting the mass of ephemera on this diverse cultural phenomenon has been undertaken by Peter Mudie in close collaboration with the UBU partners and their associates. The result is a visually stunning publication that is very thoughtfully laid out with a good balance between strong graphic content and editorial information.

Peter Mudie's brief introduction is followed by a chronological presentation of the documents accompanied by editorial comment. Each new year is introduced by a page detailing major world and Australian events which provides a context for the UBU activities. There are very useful biographies, filmographies, an amazingly extensive bibliography and a thorough index to complete the publication.

Many people will find this a useful resource. For graphic designers and anyone fascinated with expressions of 1960s youth culture, there is a wealth of material dificult to source elsewhere. And the same goes for people who are interested in the history of theatre, film, music, art and popular culture in Australia. These documents, so often dismissed and discarded, provide an intimacy of historical detail that is impossible to convey through conventional historical narratives.

Yet for me, the value of this publication and what makes it so timely, is that it provides a case history of the evolution of cultural expression and practices of cultural activism. At a time when the federal government is having yet another go at remodelling the playing field of the Australian film/screen industry and all levels of government are withdrawing from cultural investment, it is refreshing and instructive to be confronted by the UBU phenomenon.

Operating in a period before government arts funding, UBU was a business partnership whose primary objective was not maximising capital gain but maximising a meaningful life expressed through cultural engagement. Anyone working in the cultural industries, be they practitioner or bureaucrat has lessons to learn from UBU's interaction with Australian culture. If I have a problem with this publication it is that while it does a very good job of presenting the evidence or facts of UBU in intimate detail, it provides little analysis. The evidence is presented as though it speaks for itself. In the introduction, Mudie states: "The cumulative resonance that all the illustrations form in this book constructs a reflection of the context within which UBU either existed, or was apart from. Whereas the annotations provide the 'who', 'what', 'when' and 'where' of UBU, it is this resonance that provides the missing 'why'. The readers will be left to determine this for themselves".

UBU Films: Sydney Underground Movies 1965–1970

While the 'why' is left up to the reader, the 'how' is not even acknowledged. 'Who', 'what', 'when' and 'where' are undoubtedly fascinating and can exist as evidence, but the 'how' and 'why' require interpretation, and interpretation is impossible without a theory of social phenomena.

While we have moved away from a single dominant interpretive regime and now recognise the validity of multiple perspectives, the absence of all interpretive regimes is not possible. In other words, Mudie does have a theory of social phenomena that manifests itself in the selection and priority given to the documents and in the statements made in his preface, yet this remains undeclared. The interpretative framework (in this case a form of humanism that sees the social world created by the heroic and malevolent actions of individuals) masquerades as a form of 'common knowledge' about how things happen. The problem with this is that it pretends to be neutral while being selective. It declares itself non-critical and therefore above criticism. This is then dressed in the clothing of a presumed democracy that says: 'Here is the evidence,work it out for yourself', while all the evidence constructs a picture of radical individualism as the origin and destination of cultural activity.

Yet I do appreciate this publication for its dedication to presenting a rich source of lost evidence. This is definitely its strength, since interpretation does rely on evidence, and for those wanting to do their own sleuthing there is plenty to start with here. As an example I'd like to take 'Underground' and run it through my own Foucauldian-derived analytical framework. This framework focuses on routines of speech (discourse) and routines of actions (practices) instead of heroic and malevolent individuals.

When UBU staged its first screening of short films at the University of Sydney in April 1966, it attracted reviews in the mainstream press including *The Australian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Peter King in *The Australian* enthusiastically claimed that the screening was "The cinema event of the week". He assessed each of the (amateur) films and summed up the screening as "recent efforts by the tiny, under-financed and under-experienced, but also under-ambitious group of youthful filmmakers in Sydney".

In my framework it is important to the question 'how' to understand that there was an established 'routine of discourse' in the press regarding the desirability and necessity of establishing an Australian feature film industry. This discourse had a long history but was well established by 1966 and UBU, who publicised their event as "A Screening of Australian Films", were eagerly picked up by the press and subsequently by film societies very active at the time. The problem with this was that these films didn't look like Hollywood features and, in fact, many were satires of Hollywood product. For reviewers the most commonly used category to describe the films was 'amateur' and under this category their interest would probably not have been long-lived.

The fate of UBU was changed by a new discourse on the underground that repositioned UBU's activities and products. In Mudie's publication there is a small reproduction of a fragment of an article by Jack Kroll that appeared in the American magazine *Newsweek*, February 13, 1967. Titled "Up from Underground", the review predicted that the American film industry was about to be taken over by "the American anti-establishment filmmaking movement".

In fact, there were four articles, two in *Newsweek* and two in *Time*, between November 1966 and February 1967 that covered the box office success of Andy Warhol's *The Chelsea Girls* and discussed the films and filmmakers long championed by Jonas Mekas in his regular column in *The Village Voice*. Mekas, who had spent his youth in a forced labour camp in Nazi Germany, had used the term 'Underground', along with many others, to describe the filmmaking practices of a young generation resisting the "frozen cinematic conventions" of Hollywood.

'Underground' was a poetic and resonant word and one the media and UBU could use to advantage. After the *Time* and *Newsweek* articles, UBU screenings and other activities were labelled 'Underground'. This significantly changed their social positioning. They were no longer confined to the discourse of 'Australian' films or defined as amateur. Under this new title, they could align their activities with a growing youth subculture which was critical of the forms and conventions of adult culture. Here their films and other activities could take on other meanings. Through its various practices UBU colonised, mutated, and multiplied the Underground discourse, providing a unique Australian cultural expression that can be charted in this publication through the documentation of UBU's newsletters, films, lightshows, happenings, national film distribution and exhibition network, censorship battles and much more.

Importantly this new cultural space can be seen in the context of the unique possibilities that it offered—different from what was possible both before and after. UBU successfully engaged with powerful cultural forces by systematically developing these uniquely historical possibilities to produce new cultural knowledge.

While the Underground discourse was used and shaped by UBU to their advantage they were also used and shaped within it. For instance Albie Thoms' tour de force of underground filmmaking, the 85 minute *Marinetti*, while being arguably Australia's greatest underground film could never be accepted by the film critics and audiences who were looking for the dreamed 'Australian film' in the form of a Hollywood style feature.

Unfortunately, there are still very few discourses that open the doors of perception beyond the familiar. Those who are inspired by *UBU Films: Sydney Underground Movies* and want to do some more sleuthing, I recommend the video compilation of UBU films which is available from Albie Thoms Productions Pty Ltd (PO Box 409, Spit Junction, NSW 2088; $50 + $5 postage)—three hours of unique material guaranteed to excite your senses.

Next track down Albie Thoms' own book *Polemics for a new cinema* (Wild and Woolley) and also contact Arthur and Corinne Cantrill for a complete set of their remarkable journal *Cantrills Filmnotes*, which has been published regularly since 1971 (tel [03] 9380 6416 or GPO Box 1295L Melbourne VIC 3001).

If you are looking for a starting point for your own investigation into this phenomenon try this: Why would a journalist refer to Australia as Alfland and how does that connect with UBU?

Happy sleuthing.

Brian Doherty, B Des St, MA, was co-ordinator of Sydney Intermedia Network from 1989 to 1995. His MA paper was on the emergence of underground film in Australia.

Book review

A phoney war

Jane Mills challenges David Puttnam's knight's tale

David Puttnam
The Undeclared War: The Struggle for Control of the World's Film Industry
Harper Collins, London 1997

David Puttnam sees himself as a soldier. Not your common or garden private, nor your elitist officer, as his recent knighthood might imply; more the parfit, gentil sort who takes up the cudgels to fight for those who lack the power to defend themselves. The major trope of his book is that of military conflict, with the valiant Sir David ruing Hollywood's ultimate victory over the vanquished national cinemas of the world.

Seeing cinema's history in terms of a trade war, Puttnam presents an initially compelling argument. Hollywood currently accounts for around eighty per cent of European box office revenues, European films for less than one per cent of the American box-office. In European nations, home-produced films represent a derisory percentage share of the market—only seven per cent in the case of Britain. Things are even worse in Australia.

He begins with some fascinating behind-the-scenes stories from the aborted GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) negotiations of the early 1990s when Jack Valenti, head of the American Motion Picture and Production Association, pressured Clinton to torpedo Europe's system of quotas on American screen product. Puttnam traces the origins of the war back to the days of early cinema when disorganised national industries proved incapable of resisting the cultural domination of an economically powerful American vertically integrated infrastructure.

The opposing forces in this open warfare are characterised as America's philosophy of free enterprise versus Europe's protectionist political culture. Puttnam's Blairite liberalism will strike chords among many Australian filmmakers and critics who frequently fall into the trap of defining Australian cinema as caught in a hard place between the scylla of Hollywood commerce and the charybdis of European art. But it is more complex than this: and what makes Braveheart Puttnam an unreliable defender of the national cinema faith is his simplistic idealisation of Hollywood and his often woefully ignorant denigration of European cinemas.

Puttnam has no time for kneejerk anti-Hollywood protectionists like French filmmaker Claude Berri who said: "I'm not about to be buggered by the US industry. We shouldn't allow them to deal with us the way they dealt with the Redskins" (*Empire*, UK, 1994). Instead, he charts the history of American mainstream cinema in terms of its egalitarianism, non-elitist and democracy-inspired attitudes to screen culture and audiences.

He points to the anti-authoritarian themes of Hollywood movies influenced as they were by the political and cultural attitudes of the largely European studio heads and investors in the early days of the studio system: "the movies became the glue binding together America's dispossessed. They offered downtrodden audiences a chance to dream of a better life, and a few immigrant entrepreneurs a chance to realise those dreams. So it was that the movie developed into America's first truly indigenous form of mass culture".

He is excited by Hollywood's determination to enhance profits by focusing on audience—a trait which he claims was to become an article of faith for the entire American movie industry. He praises Hollywood's "belief that members of the public were the ultimate arbiters of everything that the studios did".

Where some point to Hollywood's tawdry market values and the supposed damage done to national art and culture, Puttnam replies, "The more we can get away from relying on cultural defence, and concentrate our energies on industrial success, the better...If we make a film that nobody comes to see, who do we seek to blame? The distributor, the exhibitor, the critics, the audience, the Americans, GATT? Seldom ourselves! Instead, we've developed to a fine art what could best be described as a 'culture of complaint'—combined with something worse, an ever-growing evasion of personal responsibility...isn't it a kind of blind arrogance to believe that 'If the general public are too dull and unimaginative to see the splendour of my vision—that's their problem'? The truth is, it's not their problem. If the public don't like it, they'll go and see another movie, or maybe they'll just stay at home...If you don't respect your audience, they're unlikely to respect you".

If only it were that simple. Puttnam's failure to provide much in the way of solutions lies in his insistence upon polarising the argument which his war imagery requires and in his denigration of local national cinema. As Tom O'Regan has lucidly explained: "In any positive assessment of Hollywood, the Australian cinema also suffers. It is patently not Hollywood. It is a less popular, lesser version of it. It lacks Hollywood's vitality and energy, its powerful characterizations and production values...Australian efforts are routinely compared with international films and are found wanting." (*Australian National Cinema*, Routledge, London, 1996)

Reserving special blame for French auteur theory, Puttnam maintains that the economic failure of European national cinema and its ghettoisation is due to an elitist screen culture which places too much emphasis on high art at the expense of audience pleasure.

But, failing to understand the role the *nouvelle vague* (and the innovations of other European national cinemas) in popularising and validating Hollywood's glorious mass culture past as well as profoundly broadening its cultural horizons, Puttnam ultimately fails to provide a convincing analysis of national cinema's ghettoisation.

Had he not been intent upon casting himself as a supra-national screen saviour, nor upon characterising cultural differences in terms of a bloody battle between goodies (Hollywood) and baddies (national cinemas), Puttnam might have arrived at some potential solutions to the economic and cultural problems facing local screen cultures.

O'Regan argues that the solution lies in a pluralistic, not a relativistic, approach to analysing screen culture. This is the approach adopted by Angus Finney in his recent critical review of European cinema, *The State of European Cinema: A New Dose of Reality* (Cassell, London, 1996). In his well-argued analysis, supported by illuminating case studies, Finney explores the myriad potential solutions to the problems confronting all economically and culturally endangered national cinemas. It is a book that all those involved in Australian cinema—politicians, funding bodies, film and television program makers, screen educators and audiences—would benefit from reading. Unlike Puttnam, Finney believes the way forward resides in the skills, talents and minds of the cultural producers, educators and consumers—not in the fancy speechifying of a self-appointed military leader.

Jane Mills is head of screen culture at The Australian Film, Television & Radio School.

Report

At the intersection of politics and poetics

Julianne Pierce immersed in the screens at *documentaX*

The city of Kassel in the north west of Germany is an unlikely town for *Documenta*, the world's leading art event. It has the feeling of a large village—perhaps once a grand city, but totally devastated then rebuilt after World War II. But somehow this village feeling works for an exhibition like *Documenta*, allowing the audience to walk the city between four exhibition spaces and view several site-specific projects along the way. Throughout all sites, a strong thematic cohesion is maintained along with a sense of relation between the many installation, photographic, screen-based and sculptural works on display.

The 10th *Documenta* (aka *dX*) was held from June to September this year assembled by French curator Catherine David with the title "politics/poetics". Without including many big names, *dX* featured over 100 artists and groups, indicating a preference towards a thematic rather than a 'blockbuster' approach.

dX engaged in very direct ways, enticing the viewer to spend time with works, to read, to sit, to watch and at times touch. This engagement was particularly pronounced with the screen-based works, a predominant feature of *dX*. What was most obvious about these works was the presentation in relation to the viewer—with great consideration of how an audience relates to screen-based work within the context of an art exhibition. The viewer could be both receptive and active in the concept and delivery of the ideas.

The most pronounced example of this was a series of four videos by Jean Luc Godard screened in a 'viewing structure' designed by Dan Graham. The Godard works were from his personal history of cinema and other movies, excerpts from his own and others' films, interspersed with interviews and dialogues on many topics from French philosophy to cinema theory. Each monitor sat on the floor and was displayed in one compartment of a four cell glass 'booth', the audience sitting on cushions in each booth with headphones. The design of the booth however created an uneasy sense of voyeurism as viewers could see each other through the glass, as well as reflections of the other videos, and in turn, their own image as part of the reflected Godard image. The whole structure created tension, mirroring Godard's own techniques of fracturing and layering.

French artist Liisa Roberts presented a 16mm installation entitled *Trap Door*. Situated in a large space, three loops of repetitive human motion were projected on the walls as well as screens arranged in a triangular pattern. Her work "...reflects the relationship between viewer and work in time and space...in a space that is both closed and open at the same time. The viewer can walk around it, enter it, or observe it, for it adheres to sculptural principles as well as visual principles. It is both exhibition space and object." (*dX*, Short Guide) The grainy black and white film, with only the sound of the projectors created an eerie and mesmeric effect. Like the Godard work, the viewer becomes both spectator and participant, but using a more poetic approach, Roberts created an immersive and contemplative screen environment.

On a more 'gritty realist' note Johan Grimonprez presented a documentary video *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* (1995-97), an historical chronology of airplane highjackings. The work was totally engaging, and in the context of *dX* was an important detailing of the history of extreme political actions. The work did not glorify the terrorist acts, but rather seemed nostalgic for the 'classical' terrorist method.

These three works are only a short selection from a comprehensive list of screen-based works. The inclusion of these works alongside many other artforms created a strong sense of content and theme rather than medium. Most of the screen-based works were actually about projecting beyond the screen, engaging the audience in an environment, creating the image as a confrontational spectre. Artists such as Graham/Godard, Roberts, Grimonprez as well as, for example, Jordan Crandall, Steve McQueen and the collaborative team of Mike Kelley and Tony Oursler are working at the intersection of politics and poetics, exploring ways in which the screen is simultaneously site of production, display medium and expanded sculptural/architectural mechanism.

Report

Barroom fantasias

Deane Kiley does *Digita* at Melbourne's Cyber-Fringe Binary Bar

Informal, sardine-packed and a little like the Mother of All Uncle Arthur's Slide Nights, Digita's takeover of the Binary Bar for two nights was worth its wait in set-up time.

Lisa Gye and Steven Ball, in an inspired piece of adhoc-ery, used a calico sheet over the main window of the bar rather than a clinical projection screen, so pedestrians and that peculiar brand of Melbournian flaneur could—with neat literalism—turn the plane to interface. Apt, really, for a double bill of interactive multimedia entertainment that aimed to put the performance and audience-focus back into an often-predictable point-click Timezoney version of art shrink-wrapped to fit kiosk one-to-one.

As with any decent theatre restaurant, we got some terrific warm-up acts, in this case an experimental video compilation featuring work by RMIT animation students, from scalpel-surreal metallic 3D-morphed flowers to deconstructed faux-naif retro-Astroboy, starring (as enjoyably always) Troy Innocent and Third Eye.

At one end of the theatricalisation continuum were CD-ROM extravaganzas that nonetheless simply multiplied the over-shoulder-starer experience of impatiently waiting for a Riven addict to finish up. Zoe Beloff's *Beyond* is an extraordinary cinematic VR narrative, set in an abandoned asylum occupied by about 20 panoramas and 20 QuickTime movies. Hauntingly gothic and dreamily associative, it explores artificial resurrection and dramatises the paradoxes and cross-translations between media technologies over time, mode, fiction, analysis and use, and frankensteining discarded 1920s home movies. But—in addition to the distancing of CD-autocontrol—the poor circus-bear computer got d-drive stutters, dissipating the soundscape, swallowing the scripted-word recordings, distorting the picture.

Then there's the hybrid inbetweeneries of performed interactivity and projected performances. *Regurgitations*, a la Dirk de Bruyn, did fractal variations on the diaristic theme in full handheld vertigo mode with palimpsestic layers of text, old family-photo riffs, chanting, live guitar, comic-book iconography and hallucinogenic movement disconcertingly reminiscent of bad improvisational contact dancing. *Synthesiser*, by Steven Ball and Nicole Skeltys, bounced fractured randomly-generated text off a distressed, Gaussian road movie (broken white line zipping itself up into infinity), colliding with pixillated palettes, tartan swatches, screensize Dulux samplers and other found-objects from the technical apparatus of image manipulation.

But at the other performance extreme, and probably the most entertainingly effective, were those incorporating and engaging the space and audience. *Tony Wood's Interactive* boasted live percussion and electric guitar backing CD-ROM projections of abstracted video and photographic kinetic water studies, match-cut and jump-cut with a duelling slide projector. The two competing (and mobile: tilting, scrolling, crawling up the wall, chasing each other across the screen) image-sets framed, overlapped, slid in and out of focus and position, collide-o-scoping sunflowers, circuitboards, snakeskin, peacock-tail oil-patinas, diodes, stained glass, and hieroglyphs. Mesmerising fun syncopated to the live music.

And Paul Rodgers produced two terrific pieces, *The Waxing Book* and *Paul's Experiments*, the latter being the Digita highlight (in all senses), installing a video hook-up projecting the audience-as-film, three light globes that he slowly, surgically punctured with a blowtorch while a fan dissected light, mirrors refracted it, sunspots imploded it, video-inserts and shadow produced a quadrupled puppet-play commentary. Medium as newly-visibilised message and toy: an acute fable for Digita.

Digita Screensavers & Moving Stills, *CyberFringe, Binary Bar, October 5 and 19.*

Content as discontent

Jeffrey Cook at a cacophonous ISEA97, Chicago

ISEA97, the eighth in a series of annual conferences on and exhibitions of electronic art, was the second to occur in the US—on this occasion, at the School of Art Institute of Chicago (ARTIC). This year's "theme" was content, that most ghastly term for anything from art to artless entertainment in the digital media domain. Apart from a curious struggle between the local hosts wanting to rename the organisation "International Symposia" instead of "Inter-Society", the event successfully brought together over 300 academics, students, artists and others interested in the current state of digital and analogue electronic culture.

A sample of the Australian contingent included Merlin (we were invited to exhibit our work *Metabody* [www.metabody.com]), Norie Neumark with *Shock in the Ear* and Nigel Jamieson from New Zealand with *Something=X* as well as Amanda McDonald Crowley, director of Australian Network for Art and Technology and also a board member of ISEA, who spoke on behalf of Paul Brown on electronic arts publishing. I can't do justice to the many works within the limited space of this article, but suffice to say that many of them were elegant, effective and stimulating. Best of all was the opportunity to see Australian works in an international context, and to meet with all the participating artists.

As discussed at the conference's plenary session, ISEA is a "snapshot" of new media art. Rather than a specifically 'curated' exhibition, it attempts to be more inclusive and wide-ranging of work and ideas than smaller, more focused festivals and events. Importantly, the true focus of ISEA is 'academic', and although it centred around three days of presentation of papers, it also showcased 70 works by local and international artists, including installations, photomedia exhibitions, performances and musical events.

A great idea, mixing theory and practice, but in practice the presentations with all their inherent problems of 'too many papers, not enough time', tended to overshadow the exhibitions and performances. Hurried, and by the third day, relentless, delivery of papers on the aesthetics of digital media, the history of electronic art, the future of publishing, issues in media education, the problems with social activism in the arts, and so on, made for a hectic and at times impractical schedule. The event was not so much a "snapshot" of everything that was new in arts, architecture and media, but more a cacophony of new media arts.

The people of ARTIC tried hard, and were often effective, but the ambitions of the event easily outstrip its reality. ISEA98 will be held in England. The theme, dangerously (over)stretched between Liverpool and Manchester "as the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution", will be "revolution and horror" (and, yes, quotes from Trotsky!). Submissions are now being sought. It's a great step into the world of new media arts.

For this year's event see www.artic.edu/~isea97*; for next year's at Manchester and Liverpool see* www.isea98.org

Jeffrey Cook received a travel grant from the AFC to travel to ISEA 1997.

Media to move the margins

Shane Rowlands on the making of *Zen Che: A Tactical Arts Response*

Arterial (formerly Street Arts) is a Brisbane-based professional community development company aiming to produce contemporary art which interacts with young people in public spaces. For the last 18 months, the company has been working with marginalised youth communities in the under-resourced northern outskirts of Brisbane in collaboration with local community organisations. The entire Caboolture region, incorporating Bribie Island, Caboolture, Burpengary and Morayfield, is serviced by one youth worker. The *Zen Che* multimedia project focussed on a core group of six young men, aged 16-18 years, who participate in martial arts training at the Ningi Youth Centre (read: tin shed with pool table) near Bribie Island.

Two professional artsworkers—documentary filmmaker Randall Wood, and public installation artist Craig Walsh—facilitated the ten-week workshop, consisting of two four-hour sessions per week, which offered the participants training in the use of video and still digital cameras, computer manipulation of still images, interviewing techniques, editing, and the chance to experiment with video installation and site-specific performance. By extrapolating their keen interest in martial arts training to broader considerations of fear, conflict, and (self-)defence, the young

Zen Che: A Tactical Arts Response

men sought to address issues of particular relevance to them, that is, the presumed threat posed by youth to older people in the community and the consequent resentment by youth for being 'written off'.

The process of initiating an intergenerational dialogue began with the participants filming an interview with Alex Clode, a local Korean War veteran, about his perspectives on war, violence, the role of young people today, and the history of the World War II bunkers and gun turrets, local landmarks where youths hang out on Bribie Island beaches. One of these bunkers was the site of the night-time 'beach event'. Footage from a variety of sources—the interview with Clode, historical images from WWII and computer manipulated vox-pops of/by the participants and other young people from the area—were projected onto three external walls of the bunker, which became the installation context for the young men's martial arts performance on the beach. In turn, the beach event was filmed and this material was edited by Rochelle Srhoj and Triny Roe in collaboration with the participants to form the basis of an eight minute video, *Zen Che: A Tactical Arts Response.*

The product is a sophisticated, cleverly layered, television-broadcast quality video. The process of its production has been one of collaboration between participants and a group of professional artists, rather than a more traditional youth arts model in which the participants devise the work with broad facilitation by artsworkers. Given that Arterial is committed to continue working in the Caboolture region, their process is strategic for a number of reasons. In addition to being a source of great pride and further inspiration for the participants and community, the video's exceptional production values will be useful in lobbying for further funding as will its potential for national exposure via various youth and film festivals. The nature of developing skills in complex multimedia technologies necessitates a much longer, multiple-phase approach and perhaps, in the early stages, a more closely mentored relationship between participants and professional artists.

Zen Che: A Tactical Arts Response*; core participants: Karl Torrens, Jodi Warman, Jamie Warman, Huon Siebert, Michael Johnson, Nick Jimenez.*

Report

Open and shut

Anna Dzenis welcomes the AFI/Cinemedia discussion "The best and worst—films that shaped our lives" and regrets the cancellation of Adrian Martin's *The Week in Film* from Radio National

What are the films that have shaped our lives? What are the films that have impressed us, moved us, challenged us? What are the films that have irritated us, angered us or offended us? These were the questions posed by Adrian Martin (chair) to Joe Queenan and Joanna Murray-Smith at the AFI/Cinemedia sponsored event foregrounding writers on film at this year's Writers Festival in Melbourne.

Strong opinions have characterised US writer Joe Queenan's work, whose title 'hatchet-man critic' is certainly warranted. Queenan is the author of *If You're Speaking To Me Your Career Must Be In Trouble* and *The Unkindest Cut: How A Hatchet-Man Critic Made His Own $7,000 Movie and Put it All on His Credit Card*. He has also written extensively for publications such as *Time, Newsweek, Rolling Stone, Spy, People, Cosmopolitan, Esquire, Vogue, Allure, George, The Washington Post, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal* and *Playboy*. He is currently working on a new book, *How Bad Could it Be?*, which explores many contentious facets of popular culture. Queenan's experience of the cinema appears to be predominantly a negative one, or at least that's the way he chooses to describe it. In his presentation his favourite term of denigration was "horrible". He frequently invoked catastrophic cultural and historical events as metaphors to highlight his dislike of a film or a group of actors. At one stage he read out two lists—the first list included Joseph Goebbels, Hermann Goerring, Rudolph Hess, Heinrich Himmler and Adolf Hitler. Those were the people on the marquee at the 1934 Nuremberg Rally. The second list consisted of Emilio Estevez, Rob Lowe, Andrew McCarthy, Judd Nelson, Ally Sheedy, Mare Winningham and Demi Moore—these were the actors in the opening credits for *St. Elmo's Fire*. Queenan suggested he was leaving it up to the audience to decide which of these two groups of people were scarier. His polemic, however, was clearly against the 'brat pack'. While Queenan claimed to value a film such as Hitchcock's *Psycho* because of its educative function—it warns you not to stay in motels—it is 'badness' he was most concerned with.

Joanna Murray-Smith is also a prolific writer. Her play *Honour* won the Premier's Literary Award for Drama in 1996. Her other work includes *Love Child, Flame, Atlanta,* and *Angry Young Penguins*. Her screenwriting work includes episodes of *Janus, Greed,* and *Mimi goes to the Analyst*. She is also a regular contributor to *The Age*'s *Cinema-Verite* column. In her presentation Murray-Smith was concerned to isolate the cultural and historical facets which contributed to the cinema's formative influence on her life. Reflecting on how she differed from Queenan, she suggested that she was more like Carol Brady—a beacon of simplistic positive energy. Yet what distinguished Murray-Smith even more from Queenan was the fact that she identified so passionately, so completely with the films which she spoke about—films which ranged from *Love Story* and *Belle de Jour* to *Mr Smith Goes to Washington*. Not only did she value a film like *The Big Chill* because of the fantasy friendships it represented—friendships formed through some communal ideological fervour—but she also claimed to have fallen in love with the house in the film to the point where she had to make a pilgrimage to the actual site.

The evening was evidence of how pivotal the cinema can be at so many junctures in our lives. For both Joe and Joanna there have been profound moments and effects. Listening to their stories caused me to reflect on my own cinematic experiences, and in particular on films that have at different times and for various reasons meant a great deal to me. Just the other weekend while watching Leos Carax's astonishing film *Les Amants Du Pont-Neuf* I felt immediately compelled to watch it again, to remain immersed in its images of passion. The other thing I wanted to do straight away was to talk about this experience, to engage in a dialogue. It is such a fascination with the ways and means that cinema engenders and provokes discourse and conversation that also drew me along to this event at the Writers Festival. The AFI have again demonstrated a serious commitment to a critical and open discussion of the cinema—from their *Conversations on Film* series to events such as this.

The disappointment of the evening was the marginal space allocated to Pascall Prize winning critic, Adrian Martin. His regular provocations and reflections in his sadly soon-to-disappear radio program *The Week in Film*, have offered precisely this regular, active, intellectual engagement with so many aspects of the cinema. It was only a month or so ago that Martin called into question the practice and critique of film reviewing. He asked these same questions of himself and his colleagues: "Do film reviewers know what they are talking about most of the time? More specifically, do they really know what they're saying when they chop up films into their component bits and ascribe evaluations of good or bad, better or worse, to these respective bits?...Do they really understand the technical aspects, the division of labour across the various members of the crew, do they have the foggiest about the differences between pre-production and production and post-production?" These are important questions, that while acknowledging dualities such as good/bad, like/dislike, also bring into question what we really mean when we evaluate films in those ways. I have so often been moved to serious reflection while listening to this program. I despair that the public spaces where genuine critical dialogue occurs are disappearing. The continuity of such spaces and places—the possibility of hearing voices which speak thoughtfully—is an essential and indispensable part of a lively screen culture. The AFI, Cinemedia and the Writers' Festival deserve our praise and support for keeping one such venue alive.

Review

From the dusk of celluloid and the dawn of digital

SIN's *Metalux* program inspires Paul Andrew

"Metalux" is a term which loosely translates as "above light". It also has an alchemical ring to it. So too do many of the striking films and videos which comprise the program of this name recently screened by SIN (Sydney Intermedia Network). This memorable new media program co-ordinated by artists Jo Law and Redmond Bridgeman brought together 11 raconteurs of transformation and enlightenment, produced by Western Australian experimental film and video artists.

Like their precursors, the UBU group and film-makers like Paul Winkler, these would-be cinemalchemists loosen celluloid from the primacy of its linear and narrative projections. These are films rich with metaphor that seek out the transmutative aspects of film and video structure. They enliven the project of structural film and in so doing evince the spirit of countercultural film-making which informed their predecessors.

These are new media works from the aftermath of structuralism. Each film in the program comprises the mutable imaging from the dusk of celluloid and the dawn of digital. The program, it seems, has been undertaken to continue the project of structural film-making in an era of technological ambivalence. In examining technologies, old and new, it retrieves radical and anarchic film-making tendencies from our collective amnesia and applies them to new media.

To be digital or not to be digital is the question for many low-end new media makers, many of whom have been seduced by Super 8, 16mm and video and who have abandoned what might be termed a "filmic spirit" (and, many would argue, the formal principles, techniques and craft of film) in the race to multimedia and FX.

Jo Law, *Virtual Memory is Running Low*, 1996, 16mm

Each artist has interrogated the structural rupture inherent in the current milieu. Intentionally or not, these artists have also taken to task the very nature of this ambivalence, the similarities and differences of filmic and electronic media. These are often mesmerising and entrancing architectures. The filmmakers imbue these spaces, often handmade, with incantation-like texts, sounds and markings treating the base elements of film and video, its celluloid and electronic fields, more as a collision course for the prismatic and mutable qualities of film's building blocks.

The program is a triumvirate of structural approaches. First up, works which interrogate celluloid as a constructive premise. Second, those that deploy a diverse range of media from Super 8 to 16mm to video and are completed as a video product. The third intriguing but obscure component is film which explores the relationship between visual perception and visual representation.

Like their precursors, there is a common subtext of sheer exuberance for the wonderment of technological progress. Here the film-makers have combined new and old technologies more for a scratchy obfuscation than elucidation or narrative intent. Each of them, however, has kept their sites (sic) firmly on restoring the glint in the eye of experimental film.

The first section begins with a film as disturbing as it is entrancing. It is the Zen-like simplicity of *At No Time*, a 16mm film by Martin Heine which sets the tone for the program; its rudimentary and rustic quality highlights film's meditative, contemplative and introspective possibilities. The prescient catalogue essay by Redmond Bridgeman (from a beautifully designed catalogue) describes it thus, "the simple stripping back of the emulsion brings each frame into consciousness and focuses attention on the temporal structure of film".

The second section includes *Snow Film* by Arlene de Souza, *Old Earth* and the sexy nonsense of *Given Leave to Enter* by Jo Law. Each uses home movie style Super 8 film to suggest private memory, sentimentality and a retrieval of the brass tacks of film.

The final section includes the more technically sophisticated films like the Wagnerian and highly patterned tour de force *Hydra* by Sam Lendels using techniques from pre-cinema: the zoetrope and kinetoscope. A remarkable film which, in the current race to high end, high tech multimedia, resonates with a *fin de siecle* intensity. The trance-like *Rinse and Repeat* by Bec Dean foregrounds the paradox of machinic autonomy in a humanist world. Each of these films have arousal in mind, arousal of memory, arousal of basics. Each film heightens these rudiments of film structure and history to achieve an aura-like and symbolic nature in this time where new and old technologies collide.

The vortex-like 3D animation *Landscape 1* by Soha Ariel Hayes which concludes the program is like the first film, *At No Time*, strangely primordial. The former from the pre-light of digital and the latter from the beginnings of pre-cinema. *Landscape 1* is an amazing film which seems at once visually incongruous and disturbingly vital alongside these overtly low-tech looking films. It consists of images lifted from a book on human skin diseases. The animation has the appearance of a carnal, architectural and technological Mixmaster. It serves as something of a leitmotif for these alchemical days when morphing, transforming and transmuting are *de rigeur*.

Landscape 1 is a spiralling animation which concludes the films of the more high end ilk. It is also the antithesis of those which precede it. While this created a rich irony for the program and a spectacular finish, it also suggested a convincing narrative within this climate of ambivalence—that the pyrotechnics of high-tech animations will prevail.

This program deserves legs, it deserves box office gold, it deserves to be seen by many more than those who attended the Art Gallery of New South Wales screenings. *Metalux* is emblematic of the new wave of cinematic changelings who have not forgotten the past, who have not forgotten the future and whose project is to continue restoring the glint in the eye of cinema.

Metalux *was presented by Sydney Intermedia Network (SIN) at The Domain Theatre, The Art Gallery of NSW, November 1 and 8.*

Paul Andrew is a Sydney-based filmmaker.

Review

Those that touch

Vicki Sowry and John McConchie sample the short film program at Adelaide's Gay and Lesbian Festival

Adelaide has traditionally subsumed a gay and lesbian identity into its wider cultural agenda, at least more so than Melbourne or Sydney. *Feast* is, then, a welcome addition to the calendar of events, especially in a town that has historical reason to pride itself on a pro-active approach to culture and (perhaps not coincidentally), was also the first state to legalise homosexuality. No surprises here; a dedicated lesbian/gay event feasting on the usual fare of visual arts and theatre. More unusual was the presence of a strong film component and, better still, were screens filled with diverse representations unfettered by rigid agendas of gender/sexual identities; especially in the two sessions of short films, one a local competition, the other the "best" of Queer Screen's *My Queer Career*. The Queer Screen contribution appeared restricted to celluloid: a shame, as some of the best work from its 1997 collection was produced on video.

Still, when viewed together, the shorts revealed a consistent flaw in their over-reliance on symbolism. The nature of the short restricts it to a single event or, instead, references (often through metaphor) a complexity otherwise unavailable in a limited time. We saw the pain of first love and disintegrating relationships through a smorgasbord of tortured caves, fiery gymnastics, wrestling love affairs and sweet vulva-shaped biscuits; solutions or alternatives to realist narratives foreclosed by brevity, or directors still too inexperienced to trust their actors. Too often we encountered films that could only sign their intentions without engaging us emotionally, without touching the complexities of the real.

However, some films were consummate in turning their tropes into successes. Adrian Francis' *Afternoons* wove muted autumn colours with a wind stirred curtain and a rediscovered journal from long-gone youth to speak of a loss as pervasive as it was inevitable. It hits the right note of ambiguity—did these events happen in a lost youth, or were they simply a desired moment which never took place? In voiding itself of sentimentality, the film suggests it doesn't matter which is the case: the loss lies in a desire that will never again be expressed. Moira Joseph's *Brian's Body* pushes into completely experimental realms. Fragmented close-ups of a sepia-toned Brian appear to be the intended host to the larvae of an annoying and ubiquitous fly. Brian's skin, and the screen itself, seems to seethe with a subterranean life threatening to break through the surface. A more conventional approach allows Sue Brown's *Snoop* to hang out the dirty laundry on the perverse pleasures of domestic life. Without a single verbal exchange between the female characters, a dialogue of mutual curiosity, intrigue and an all too voyeuristic drive is set in motion. Andrew Porter's *Nobody I Know* is a simple and unaffected tale told with a straight naturalism that acutely captures, through spot-on direction and performance, an encounter between two young men frustrated by the dynamics of the family.

Nobody I Know was a deserved winner (to *Snoop*'s runner-up) in the SA competition's Drama category. Jure Turcinov's *Boys With a Habit* took out the Documentary section, with Amy Gebhardt's *Life On Mars* taking second.

Feast, *Adelaide Gay and Lesbian Cultural Festival Film Program, Mercury Cinema, November 5.*

Review

Fighting depression with the tools of the trade

Tina Kaufman mingles with the suits at the first national WIFT Australia Conference

The Australian film industry with its high profile women producers, directors, and bureaucrats, gives the appearance of an area where women have made great advances. Democrat Senator Vicki Bourne queried this in her opening address at the Women In Film and Television (WIFT) Conference, believing the reality to be depressing, with many earlier gains not maintained, and most levels of achievement stagnating. However, as I arrived at the Sebel Townhouse for the opening session, the swirling crowd seemed dominated by young women wearing infinite varieties of the black power suit, clutching briefcases, and I realised that for them, the film industry is an exciting prospect, a territory to be won.

During the conference, as many of these young women asked questions which seemed to indicate a lack of knowledge about the processes of film business, I wondered whether there really was room and work for what seemed to be an avalanche of young women producers. Later, discussing the composition of the audience with WIFT organisers, I found that it was far more diverse and representative, covering a wide range of ages, breadth of experience and diversity of activity, and that the independent filmmakers there were both budding and experienced producers, producer-directors, writers and writer-directors. There was even a liberal smattering of actors (perhaps impelled by the need expressed recently by Nadine Garner and Sigrid Thornton for female actors over a certain age to create another career for themselves behind the camera if they want to keep working in film in Australia), as well as distributors, publicity and marketing people, and representatives from government and industry organisations.

This was the first national WIFT Conference, the culmination of several years' work by WIFT committee members around Australia to provide a platform for the discussion of areas of importance to women in the industry, recognising that many of the issues that concern women are different from those facing men. Just back from representing WIFT Australia at the New York meeting of the international WIFT organisations, where she'd been inspired by the diversity and enthusiasm of the women from WIFT's many national organisations, WIFT Chair Penny McDonald reported that WIFT International is to operate out of offices in Dublin and Los Angeles, is working towards an internet database, special events, and is arranging a tent at Cannes to support filmmakers who are WIFT members.

As the conference took place the day after Cheryl Kernot's resignation from the Democrats, it was too much to expect that she would deliver the programmed keynote address. Instead, Vicki Bourne proved to be an admirable substitute. "It's difficult to tell from the public face of Australian filmmaking, with women popping up everywhere...but it really follows the more depressing reality of women still grossly under-represented in positions of influence or authority", she stated. Bourne believes that women do have some effect on the types of films being made, but regrets that this isn't true on TV, where "it's a long time since we've seen anything new or exciting involving women, where newsrooms and newsdesks remain largely male-dominated, and where women seem to be locked into the soft, lifestyle programs and stories"—when they're not leaving TV altogether once they've had children, as one in four do. She mourned that the ABC now has virtually no capacity for in-house drama, having had $55 million ripped out of its funding by a federal government determined to privatise and outsource. A free and diverse media is a most valuable cultural concept, she concluded, and that doesn't mean a boy's own media.

The conference offered a crash course in issues of particular concern to women both in front of and behind the camera in film and in television and indicated, in a crammed and solid agenda over two days, some of the ways issues might be addressed and perhaps even solved. An entertaining hypothetical on securing a property and raising the finance provided a lighthearted look at a serious issue, while those breakfasting with Kim Marie Penn, an Australian who's carved out a successful and unexpected career as a martial artist in Hong Kong films and as proprietor of her own bodyguard business, were entertained by her filmmaking stories and her thrilling showreel. A media-free masterclass with Jane Campion and a group of actors gave insight into the way the director works, while a witty history of her career from Hollywood producer Linda Obst was both enlightening and very funny.

The skills and strategies needed for women to address the future in a more conservative political landscape were discussed by a panel of women who have 'made it' in the media. Radio National's Geraldine Doogue believes we have entered a more meritocratic period, less sympathetic to women's issues, in which individual women will thrive but society will not help women achieve. ABC TV's Penny Chapman talked about the challenges facing public broadcasting as it attempts to maintain its commitment to a diversity of perspective, of picture, of authorship, with budget cuts accelerating a major restructure. She believes that as digital technology de-professionalises the production process it removes barriers to women by changing the demographic on authorship—"opportunities have never been greater for women to have input, and their impact can be profound", she added. News and current affairs are still male-dominated in commercial TV. Channel Ten's Sandra Sully explained that, while (male) journalists get heated about discrimination and injustice, they tend not to notice the regularity of these abuses which occur under their noses (many women leaving this area of the media give harassment and discrimination as the main reasons). She quoted Jill Kerr Conway's advice to women working in male dominated fields: "Study the tactics of warfare and understand game-playing". She also talked about the importance of making women aware of their rights and the procedures which help, while admitting that commercial TV pays only lip-service to EEO. As more flexible work practices actually suit both women and employers, they should lead to more enlightened women working in this area. All speakers agreed that childcare is still the key industrial issue for women, while issues to do with work and family are primary in people's lives, especially now that younger men want to participate more in the upbringing of their children. As Hilary Glow of the AFC's Women's Program commented, it's something rarely addressed in film and television. "When the couple finally gets together—where are the children? Who's picking them up, who's doing the cooking?"

Straitened times lead to different solutions. A continuing and positive theme throughout the conference was of sharing, helping, collaborating; suggestions were made in a number of contexts that in lean times where there is less money that creative and collaborative partnerships and mentorships are vital—small film-making companies or teams could take practical measures like sharing premises, equipment and services. This is the way women are inclined to work anyway; Hilary Glow highlighted the success women producers have had in putting together creative teams and encouraging different ways of working, while Geraldine Doogue talked about small teams throwing up more women, fostering better interpersonal behaviour. It's interesting that the exigencies of tight budgets and increased competition for funding should encourage such approaches.

1997 WIFT Conference, Tools of the Trade—Skilling up for the future, *Sebel Hotel, Sydney, October 16-17*

Flickerfest 98

Forbidden Porcupine

The 7th international Flickerfest short-film festival kicks off January 3-11 at Bondi Pavilion, Bondi Beach. Festival directors Bronwyn Kidd and George Catsi have put together a program of over 100 short films from around the world plus a program of international documentaries. Two years ago, the festival became internationally competitive and this year a panel of international guests plus local industry figures will judge the films and the competition will tour nationally beginning in February. Films in competition are selected locally as well as from other international film festivals (including this year the Amsterdam International Documentary Festival and the *Sunny Side of the Doc* Festival in Marseilles). The competition program of 35mm and 16mm films has awards in 14 categories with Best Film receiving $2,000, Best Australian Film $1000 and Best Documentary $1000.

The short-film program will be shown on two screens (indoor and outdoor) with day and evening sessions. Included is a retrospective of British Women's Animation films and two nights showcasing shorts from Northern Ireland and Scandinavia. In association with ASDA and the British Council's newIMAGES program, British film-maker Candy Guard from the Channel 4 animation series *Pond Life* will participate in the discussions on the role of narrative in animation film (*From Pictures to Story*)on Sunday 4 January. On Saturday-Sunday January 10-11, film and TV producer Steven Mondal, head of the producers program at California's Chapman University, will lead a two day workshop (*Insiders Insight*) on co-productions and how to produce independent films for the world market. 20 students from Chapman will also attend the event to present their films and participate in the debate. There'll be a forum on documentary film-making (*Documentary—Just Do It*) on January 5 featuring international short film distributor Madeline Carr and Belinda Young, administrator of the NSW Film and TV Office's Young Filmmaker Fund.

Beatpix is a collection of rare music video clips from the 60s and 70s curated by musicologist Fenno Werkman. Premiering will be a selection from Australia's large collection of international Scopitone music clips from the 50s and 60s curated by Jaimie Leonarder. Also featured, a film on the 1964 Tokyo Grand Pageant plus a 1945 theatrical short made for the black theatre circuit of jazz great Louis Jordan. There's *Flickerkids*, two programs for children (4-8 years and 8-12 years) plus some beloved Bondi icons from the National Film and Sound Archive. *RT*

For registration and program details call 02-92117133

Heretics and heritage

Amanda Card in defence of dance independents: Green Mill 1997 and PICA's *Dancers are Spaceaters*

Our search for a history often begins with the residue of memory, with the traces of the past that remain with us in the present. These remnants become starting points for a journey into our history—for the maps we make of the past. And yet, memories are invariably partial and incomplete. The maps we create lead us back to very precise places—to very personal and limited locations—and they give us a very particular view of our history and our heritage.

This tracing of a memory to create a history is a very pleasurable act. I was reminded of this at the 1997 Green Mill Dance Project held in Melbourne during early July. As I watched a parade of dancers take the microphone to offer witness to the legacy of Gertrude Bodenwieser and Laurel Martin, I was fascinated by the seductive nature of living history (especially when it is celebrated among people starved of a past). Person after person rose to pay tribute to these women—bodies in the present becoming testimony to the significance of these bodies of the past.

But what does it take to be remembered in dance? Which bodies resonate in the present, leaving maps for us to follow to the past? According to Karen Van Ulzen, editor of *Dance Australia*, they are the heretics who leave a heritage. They are "seldom lone individuals but part of a continuum of change sweeping Western art". These artists defy tradition while acknowledging their heritage as a "point of departure". This genesis model of history (Martha begat Merce begat etc etc) validates the present by reference to the existence of a past. It offers dance a kind of historical legitimacy which champions linear, progressive development but, in the process, glosses over a memory of rupture and historical specificity.

Let's take one dancer's career as a case in point. Sonia Revid was trained by Mary Wigman in Germany. Originally from Latvia, she arrived in Australia in 1932. Four years earlier Revid had left Wigman's Dresden studio to pursue a solo career throughout Europe, gaining particular success in Berlin. She remained in Melbourne for 13 years, dying suddenly in 1945. Like other independent dancers working in Australia during the late 1920s and the 1930s, Sonia's work provoked interest, received praise, and stimulated criticism from reviewers, audience members and other dancers. Basil Burdett was one critic who took a particular dislike to Revid's style. Burdett was horrified by what he saw as Sonia's abandonment of established technique (ballet) and scoffed at her reliance on internal stimulation for external action. He told his readers in the *Melbourne Herald* in 1934 that during her recital, the "general conception and technical invention were hardly adequate" and "the emotional side tends to be too dominant".

However, Basil Burdett condemned Sonia Revid's performances by judging them against completely inappropriate standards, assumptions and principles. For him, her abandonment of an identifiable technique made her dance highly subjective and, therefore, of suspect quality. However, the whole point of Sonia Revid's work was her rejection of formalised techniques, her application of theory which had been developed in other art forms, and...her independence.

Consequently, as her work was so personal she did not acquire the trappings necessary for the development of a stake in the future, in the history of this country's dance practice. She left no legacy, no disciples, no means through which her name, her life, and her work could transcend her own time. The focus of this woman's life, and her dance, was its particularity, it was situated and historically specific. Such behaviour dictated that she be forgotten in a world so reliant on a history in which the significance of a past activity is measured by its residue and relevance in the present.

I suppose it should come as no surprise that, 60 years after Basil Burdett's complaints, the idea of an art which transcends the specificities of time and place should prevail. As Karen Van Ulzen stated in 1988:

It is surely obvious that most of the good art of the past transcends the flux of specific ideologies to touch something else that remains constant throughout human experience...

Dance Australia, October/November 1988

Such a statement was prompted by Van Ulzen's evaluation of the work of American independents such as Yvonne Rainer, Deborah Hay, and Trisha Brown and the theories they followed. Theories which, to Van Ulzen's dismay, had infected the projects of Australian dancers and choreographers. These dancers applied inappropriate theories to an art form which had always been, for Van Ulzen, necessarily associated with ideological individualism, the attainment of skill, the rewarding of talent, and a "discriminating, evaluative...authoritative, hierarchical approach" to criticism.

Well, Van Ulzen is nothing if not consistent. Ten years later, in her review of this year's Green Mill for *The Australian,* she bemoaned the lack of external stimulus and reference to tradition displayed in the work of contemporary independents. Their dance was "utterly unremarkable"—but, as she later suggested:

We really shouldn't be surprised—most independents choreograph on themselves. They are therefore, first, limited by their own technical facility and, second, by a lack of outside perspective of guidance.

The Australian, July 4 1997

However, this was only part of the problem. The other was the continued use of supposedly inappropriate theories in the creation of dance; or the use of "post-frog guff" as Van Ulzen calls it. This phrase refers to post-structuralist theories and post-modernism and was proudly borrowed by Van Ulzen from the Robert Hughes—a critic who freely admits to his own generationally induced myopia.

As we have seen, this association between independent practice, the active use of theory, and the critical devaluation of such art, has a long history in Australian dance. So, when I attended this September's *Dancers Are Space Eaters* forum, organised by the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA) and subtitled *Directions in independent dance,* I arrived with the history of independent practice, the reviews of this year's Green Mill, and the indignation of many dancers, ringing in my ears. There, some interesting questions were asked. "What is independence anyway?" Sally Gardner grappled with this topic offering a reference point for further discussion. "What do those artists who consider themselves independents represent in their work?" The variety of relationships between the individual, the world and movement saw a mesmeric exploration of the relationship between light/video and movement by Sue Peacock, *f22: the last stop;* the revisiting of a highly personal but revealing history by Kate Champion, *Of Sound Body and Mind*; a dance of playful simplicity and explosive space-carving from Jennifer Monson, *Lure*; a frenetic race for escape at the crescendo of Rosalind Crisp's memorable *roar*; and Tamara Kerr's *Ricochet* whose relentless energy became seductively hypnotic.

What I saw at PICA was a group of artists exploring the relationship between life and their moving bodies. Sure, not all of it was great, but even the pieces mentioned above, which have all stayed with me in the months that followed their viewing, were very specific to their time and place. For me, this is where their validity lies, but for others this condemns the work. It also threatens to banish the creators to historical obscurity as the canonical myths of the future devour the multiplicity of our dancing present, just as has happened with our dancing past. For independence, whether it means working alone, inventing against the grain, or merely managing to create work outside dominant funding structures, rarely lends itself to the establishment of a 'heritage'. Or does it?

To my amazement even I finally contributed to the maintenance of this idea of heritage with my address to the audience of *Space Eaters*. I should have seen it coming, but I didn't. For in my attempt to diffuse the centrality of certain memories and explode the mythology of 'heritage' through the illumination of the lives of former 'independent' dancers in Australia, I also gave some of those who identified as independent artists in the audience a linkage to a past of their own. Hungry for affirmation of their contemporary location, these histories gave these young dancers—their process, their passions, and their position in the contemporary social structure of Australian dance—some sort of validity. It offered them a memory from which to create a map to their own heritage.

Sections of this article originally appeared as part of the keynote address for the 1997 Dancers are Space Eaters *forum at PICA entitled* Maps, Notion and Memory: a tale of independents in the history of Australian dance.

Amanda Card is currently completing a PhD on aspects of Australian dance history and formerly performed with Kinetic Energy and Human Veins.

Not about disability

Zsuzsanna Soboslay sees Britain's CandoCo dance company

A plainchant violin. *Between the national and the bristol* opens like an arrangement of Giacometti figures in a square: eight faces, eight physiques turned in different directions, at different levels. Some are seated, some stand. This is an architectural arrangement of bodies in a wavering line—a queue, a thread, a taciturn question (how much can we know each other?). The inherent drama of bodies thinking, thinking to pass each other, is accentuated with a momentary blackout. Lights up again, as if, in remembering (the same positions, same roles), we can now look differently. This is not a piece about disability, nor even one that so much as points to some of its dancers as disabled. It is about planes of habitation, interaction, of where and how one can know another, manifest through sweep and contact.

Technically, what is notable is that the viewer's attention is equally dispersed between dancers. Siobhan Davies has choreographed for texture, line and placement, leverage, echo and counterbalance. This for me highlights one of the problems in *Christy don't leave me so soon* which first labelled the three dancers as (wheelchair) bound or unbound, before they could explore how it was possible to move. As an audience for this program there is a fine line between wondering at limitation, and wandering within the art: *Christy...* defines its characters as (unfortunately, female and) crippled, desiring, versus erect (and male) before it explores manoeuvres off-the-wheelchair in quite nice ways. Perhaps its first part was pointed, provocative, for some, but I found its politics loaded and unthinking. The problematic of Davies' piece, however, is quite different: how do you stop one dancer showing up the others?

CandoCo

David Toole uses his elbows like knees, his arms like levering cranes, his tumbles and turns somehow turning the earth like an earth-moving machine. None of his manoeuvres skim the surface—of soil, or emotions. Most of the fully-able-bodied dancers feel static beside him. There was some nice partnering with Helen Baggett, she breathing through her bones to accompany him; but largely, this legless dancer's skill should have been caught up in the rest of the troupe, but wasn't. Wheelchair bound, Jon French's angularity was given wonderful space by Davies, but could have been better threaded and echoed as a texture by other dancers throughout the piece. Working against isolation and exclusion is obviously a huge factor in the work of CandoCo; in its choreography this program did not always achieve a similar vision.

CandoCo is a group of able and dis-able-bodied dancers founded in 1991 in London. Their Australian tour, part of the British Council's newIMAGES *program, encompassed performances and workshops in Lismore, Newcastle, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane September 18-October 29.* between the national and the bristol*, choreography Siobhan Davies, music by Gavin Bryars;* Christy don't leave so soon, *choreography Benjamin/Dandeker/Parkinson. The Gasworks, Melbourne Fringe, October 7.*

Enabling dance

Anne Thompson talks to Sally Chance of Adelaide's Restless Dance Company

In my interview with Meryl Tankard in *RealTime* #21 ("Free from Steps") I hoped to tease out the meanings of terms she uses to talk about her work and dance in general—terms borrowed from a Modernist discourse. This proved difficult as the meaning of these terms was clearly implicit for Meryl and important to her. For this issue, I interviewed Sally Chance, artistic director of Restless Dance Company in Adelaide. Sally is clearly conscious of the necessity of speaking across existing discourses of aesthetics and identity. She also acknowledges the effect of doing so and thus how using a certain discourse can be a strategy for social change.

Nadia Ferencz in *Sex Juggling*, Restless Dance Company David Wilson

AT Why was Restless Dance formed? What is its charter? What drives you to run such a company?

SC The simple answer is that the time was right. My involvement began when I toured to Australia with Ludus Dance Company from the UK as one of their community dance workers at the 1989 Come Out Festival. Part of my role on tour was to run workshops. While we were in Adelaide I ran dance workshops with groups of differently-abled people including those with Down syndrome and cerebral palsy. This was a new area for dance in Australia. A couple of years later I decided to leave Ludus. I was interested in working in Australia but needed to establish myself as a specialist in an area of work to obtain permission to live and work here. So I thought I would seek work as a dance animateur with differently-abled people. Carclew Youth Arts Centre provided me with that opportunity. The company thus began as a youth arts project initiated by project officers Judy Potter and Virginia Hyme.

Since its inception in 1991 Restless Dance has held hundreds of workshops for fun and recreation, for skill and personal development, for industry professionals and for school and community groups. We've also performed in festivals, at conferences, at launches, at benefits, toured interstate and performed in Adelaide's premier theatres.

The company's aims are: to create and present excellent and challenging dance theatre nationally and internationally; to provide high quality dance workshops for people with and without a disability; to increase the profile of dance and disability in the community; to provide enjoyable recreational experiences.

AT What is your vision for the company?

SC When the company was associated with Carclew, project officers considered it important that workshops had a public outcome. So there has always been a split focus for me. I have always had community goals and artistic goals. The company is currently in transition. We have been incorporated for nearly a year. We would like triennial funding but the Australia Council's Dance Fund doesn't fund youth companies. We are also at a stage where some of the dancers, who have been with the company since its inception, deserve to be paid to co-direct and lead workshops as well as to perform. These dancers have become skilled and should be eligible for professional status. I'd like to establish a small professional company with a core group of performers as well as continue the work of the youth company. Each would contribute something different.

AT Could you talk about the company in relation to disability politics?

SC The policy of the company is "reverse integration" in which the expressive skills of the participants with disabilities define the company's unique style. This policy developed in response to three perceptions: Firstly, integration was the policy of the disability support services when the company began. This policy was connected to two other notions—normalisation and social role valorisation. In practical terms this policy involved placing individuals with disabilities in tedious jobs at low pay.

These individuals were not encouraged to have aspirations beyond being employed. They were not encouraged to be ambitious within the workplace, or to desire other life experiences such as personal health and fitness, sexual relationships, home ownership, children or travel. I, alongside some workers in the disability sector, began to feel quite cynical about the so-called 'opportunities' being offered to the disabled. I became interested in helping to redefine identity for this group in a broader way. I felt people gained identity options through leisure activities as well as through paid work. I thought that being a dancer could be one of these options.

Secondly, I also questioned the definition of 'normal' being used as the yardstick in determining lifestyle for the disabled. In my experience 'normal' people don't dance so I am not 'normal' in the way the word was being used. I also observed that in my dance classes the carers who accompanied the 'dis-abled' were often less skilled as dancers and as workshop participants than their so-called clients. What then was 'normal' behaviour in a situation such as a creative dance class?

Thirdly, I also felt that it was unfair that the person with the disability had to make all the effort in relation to integration. However, we have lost some workshop participants because of our policy. Some parents prefer their child to be a member of a group of predominantly able-bodied people or with able-bodied norms of behaviour.

AT Do you perceive dance training to be a tool of socialisation, a means by which unruly bodies can be disciplined?

SC Dance means as many different things to this population as it does across the general category of "people who dance". For some it's a means of getting fit, for others it's a social activity and for others it serves an expressive purpose. Some company members like their jobs and dance for fun. Others are bored at work and the experience of being in the company has enabled them to become more ambitious. One company member wants to become a full-time dancer. In workshops, I explore a range of goals such as the development of social skills and physical skills, personal expression, self-discipline and I challenge behaviour patterns.

AT Could you talk about the company's style?

SC I always focus on the group rather than on individuals and encourage participants to work as a group. I ask members to watch and copy each other. Thus, in performance everyone tends to do everything. Improvisation is the primary approach taken in workshops and a crucial aspect of the performances which can differ depending on how a participant is feeling. Because of this variable, I set up a "time-out" space for the performers during the show.

I select material on the basis of whether the dancers look comfortable doing it. I always work from a movement focus and then suggest links with emotion rather than the other way around. I find that these dancers have a powerful understanding of gesture as a dance language and of touch. Contact work, unison work and gesture have thus become the identifiable components of the company's style.

Ziggy Kuster and Stephen Noonan in *Sex Juggling* David Wilson

AT Could you talk a little about Restless Dance's last piece, Sex Juggling?

SC It explored a particular category of personal identity. The company divided into male and female groups to explore the idea of gender roles and behaviours and to devise and create dance. The project began with some sex education workshops run by the Family Planning Association. This aspect of identity seemed important to address as sexism, and the subsequent limiting of gender roles, can occur within the company.

My interest is in providing someone with a disability with as many terms with which to define themselves as are available to someone without a disability. Calling yourself a dancer is one of these options. Considering yourself male or female and sexual are others.

Company without space, company in between spaces

Visiting UK writer, Sophie Hansen, responds to new media performances by Melbourne's Company in Space

Escape velocity is the speed at which one body overcomes the gravitational pull of another body. This metaphor of the gathering of momentum and release from constraints seems an appropriate way to describe the creative processes which this year led to two new performance projects by Company in Space. *Escape Velocity*, a dance installation for Melbourne's Green Mill 97 festival in June and *Digital Dancing*, a residency at The Choreographic Centre in Canberra, were linked by an imaginative energy far stronger than the gravitational pull of practicalities. The successful risk-taking of the first project provided the impetus which enabled the following residency to fulfil its promise of innovation.

Hellen Sky in *Escape Velocity*

Escape Velocity was an example of faith over adversity. Determined to take part in Green Mill, yet too late to apply for funding for the exploration of ideas which had only emerged during the previous production, *The Pool is Damned*, which took place in March, the company was starting from scratch. When the Victorian College of the Arts agreed to donate their Hybrid Room to the company for the duration of the dance festival, they provided the space in which the ideas of company co-artistic directors, Hellen Sky and John McCormick, could form. The Hybrid Room, a small empty space without any history as a performance venue, offered the bare walls against which the artists could bounce their laser beams and bodies. The reality of a physical context for their ideas released the energy required to spark the creative process into life. Energy which was gradually dissipated by a fruitless search for sponsorship in kind for the expensive technologies on the shopping list, but energy enough to carry through the conversion of the room to a black box, the construction and installation of the technologies, some speedy made-on-the-body-whilst-avoiding-cabling choreography and some hurried match-making between the two elements. With time and resources at a premium however, the dress rehearsal came only on the opening night, the installation never fully received the focus it required, and the experimentation with the interactive potential of the work occurred during each performance.

Inspired by Mark Dery's book of the same name, *Escape Velocity* sought to examine the role of the body in the virtual world. As technology revolutionises our public, private and interstitial spaces (such as the internet), shrinking the globe, compressing time and expanding horizons, the reach of an arm, the length of a stride is distorted and confused. There's no need for a nod and a wink by e-mail, we can't embrace by video conference and our eyes won't ever meet across a crowded chat room. So where does flesh and fragile bone fit into the new geographies of the late 20th century? Has technology accelerated us free of each other's orbits, into a solitary virtual world where our bodies are an irrelevance, a hindrance?

Escape Velocity posed these questions in an other-worldly space without temporal, geographic or political context. Was this the mythical cyberspace? Probably not, there were too many bodies around. The intention, stated clearly in the program (a new step in the direction of accessibility for this company), was to construct a layered, responsive environment where the bodies of the audience would enter into relationships with the space, each other, a dancer and a series of aural and visual effects. By creating an immersive interactive environment, Sky and McCormick were seeking a physical and emotional, as well as a cerebral, response to their ideas. Introducing effects singly and cumulatively would allow the audience to absorb the many technologies in operation (something which *The Pool is Damned*, with its inscrutable complexity failed to do). Certainly the laser beams which criss-crossed the space and were broken by the bodies of the entering audience did evidently trigger a variety of sound effects. Questioning voices ricocheted around the bodies, quoting from texts such as Dery's, in a Babel of languages suggestive of entire continents and cultures. Over the sounds came images, similarly triggered; projections of moving bodies, filtered through animation and special effects packages to create visions of other-worldly hybrid beings. Suspended overhead, the body of Sky was filmed and projected around the space as she danced her aspiration to flight, her will to escape. As she fell to earth and carved a powerful path through the crowd to perform her final shamanistic dance, she incrementally reasserted her physicality, gathering weight and volume with every step, every fling of her arm through a wall of light. Moving below the 'vortex' of laser lights and overhead cameras which responded to her spinning limbs with sound and images, Sky took control of her environment and lead the technology into a beautiful synthesis with her movement. As the lights came up and she stood, small and sweaty in a sea of cold cabling, her kinetic transformation of the space remained on the retina for an instant, an after-image, testimony to the power of the body in these new relationships.

The end of *Escape Velocity* was the starting point for *Digital Dancing*, the residency at Canberra's Choreographic Centre. Australia Council funding earmarked specifically for initiatives involving dance and new technologies provided a well-resourced space, three dancers and the ability to involve a previous collaborator, the composer Garth Paine, in five weeks of creative discovery. Sky was able to step back from performing and choreograph with dancers Louise Taube, and Joey and Cazerine Barry. Clare Dyson joined the project's technical team. Taking many of the themes and technological devices of the previous work at a more measured pace facilitated a thorough, measured approach. The 'vortex' for example, which Sky so gamely manipulated in her improvised ritualistic dancing, was adapted through repeated rehearsals with the dancers to achieve its broadest choreographic range. Experimentation and analysis found a complex, balanced relationship between cause and effect, forming an environment which both drove and was driven by the dancer. The audience could see that physical activity triggered responses in the visual and aural environment, yet the evolution of the movement was complex and resistant to the reductive equations which typify much interactive work (such as the point and click world of the CD-ROM). The final performance which emerged through the weeks of testing was more a series of vignettes, demonstrations of prototypes, rather than a single cohesive show. The company was able to take several of their ideas to a logical conclusion, using trained bodies, before a live audience given the rare opportunity of experiencing the results of informed experimentation with dance and technology.

While The Choreographic Centre plans to continue its support of such new media work, the company returns to the struggle for resources sufficient to match their ideas. An interactive television project taking place in Victorian schools and on the internet in late 1997, and the possible tour of a reworked version of *The Pool is Damned* in early 1998, should provide the fuel to maintain the velocity achieved during these two successful projects. A new large scale work involving a range of artists is planned for next year, potentially accelerating the company, free once again of the pull of compromise and limited ambition.

However, without a permanent physical space in which to make and test its performance ideas, Company in Space will forever remain ironically virtual—Company without Space, Company in between Spaces. Whilst the commitment to new technologies often leads Sky and McCormick into the cyber-world of the ether, their passion is fed by the body, and without somewhere to put those limbs, lungs and larynxes, they will always be hamstrung by the physical imperative. Since the company's inception in 1992, the work has steadily increased in scale and ambition, with each successive project forging a new understanding of the performance potential of the interactive technologies emerging through progressive commercial and industrial initiatives. And yet, as with every new discovery, adaptations and modifications are required before a perfect model is formed. It is this space for experimentation which escapes the company and many like them. The wonder of technology is its ability to transform the known world, its capacity to transcend the imagination and redefine perception. Only through immediate experience does one fully grasp the power of technology, only through protracted exposure does one start to push the technology forward and through the processes for which it was commercially designed. The creative mind can see potential far beyond the intent of the manufacturer or industrial user, can question, re-formulate and re-apply technologies with implications which consequently feed back into the industry. But nobody wants to pay for these rather unquantifiable processes and so artists like Sky and McCormick will still be making lasers in their lounge room, buying PCs from *The Trading Post* and wiring up the standard lamp for the foreseeable future. Escape velocity, not easily achieved, is all too quickly lost again. Sad, but virtually true.

UK writer Sophie Hansen has returned to London to work at The Place Theatre after several months in Melbourne. She is interested in dance and new technologies and would like to hear from those involved in this area with a view to future research. sophie.hansen@mailexcite.com or c/o Bi Ma Dance Company, The Place Theatre, 17 Dukes Rd, London WC1H 9AB. Sophie will report on developments in dance in the UK and Europe in future editions of RealTime.

The history of our dancing bodies is becoming hot

Eleanor Brickhill on what recent dance in Sydney says about independents

Let's talk 'big art' for a moment. If you subscribe to the marginal idea that good dance, like good movies, or philosophy, or science, can actually reveal something about being human that wasn't visible before, and may consist of more than advertising industry fodder, then let's muse on this idea of 'big dance', and the relationship between its corporate, team-based, single-focus kind of legacy, and some recent Sydney dance events.

If dancers call themselves 'independent' as many of the *Bodies* and *Intersteps* artists do, then (as Sally Gardner has recently noted) it begs the question: independent of what? Independence implies relationship, a process of having grown away from something—a certain way of doing things, a context—and a process of negotiating that separation. For instance, dancers who've inherited the Sydney Dance Company seal of approval—like many of the artists from the *Bodies* programs and Stephen Page, Brett Daffy, Garry Stewart, to mention several—might find this process of separation problematic, because of the kind of effort needed both in its recognition and explication.

And credits for the first *Bodies* program at Newtown Theatre suggest this venture is a safe haven for ex-Sydney Dance Company and Ballet School trained artists. This tradition might provide a sense of security for dancers working on their own, but their 'independence' is rarely expressed in the work they make, despite the label. Maybe it's the 'black box' variety where the workings of that relational process are never acknowledged as relevant or important, and never available for investigation.

Nevertheless, the idea of 'inheritance' has been central to much recent work, in the seeing, the doing and the making of dances; the continuous negotiation between personal understanding, the kind of physical belief systems that make personal sense, and the attractive respectability of well-trodden cultural heritage. Everything you've learned about people and places, different ways of being and thinking, all the small details which accumulate like threads in a carpet, become superimposed, grow together, fuse. Yet one view of something may not obliterate others. They remain together, side by side, all viable, negotiating for recognition within one body. You can, if you want to, commit yourself to one or the other exclusively, or you might choose to investigate their relationship. At present, it's this investigation which seems crucial. The history of our dancing bodies is becoming hot.

So it might seem a good time for Indigenous artists whose work overtly straddles cultures. Stephen Page's *Fish* (Bangarra) has certainly achieved popular acclaim. But if traditions waltz with each other in the bodies of the dancers, it must be off-stage, and not when they have their public dancing faces on. On-stage the negotiations seem formal, distant.

But the traditional material, both dance and music, is totally compelling and the effect is quite unlike watching the predictable paces of the western trained dancers in the group. *Fish* features Djakapurra Munyarryun, a performer whose physical language gives purpose and weight to the work. His gestures are mercurial and his meanings seem rich and clear, sharpened perhaps by unfamiliarity, hiding no cliches. And David Page's traditional sounds seeped into my bones, leaving traces of melody and mood long after the theatre closed.

Meanwhile, is there something in the air at the moment, absent a few years back, which sees audiences unwilling to make any effort towards participating in an idea? Or is it that the complex *Steps #3 Intersteps, Video Steps* and *Studio Steps* programs at the Performance Space, curated by Leisa Shelton, came at the back end of a long spate of dance programs, and it was just too big an ask that audiences show much enthusiasm for turning up several nights a week, sitting on tiny stools and being constantly shunted around the theatre in the dark with all your belongings falling off your lap. Okay, if it's distracting now, why wasn't it three years ago? Is the good will really gone?

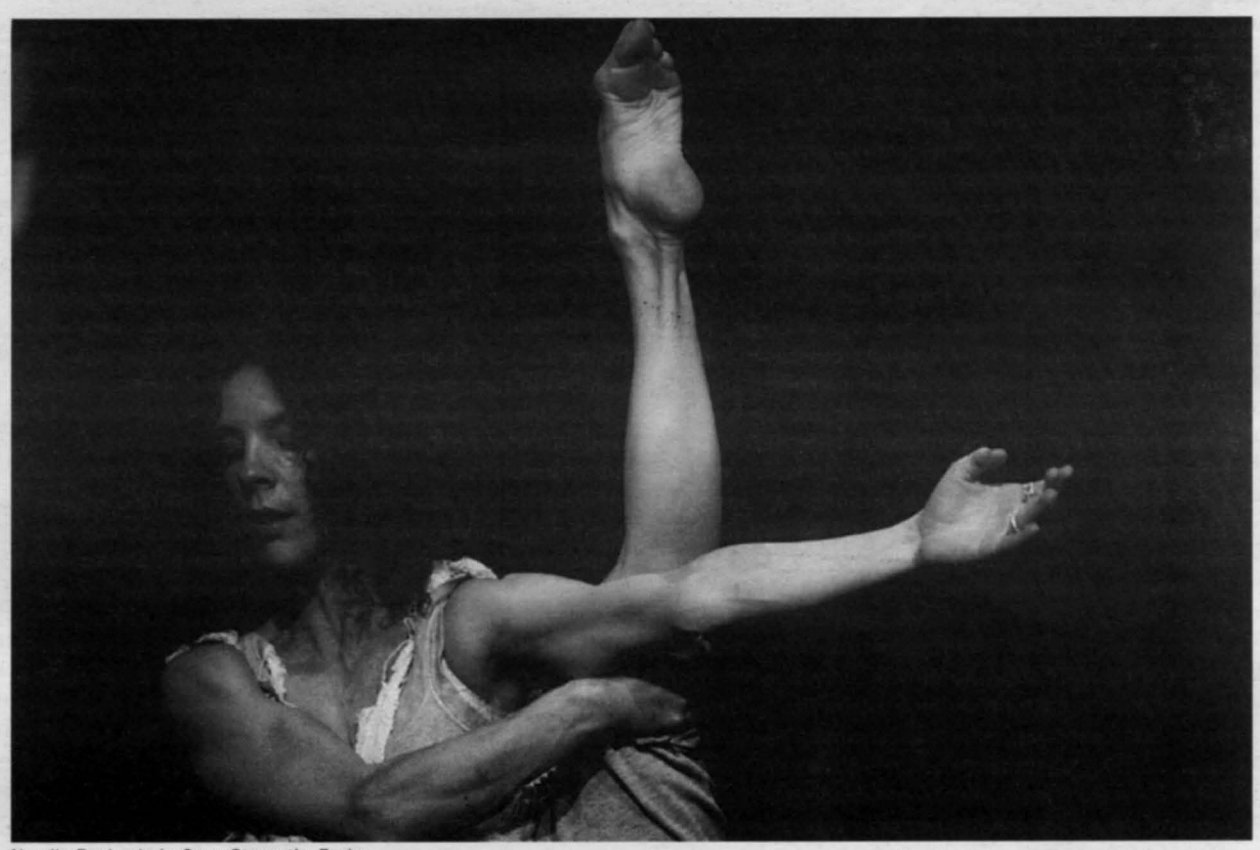
How is it possible, for instance, that Sydney audiences didn't flock to Trevor Patrick's concise and moving *Continental Drift* (see *RealTime* 20) with the same enthusiasm as Melbourne audiences? And Clare Hague's *dead trees arteries* lent itself to many viewings, as her finely wrought images of insinuating root, capillary, and great gnarled branches began to speak through her frame, wired as it was with such torsion that every pulse beat seemed charged and visible.

While Leisa Shelton's ideas about using *all* the space, requiring the audience to move from one vantage point to another might have provided nightmarish technical problems, it also allowed for an extremely varied program. But the text-based works all suffered similarly from muffled acoustics, making it difficult to follow Beth Kayes, for instance, in her *bits of 'Her'*, or Brian Carbee's *caught between Heaven and Earth*, a kind of burlesque dance-play, or Trevor Patrick's *Continental Drift*.

Memory and history operated strongly in Sue-ellen Kohler's *Premonition*. (TPS, October). Mahalya Middlemist's *Falling* film which opens the work has a grainy familiar texture, suggesting some past era of dance-making. But as she enters, Kohler's live body seems personable, vulnerable, with a poignant, childlike stance, hands open and toes turned-in, in a costume suggesting a playsuit, pantaloons, whale bone corsetry, a calf-length tulle tutu. Later balletic images appear, but oddly cut up, considered and intense. In her single drawn-out phrase reiterated live and over three screens, there are grand gestures and smaller inflection, but almost scrubbed of meaning.

But the phrases soften, some alchemical process working within the layers, and gradually it's revealed. Within her own body's assimilation of experience, her movements change, begin to flow together, closer to her centre, smaller, more from the present. There's a sense that she's creating her own self as we watch, without pretence or foreknowledge.

Comments regarding Sue-ellen Kohler's 'failed dancer' status in some reviews of the work, are pure grist to the critical mill, because the idea of critical judgment is integral to the work. Opinions reflect certain choices about what a dancer can or should do next, why one step follows another in just the way it does. If you think of different kinds of physical training as kinds of belief systems, what kind of physical beliefs count as important, what are the conditions that are brought to bear on our choices about what is appropriate, or possible?



Narelle Benjamin in Garry Stewart's *Fugly*

While the spirit of the dance speaks of unlimited possibility and its multiple containments, the multi-screened films seem also to reflect a different story, one about the body's naturally conservative nature. Choices are enmeshed in that cultural matrix that's called life as we know it. You don't just leave that behind, or else you flounder, fail, get lost in a very real sense, without language. But *Premonition* is not just about success or social survival, but that process of understanding how one's own personal history becomes currency for the present, what happens from moment to moment within you, over time, between flesh and social imperative.

Similarly balletic shadows fell over the works in One Extra's joint program, *Two*, featuring Lucy Guerin's *Remote* and Garry Stewart's *Fugly*. Balletic lines, stylised, extreme, disjointed and on the edge, featured strongly, but the choreographers' two directions were very different.

In *Remote* as if in the white on-and-off half light of a video screen, the dancers, sometimes with a hunched-up awkwardness, carved out their ungainly but definite ways with sharp-lined precision. The lighting, the stop-start, forward and back quality suggest they were in search mode. Becky Hilton, in her literally off-the-wall solo, clung closely to the wings, leaned out, curved her body like a bow, taut and twangy, and several arms-length duets lent a strange, coy, mechanical distance to these peculiar partnerships. At one point, in a laneway down centre stage, the dancers lay spayed out, with light falling on them like truck lights on a road accident. In a tight staccato cannon they knelt, stood, and lay down again, as if in a frame-by-frame, video replay.

Garry Stewart's *Fugly* opens on four dancers in a diagonal line, doll-like, frontal, slightly grim and paranoid looking, and wearing what have become infamous red tracksuits. It's claimed that we saw this initial image first in the work of another group, Frumpus. But in *Fugly*, the dancers' doll-like stance has an air of highly cultivated fashion pitch. With their big eyes and pig-tails, the dancers assume sultry suspicion, an I-don't-know-where-I-am-or-what-I'm-doing look, tough, naive and defensive, which pervades the work. Frumpus' doll-like images have a very different import—their pig-tails and lipstick are not at all cute or sexy, and their approach quite purposefully drags its teeth through excesses of that kind of still-rampant sexual commodification which underpins *Fugly*'s presentation. If the external trappings of that first image were lifted from Frumpus's work, its crucial commentary was unfortunately forgotten.

But Narelle Benjamin's solos dances in *Fugly* are extraordinary: extreme, interior, exhausting, possessed. Her last solo is tired, struggling and pushed to such limits that it seems to transcend the idea of escape from those internal demons. The intensity and doomedness of her efforts reaches the height of pathos, and the struggle is transmogrified into art.

Festival of the Dreaming: Fish, *Bangarra Dance Theatre, Drama Theatre, September 17*

Steps Three—Intersteps. *The Performance Space 28 October 1997. Curated by Leisa Shelton. Brett Daffy, Claire Hague, Beth Kayes, Meredith Kitchen, Brian Carbee, Trevor Patrick, Tuula Roppola. You can read more on the* Steps 3 *video program in RT#23*

One Extra, Two: Double Edged Dance*:* Remote, (watch closely for the re-runs) *by Lucy Guerin, and* Fugly (There's a shonky low-tech accident about to happen) *by Garry Stewart. Seymour Centre, October 31*

Premonition: A Strange Feeling For What is to Come, Sue-ellen Kohler, The Performance Space, October 9

Bodies, *Artistic directors: Normal Hall, Susan Barling, Patrick Harding-Irma. First program choreographers: Susan Barling, Kathy Driscoll, James Taylor, Francoise Philipbert, Rosetta Cook, Deborah Mills, Kenny Feather, Newtown Theatre, October 22*

Shopping and touching

Erin Brannigan on dance at Canberra's Festival of Contemporary Arts: *To the Wall* and *Laya*

There's something spooky about attending a performance in an empty shop, particularly when it's one of those characterless boxes that are part of a much bigger complex. It's as if absent, glassy-eyed shoppers haunt the space, searching for merchandise, offended by the frivolous goings on. On this Saturday night, drunken passers-by perform for us in the window before moving on. As if pre-empting this atmosphere, a surreal, intensely performative aesthetic informs the items presented in the space, six in all by choreographers: Cadi McCarthy, Janet Charlton, Barbara Mullin, Vivienne Rogis, Lisa Ffrench and James Berlyn.

Part of the Festival of Contemporary Arts in Canberra, this collection titled *To The Wall*, was curated by choreographer Paige Gordon and her influence could certainly be seen in unifying elements across the programme; comedy, character-based drama and the use of song and dialogue. As she states in the program, her primary concern is "an interest in making dance accessible by making it entertaining". While conforming to the aesthetic of the host company/choreographer raises obvious questions, it was actually great to see a dance collection that managed some kind of cohesion. The one factor that did divide the program—straight down the middle in fact—was the relative choreographic experience of Charlton, Ffrench and Berlyn, in comparison with McCarthy, Mullin and Rogis. Having said that, McCarthy's piece *Waiting* showed promise in developing a single idea well.

Interestingly, the three more successful pieces shared a particular tendency within dance practice to choose between pure, choreographed movement sequences and a mixture of performance techniques including, but not privileging, movement. These choreographers chose the latter. The site specific *Retail Therapy* by Charlton is a case in point. In what amounted to an exercise in hyperbole, Ffrench, Berlyn, comedienne Darren Gisherman and Charlton herself began outside the window as

Lisa Ffrench, *(H.T.D.A.P.H) How To Draw A Perfect Heart*

drooling shoppers, drawn inside by an overwhelming, obsessive force and finally overcome in a frenzy of wanton consumerism that culminated in a song delivered cabaret style—"five dollars…only five dollars…". Comedic skills are often demanded of dancers not up to the challenge, but in this case Charlton was lucky—or wise—in having genuinely funny people at her disposal.

In *H.T.D.A.P.H. (How To Draw A Perfect Heart)*, Lisa Ffrench continued her often autobiographical project on obsessive human behaviour. Beginning with a *Psycho*-style shower scene, Ffrench confounds expectations when the bloody smears on the fake glass shower curtain take on the form of a heart. Emerging clad in a Glad-Wrap beehive and black slip, Ffrench's monologue/dance develops around the image of the two-sided heart. The difficulty, when drawing hearts, to match the second half to the first becomes the obsession, the central idea which propagates to encompass many facets of love—disparity, co-dependence, two as one, obsession, repetition…this idea can go places not yet dreamt of by Ffrench which is proof of a good idea.

The final work for the evening was Berlyn's *Attraction Suite* and sweet it was. Arrivals and departures, awkward casualness and polystyrene cups set up a party scene where a suite of couplings unfold. Fascination, excitement, boredom, duplicity…all the elements of attraction are depicted, with differing levels of comic sensibility from performers Charlton, McCarthy, Rogis and Simon Clarke. McCarthy's performance as a panting, love sick party-goer, all trembling and swooning, was spot on. Berlyn's own comic talent, given a regular airing by his alter-ego, the drag character Buffy, stood him in good stead.

Down a block, around the corner and up the hill a very different performance unfolded in a 'proper' theatre, also a part of the festival. What do Padma Menon, Diana Reyes, Nigel Kellaway and Gary Lester have in common? A production called *Laya: Women Who Dare*, presented by Padma Menon Dance Theatre. This is indeed a daring enterprise for Menon who lists herself as choreographer/artistic director, Reyes as flamenco tutor, Kellaway as dramaturgy assistant and Lester as contemporary tutor. (The dancers are credited as co-creators.) To have these four, individually distinctive, often formally unambiguous artists involved in the one project, suggests a significant central concept; one which could inspire, and furthermore, make imperative such collaborations. Cultural hybridisation is also implied in this list of contributing artists; a fusion of performance styles driven together by an artistic impulse clearly understood and committed to by all members involved. Needless to say, a lot to ask. Menon has aimed high in *Laya…* and by the end of the show, the perils of such an ambitious project are painfully evident. What is also clear is a recklessly daring spirit, a commendable choice of cast and an often sensitive treatment of a difficult theme.

Laya is about women—their sexuality, strength, victimisation and relationships with each other. Indian, Spanish and contemporary dance vocabularies are particularly rich for women, with female dancers being historically significant in terms of their creation and development. This goes some way towards explaining Menon's choice of collaborators.

Diana Reyes' virtuosic style of flamenco is exceptionally aggressive and strong, her compact figure demanding your attention and holding it. Indian dance can match Spanish in strength, and has a softer register that expresses a particularly feminine type of passion. Stylistically, both forms focus on the arms, hands, face and feet and in the first half these practical points of contact were worked through. The dancers, asked to be proficient in so many, incredibly complex forms, often appeared to be progressing step by step, the themes being left to some Kellawayesque illuminations, where screaming, retching and twitching said emphatically what the dance sequences alluded to. Somewhere amongst all this, contemporary dance served as a strange kind of link, filling in the gaps but never appearing point blank.

The second half was a completely different show; minimal, sensual and completely seductive. Bare backed, voluptuous women (Peta Bull and Jane McKernan were strongest in this half), caressed themselves and each other in simple movement sequences, alluding to auto-eroticism, lesbianism and the intimate, often silent communication between women. This idea developed alone could have said more than the formal crisis that the first half amounted to.

Laya, *Padma Menon Dance Theatre;* To The Wall, *Paige Gordon and Performance Group, Festival of the Contemporary Arts, Canberra, October 18*

New place, old myths, new perceptions

Julia Postle surveys more dance at Canberra's Festival of Contemporary Arts: *Spontaneous Combustion*, *Visions 7…97*, and Canberra Choreographic Centre

One of the many things that keeps me coming back for more in dance is the unique ways it evokes a sense of place: how movement stories create connections with viewers in distinct moments in time and space; how I recall a piece in my mind and reconnect with that moment. It's something I've felt more conspicuously since I moved to Canberra from Brisbane. The history of place has shifted. No doubt the experience will help to expand my connection with dance and place, but for now I can enjoy the newness; the sharpening of perception it provokes.

Canberra's Festival of Contemporary Arts has just had its third incarnation. Between October 9 and 19 there was a lot going on at the Gorman House Arts Centre and other arts venues around town. In trying to piece together my thoughts on the works I saw during this time, I found myself focusing on how the different artists dealt with the idea of the contemporary, as well as how past and place impacted upon the idea.

Spontaneous Combustion. As the title of a collection of works, the association is to explosive, impulsive and improvised material. Maybe this wasn't realised, but *Spontaneous Combustion* proved to be a fun introduction to the work of Canberra's independent artists. Vivienne Rogis' *Ya Ya* was threaded throughout the program, developing in three mad episodes over the course of the evening: *Ya Ya*, *Ya Ya The 1st Corner*, and *Ya Ya The Last Lap*. Six 'drivers' struggle for position in a race; hands clenched on imaginary steering wheels, eyes focused, chewing gum, feet shuffling in a frenzy that mimicked the accompanying music by Cake. The climax is perfect chaos.

Like *Ya Ya, A Perfect Day* used music as an important part of the story. Choreographer Janine Ayres examines what makes a perfect day and what follows a perfect day, using Lou Reed's song to set the scene. It's a playful, investigative work, with more than a touch of melodrama. A video showing the performers strolling the streets of Canberra in their pyjamas, doing weird and wonderful things, like goofily sliding down escalators, gives the piece another layer of performance—although the connection between the video and the real bodies in the space could possibly have been explored more fully.

Also 'spontaneously combusting' was *Tiger* by Beren Molony. With the music of April Stevens' fabulously wicked *Teach me Tiger* filling the theatre, two performers have a ludicrous seduction battle over an imaginary love interest. The war is fought using props like a loaf of bread, egg beater and broom in mysteriously sexy ways. The leopard skin outfit and fantastic wigs make this a fun work that says a lot more than my short and sweet response may suggest.

Canberra Dance Theatre presented *Visions 7…1997*, a collection of works by choreographers Sandra Inman and Stephanie Burridge. Abstract movement images, bold spectacle, virtuosic dance and comic moments were strong features of this mixed program. Burridge in particular seems to have a canny ability to incorporate absurdities into her choreography, turning the focus of the dance on its head in curious ways. This was most evident in *joop/.sb.* and *still life*, the latter with Patrick Harding Irmer and Anca Frankenhaeuser taking on some freakily funny roles. Burridge's *dysfunction*, performed by Amalia Hordern, explodes at a frantic pace to the music of Bang on a Can, with lots of agitated movement: arms flailing, darting about the space, stumbling. Set against slow, restless movement, the pace is constantly unresolved. It's a short piece that punches. Inman's *weavers* reworks more traditional and familiar modern dance with a distinctly dynamic quality: jerky jumps, leg swings, precise footwork and signature steps of contemporary dance technique.

In *Speaking of Winged Feet* by Canberra Choreographic Centre residency recipient Niki Shepherd, Kuchipudi Indian Dance Theatre is interwoven with percussive rhythms and intimate song. This is a collection of works by Shepherd, with each verse in her poetic movement story revealing new explorations. Shepherd spoke after the performance about her attraction to the Greek god Hermes, "messenger of the gods, guardian of music and bringer of dreams". This influence was palpable, with Shepherd's winged feet taking us to Hermes. Her connection with the Greek god is contagious for a few moments there. She stomps around the space, and yet there's a sense of weightlessness to her movement, with a strong use of the lower body balanced by a subtle fluttering of fingertips. The dance has many forms—at times joyful and others more introspective. But throughout, her connection with the audience is held and fostered, drawing me in with each new development.

Tuula Roppola's movement story *Aino* is a mesmerising interpretation of *The Drowned Maid,* canto 4 of the epic poem *The Kalevala*. What strikes me most about *Aino* is the way Roppola moves through poses and expressions so fluidly, making me cringe with discomfort in reaction to some of the awkward physical tensions she creates. The detail in *Aino* pinches the nerves: a wrist bent back, head twisted away from the rest of the body, eyes either downcast or wide open and to the side, mouth open but saying nothing. Combined, these subtle, uncomfortable touches give rise to something more momentous. Like the clues in a well-constructed crime novel, in reading these details we see so much more and begin to bristle with the slow and steady unravelling of the melancholy tale.

And finally then, I feel I can begin to establish my own sense of place through these performances, varied as they are. Strangely enough it is these last two solo performance works, which each sought to recast and explore the movement potential of ancient myth in entirely different ways, that proved to be the more contemporary on the program. It's something I've been mulling over for awhile now; maybe it's my constant need to experience innovations, new histories, and the fact that 'contemporary' is such a fundamentally shifty term.

Festival of the Contemporary Arts, *Canberra, October 9–19*

Romancing the tone: 'free music' under threat

Gavin Bryars, David Chesworth, Percy Grainger, Ros Bandt, *The Listening Room*: Vikki Riley reports from the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts

Two big events this year at the Melbourne Festival went some of the way in proving the limitations of hurtling music on the margins into the mainstream performing arts circus. Contemporary Music Event's first international showcase saw the Melbourne Town Hall house the Gavin Bryars spectacle, *A Man in a Room Gambling*, three nights of recitals performed by the Bryars Ensemble, the David Chesworth Ensemble and the deFlocked string quartet, presenting work composed between 1970 and now. The event was marketed as an entree into English minimalism, the festival publicity urging patrons not to miss seeing "one of the most intriguing and influential composers working today"—anybody out there heard of Barry Adamson, Pierre Henri, Anne Dudley? Such wild claims and appeals to exclusivity may be intrinsic features of Melbourne Festival hype but it also happens to be the language of the locally funded champions of 'serious' contemporary music which organisations like CME officially represent.

That the Bryars' oeuvre came out of the cross-disciplinary impro and performance art collectives in London in the 70s and that in London now the commercial music arena and the art scene have blurred and alternated their personnel, are crucial in this context. Those venues in the UK still operate as public experimental performance centres but now feature the work of post-rock electronica whizzkids like Scanner as well as the 'senior' vanguard of Bryar's contemporaries like guitar improviser Derek Bailey (now churning out drum'n'bass). It may seem ironic that here in Australia we get the minimalism as trussed-up chamber music story, but, really it's just depressing watching experimentalism press-ganged into classical performance etiquette in the service of the increasingly conservative cultural class system flourishing well in our current political climate.

It's offensive to see musicians tip-toeing around a huge stage in humble repose like the servant class or listening to the obligatory "Melbourne's the best city in the world" colonial drivel which suddenly came out of Bryars mouth on the closing night. No seminars, lectures or Q & A sessions were factored in, further clues to the identity of the target audience. Along with other pivotal minimalist innovators like Reich, Glass or Nyman, Bryars' move to respected international composer status has eschewed the formal problematics of his work in favour of a kind of romanticism and poignancy which itself has saturated more than a decade of British art-house cinema and Channel 4 TV programs. The Greenaway-Nyman collaborations have made the genre so familiar that the lack of excessive set design in the concerts was unnerving.

Poignancy is in short supply in many musical genres today and Bryars pulls it off rather effortlessly if you can take the BBC sentimentality. All the pieces possessed a melancholy which has survived the cynicism of the genre's gentrification with possibly the exception being the *Adnan Songbook* and his chart 'hit' *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet* which in 1997 sounds like a dumb Big Issue marketing idea about the stoicism and supposed 'faith' of the homeless. The music itself varied in strength depending on the concept at hand. The atonal compositions for strings like the opening piece, *String Quartet no. 2* or *Les Fiancailles*, were the kinds of suspensed razor and crystal chisellings in high altitude which are in fashion now with string sculpting. The cello and violin are becoming the tools for this tonal shift (as opposed to noisy horns or percussion) and Sophie Harris from Bryars' Ensemble and local girl Hope Csutoros are virtuosi of this kind of playing. It would be great to see Csutoros team up with local players like the Haifitz-ish Vlamir Kocibelli and John Rodgers. deFlocked's cinematic spaced-out atonalism (with the stage blackened) just sounded like a stab at transcendentalism but it was a good invocation of music as fractured prism. Atonal formalism seems to work well in this open-ended montage form, the solo Smetanin piece, *Ladder of Escape*, looked and sounded like a workout on a plumbing attachment; the blurb mention of derivation from "disco rhythms" hard to equate—which disco?.

Bryars' new work, *A Man in a Room Gambling* was a performance of the CD version, texturally rich and precise. But a tape loop of monologue as text backing tape was a counterpoint date with technology whose impact was all over after its first cycle. The Chesworth Ensemble's contribution, *The Lacuna Suite*, a recital of his Chamber Made Opera score from last year, reminded me again of Henry Cow. In fact when Chesworth puts his hand to composing for string players who can make quirky, messy noises he ends up sounding more Frith and Cutler than Gavin Bryars, a deconstructive direction which he'd be better off pursuing than stuffy unchangeable 'worthy' formats like opera. *The Lacuna Suite*'s theme of political power and oppression where each system has a corresponding 'fictional' music counterpart—militaristic, religious, bureaucratic and so on—was refreshingly non-abstract. But here the piece floundered under the constraints of New Music conceits, things like 'different' instrumentation—the horrific moment when a percussionist picked up a derbuka and proceeded to bang on it like a cardboard box while desperately trying to follow Chesworth's draw-a-square conducting. Why not sample live, or better still, collaborate with musicians here like members of Yalla or Brahim Benim's La Casbah? For me, this is the overriding image emanating from the contemporary music scene, the notion of white Europeans still having a franchise on innovation and style.

The CME too, for all its talk about trying to include 'ethnic' music has so far made no inroads in this area. In any case the kinds of people from Africa, Asia and Latin America who live and play interesting contemporary music in Melbourne don't have the necessary credentials for CME 'artist' status—no CVs, commissions, degrees, no real interest in marketable themes, access to curators and the like which would bring in the middle class crowds. At a time when organisations like The Boite—who are devoted in putting on these people on a weekly basis in open stage venues as well as major events at the same Melbourne Town Hall—are being defunded, the CME's hogging of high profile space is a disappointing state of affairs.

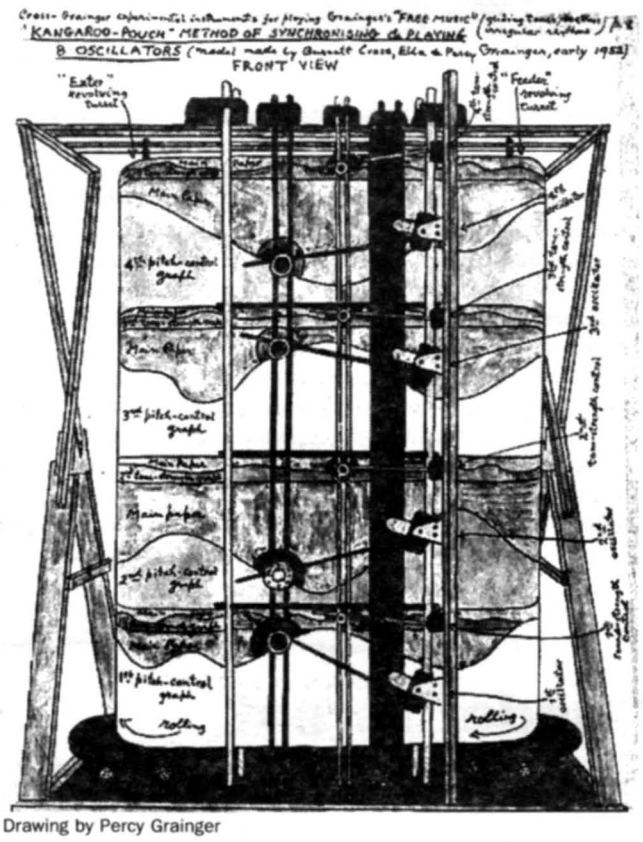
The on-campus Percy Grainger showcase, *The Many Faces of Percy Grainger*, was serious head material, a real adventure in listening as archeology and invention. The strange partnership of a one-off artist's museum of international importance and a marketing driven academia vying for revenue and mainstream arts status via a debut in the key state arts event with rave ups in the daily papers is, I suppose, to be expected. But unlike the Bryars recitals, the Grainger event mercifully lacked the colour supplement glow. A stellar performance by a real *avant garde* medium like Michael Kieran Harvey still gets the establishment whispering about 'noise' and nothing could clear the fog surrounding the event over Grainger's symbolic and physical exile from the campus music department 70 years on.

This was a cultural experience not about herding patrons in and out of numbered seats at respectable venues. If people at the Grainger series looked uncomfortable it's because they were—absorbing demanding performances, talks, demonstrations, cyber-sound shows, taking in a fantastically stocked museum and library of exotic instruments, sound generation machines, books, crazy clothes, sound scores, adornments, souvenirs, letters, all the material evidence surrounding the generation of artistic practice in real life that you'll never get on the web. Personally what got me thinking was Grainger's idiosyncratic approach to ethnomusicology. Rabidly collating and absorbing the cultural effects and artefacts of creators from far away lands seems radical in the face of official music histories but as an *avant garde* artist of his era (in Melbourne, not New York) his raw materials had to be offshore. Close to the fetishism of Breton or the poetics of 'the other' prematurely announced by the travel writer Victor Segalen in his 1909 *Essai Sur l'Exoticisme*, so too Grainger's valorisation of the exotic and the creative impulse seek a complex design for living. Like the Surrealists, he too sought to find his self amongst 'the others'.

Grainger's take on 'the other' too has become the modus operandi of the 'world music' phenomenon for the past decade or more—music consumers and creators worldwide who seek out new frontiers and hybrids from third world creators. I'm thinking not so much of record collectors with cash to blow on import mags and RealWorld CDs but the whole contemporary trance dance ambient culture with figures like 'telematic nomad' producer Bill Laswell who, with his Axiom label, collaborates with Morroccan (the Gnawa), African and Mongolian musicians. For Laswell, like Grainger, the fraternity of creators is universal, it's not possible to own a piece of music, it's about connecting fragile links between a graphic here, a text there, a sound, a lost soul, a smothered history, or a recorded moment which, in Laswell's words, "disabuses the notion that we are all on the same path, creating what Burroughs and Gysin called The Third Mind".

The explosion of a cargo culture in the 80s and the advent of the all-genres corporate record store is where Grainger's sensibility has come to the fore. It's now valid to make a case for a disparate *avant garde* 'force' as independently heard on a Colombian cumbia track or a Brazilian olodum recording without the translation by white cultural narrative 'navigators'—the Chatwin novel, the Womad ticket, an SBS movie. And the status of the academy-housed ethnomusicologist and the consumer connoisseur has undergone severe industrialisation to the point of near extinction. For DJs like Dave Hucker and his London dance club and recording project Mambo Inn or ABC RN's Lucky Oceans or Robyn Johnston, the notion of discovery and surprise is now an intrinsic feature of day to day music consumption. So it was strange to find a progenitor of this phenomenon at the Grainger event, where Denis Condon demonstrated Grainger's Duo-Art pianola rolls in a room with 20 or so people intently listening to these extraordinarily lucid piano 'takes'. Originally marketing to customers who had, according to Condon, a "music box mentality", Grainger was, in the 1920s, reproducing for a mass market recordings of not only English sea shanties and lullabies but folk songs from the Faroe Islands, Norway, Denmark, Micronesia, in versions that lasted sometimes only a minute and twenty seconds. His Celtic modal pieces were the most astonishing, pure evocations of hitherto 'lost' emotive

• *continued page 36*



Drawing by Percy Grainger


Percy Grainger

New music land

Andy Arthurs reports that Topology's latest concert in Brisbane is a good sign for contemporary music

The guiding light behind *Topology* is Robert Davidson, the 31 year old composer who is gently challenging the musical status quo in south east Queensland; and the audience for new music is growing. Davidson is a University of Queensland classical contrabass graduate who cites the Beatles *White Album* as one of his compositional text-books. Since graduating in 1988 he has spent a year in Southern India and been awarded a Churchill Fellowship to study with Terry Riley in the USA. Already we see the lie of his musical land.

Davidson (contrabass and electronic keyboards) has gathered a team of skilled musicians: John Babbage (saxophones), Christa Powell (violin), Bernard Hoey (viola), Kylie Davidson (piano) and on this occasion special guest Kerryn Joyce (percussion).

St Mary's Church in Southern Brisbane was an appropriate setting for the concert. Even the incessant traffic noise contributed, Cage style, to the event. Bold glass mosaic floor lights of mainly primary colours were placed around the performers and offset the formality of the church. The music could be described as 'new simplicity', much of it inspired and developed from Davidson's minimalist guru and teacher, Riley. Here is music that is engaging and central to life—intelligent rather than intellectual, artistic not arty and entertaining but not mere entertainment. Simple lines, delicate phrases, fragile structures, music of the 'soul', non-judgemental—the electronic sits comfortably with the acoustic. There were six Australian premieres.

The opening work was by Californian Sasha Bognadovisch, a composer deeply influenced by Indian and Arabic music. The performance of *Wings Across This Way* (1997) was a first for the whole ensemble. There were two works by Brisbane composer Tom Adeney. The first was *Fantasia* (1996) for violin, marimba and contrabass. The second, which completed the evening was an earlier more evocative filmic work *Kagu Ha Hime* (1990) with small thematic fragments giving way to a classic minimalist line which returned episodically throughout the work. This was scored for the permanent members of the group.

Topology

British composer Gavin Bryars has recently been in Australia with his band for the Melbourne International Festival. (I always feel festivals insecurely labelled "International" carry remnants of the cringe). *Topology* gave an exquisitely sensitive performance of Bryars' piece *The North Shore* (1993) for viola and piano. It's a shame he was not there to hear it. This slow unfolding work exploits the velvety low tones of the viola, accompanied by an undulating piano wandering through a landscape of free tonality. It's warm crescendo carries an undertone of tension—or maybe melancholy—before sinking slowly to a peaceful close.

Robert Davidson presented two pieces of his own, a first performance and a 1997 work, *Tyalgum*. This piece has grown from another, the central piano section being from the original material and representing Mount Warning, the first piece of land in Australia to catch the morning sun. It was composed for this year's festival in Tyalgum, a town dominated by the mountain. This is a sombre and powerful work, straddling the jazz/minimalist territory with beautifully interwoven polyphonic conversations shifting focuses between parts. The second piece from Davidson's *Spin* used the characteristics of the EPS sampler to reveal more and more of a looped sample of Chopin's *Etude No1*. It built to a noisy climax with all the digital distortion we are growing to enjoy, reflecting his punk-loving youth.

A 1976 Michael Nyman piece began the second half of the concert. This was unfamiliar Nyman—*Bell Set* is scored for various non-defined scraps of metal and works from density to sparseness via a graphic score. Terry Riley's *Ritmos and Melos* (1993) for violin, percussion and piano was another Australian premiere. On first listening there was little I could get hold of, but I was assured that it just takes time to grow into.

Toplogy's geographical influences are Eastern and North American, with a little bit of English. Robert Davidson feels that the US and Australia share a 'new world' heritage which is a rich source of inspiration. As well as the minimalist influence in *Topology* I heard Laurie Anderson, Brian Eno, The Beatles and the Penguin Café Orchestra. In many ways it is true 'World Music'. It plunders from no-one but taps that which is universal in music whilst being firmly rooted in the culture in which it exists.

Brisbane has been quietly developing as a centre for innovative contemporary music in Australia. I see *Topology* becoming an increasingly significant influence on the music scene here.

Topology—Non Institutionalised Music,*St Marys Church, South Brisbane, Friday October 17*

Topology's next concert, Post-Classical Music, *St Mary's Church, South Brisbane, December 11, 8pm*

Romancing the tone: 'free music' under threat

• *from page 35*

moments, eerily echoing an impulse to be found in today's mass love affair with Celtology (see Riverdance, the medievalist experimental scene, Enya ,Wendy Rule, *Breaking the Waves*). In their simple state these are concrete evidence of Grainger's genius for presenting space-time equations as veritable entries for a tonal Shonegun's list, things to quicken the heart.

A Garden for Percy's Delight was the modernist component to the event, an installation by Ros Bandt in the newly built bricked-up courtyard space where plastic cushions sat in a pile for listeners to posit themselves under speaker umbrellas or against walls. The installation's sonic fabric was adapted from Grainger's 1938 treatise on Free Music where he talks about the source of his plans for "a world of tonal freedom"—visits to Brighton beach as a child, the "free music inside my head as a boy of 11 or 12". So the installation recreated a kind of working blueprint for Grainger's insistence on the tonal and non-harmonic sounds of nature as true emotive music.

As a finale to the festival this soundtrack was worked into a pre-scored sound piece played on a selection of instruments from the Grainger collection in collaboration with Johannes Sistermanns in Frankfurt which was then broadcast live via ISDN technology on ABC Radio's *The Listening Room* and some unidentified Rundfunk equivalent then left on the internet for access (why is the ABC using the Internet when it is a corporate broadcaster?). It's great that *The Listening Room* is finally discovering the bottomless pit of German sound culture; let's hope they get hold of the real meaty stuff like Caspar Brotzmann, Frieder Butzmann or the post-Adorno sound art emanating from Frankfurt's Mill Plateaux stable real soon. Parts of the broadcast reminded me of Masami Akita's Merzbow, Schwitters-like music concrete, rushes of percussive shatterings and vocal scratches which threw the balance out on the ebb and flow lull (what I later heard as described as 'non linear'). As an ambient piece though it recalled David Toop's woeful musical output since he wrote *Ocean of Sound*—soundtracks without the imaginary film, just 'elemental' uniform images like water, wind, curves and stretches of sound, player, snatches of chaos and disjunctive traffic-like polaroids of 'noise', plenty of room to hear yourself think. Not because the sounds produced were uninteresting, or badly performed, but it just sounded like sound art academics creating hygienic prescribed environments and specialised spaces for privileged reception. As a sophisticated radiophonic event this kind of posturing thankfully got lost in the broadcast space. As live performance it was a non-event with 15 people perched on chairs in the museum foyer, Dr Bandt's crew and Grainger's machines 'at work' behind glass in a separate closed off room. Why is sound art presented this way?

Which brings me to what I see as a real problem with propelling this kind of composer-obsessed sound art into the public arena. As Biba Kopf rightly says, modern ambient culture is about creating 'psychic retreats' from noisy city life. But for a long time now the Melbourne sound art scene has busied itself with retreating into the hierarchies of art school experimentalism while prolific sound innovators like Ollie Olsen get airtime on patronising 'yoof' dramas (listen to Raw FM). Too much time is spent sealing off cavelike spaces as public chapels for sensorial wonders apparently missing in pulse driven public spaces—the ubiquitous Pauline Oliveros factor so popular now with artists and institutions like *The Listening Room* rehashing 'deep listening' rhetoric as some kind of neat formula for easy audience interpretation. Too much emphasis is placed on pristine hi-tech sound environments as virtual geologies concealing adult pleasures of form and texture, 'open' narratives to ponder trite aesthetic questions about nature and new technology. Garden as metaphor and subject in experimental and popular music practice is a long story, done to death in the age of vinyl by Prog and Krautrock and with techno-dance culture and its digital 'jigsaws' which are felt and experienced (Dave Clarke and his *Garden of Eden* raves for up to 35,000 people or the local-out-in-the-bush Earthcore ambient events where counsellors in tents are there for those whose visceral interactions get the better of them).

At the door of the courtyard where it lived, a sign listing instrumentation announced "You are about to enter a 3D environment"—is this the sort of navigation of 'free music' Grainger talked about or is it the jargon of corporate eco-sound art companies like Les Gilbert's Purple Group who sponsored the joint installation link up? As Jeff Gibson said (reviewing Perspecta in *Art & Text*) the fascination with 'green' palettes and virtual ecologies in contemporary digital art has so far only produced "half baked profundities" around the aesthetics of what a virtual space looks and sounds like. I found Bandt's *Garden* perfectly compatible with John McCormack's all-surfaces algorithm-driven computer art, taking me far away from the fenceless imaginary soundtracks Grainger heard in his head at age 12.

Proposals are currently underway to turn the Grainger Museum into an interdisciplinary venue for exhibitions, installations and performances. If *The Listening Room* event was a glimpse of what's in store then it's hardly worth getting excited about it. And if it means a physical reorganisation of a cluttered, dusty museum into a user-friendly contemporary art space mediated by curators and bureaucrats from the visual arts scene hellbent on dragging sound art into a culture of closure and self-definition then it is a proposal worth opposing. Melbourne University could do us all the service of maintaining its asset as an independent public resource run by people devoted to Grainger's radical premise of investigating creativity instead of playing into the hands of agents of celebrity and spectacle. In any case, popular culture will be the final adjudicator it seems. Read *The Village Voice* and you'll find out that pre-production has already begun on the multi-million dollar blockbuster biopic. *Blue Rose* is to be directed by Melbourne artist and screenwriter Wain Fimeri, produced by John Maynard and to star Richard Harris and Crispin Bonham Carter respectively as the older and younger Graingers—a *Shine*, no doubt for an American market already mourning the neglect of Australia's 'idiot savants' for us all.

Australia is having its own shot at the Grainger story—the Rob George and Peter Goldsworthy scripted Passion—*ed.*

Cross-cultural koto

Keith Gallasch listens to Satsuki Odamura's new CD, *Burning House*

Burning House
Satsuki Odamura, koto
Australian compositions for the koto
Voxaustralis VAST022-2

In performance Satsuki Odamura is remarkable to watch and to hear. She plays, she attacks, fondles, plucks, tears at, almost sweeps up that apparently fragile instrument as if to wring some unachievable note from it, lets it lie reverberating. The challenge of recording is to capture that physicality at its most delicate, at its most violent. Here the recording is intimate, free of imposed ambience and the instrument's remarkable range captured. The greater test though is for the Australian composers: are they up to the instrument's considerable demands and the player's capacities?

Tony Lewis, also the CD's producer, engineer and annotator, opens the disc with his *Alien Moon* (1995), a work, he writes, that "uses both of the performer's hands more or less equally on the koto, in a somewhat pianistic fashion". The rhythmic re-cycling and gentle shifts in focus result in a warm, gently engaging and almost folksy minimalism, and confirms at the same time the instrument's pianistic possibilities—although this is the track where the koto's guitar and harp affinities also come to the fore.

Sarah de Jong's *Unreal Fair* is a very different matter, starkly theatrical it derives from a collaboration between de Jong, performer Nigel Kellaway and Satsuki Odamura in 1993—*Portrait of an Invisible Man*. Vocalist Mara Kiek sings a Rilke text in German and Odamura is joined by Philip South on percussion. The koto is a potent in accompaniment, its stabbing high notes running with the drums and against the slightly longer lines of the singer until the effect is of a dialogue. It's also curiously cross cultural: the koto's overt Japaneseness and the song's evocation of German music theatre of the 20s and 30s another dialogue. de Jong's second contribution, *In Other Ways Your Image*, from the same performance work, is for solo koto and draws from the instrument a distinctively classical guitar tone and musical shape.

Inner States (1993), by Anne Norman, has the koto singing powerfully in a more familiar mode, initially gently rhythmic, if sharply accented, and then discursively with bursts of strumming, string distortions, sudden stops and more aggressive playing as if the full weight of the hands were pulling against the strings. Short ostinato episodes explode into cries and then evaporate. If, of all these compositions, *Inner States* sounds the most akin to Japanese works, it's not surprising. According to Lewis' notes, "While in Japan (Norman) took lessons in the shakuhachi and also some in the koto, transnotated Japanese classical pieces from tablature system into Western staff notation, and formed an ensemble, the Kansai Wagakki Players, consisting entirely of non-Japanese performers of traditional Japanese instruments, gathered from cities around Kobe...in Melbourne once again, she is the Artistic Director of the Nadoya Music and Dance Company, of which Satsuki is a member".

Satsuki Odamura Heidrun Löhr

Jim Denley plays with Odamura for Anne Boyd's *Cloudy Mountain* (1981). Originally composed for piano and flute, then adapted for koto and shakuhachi, this version is for koto and flute. Needless to say, Jim Denley's virtuosic playing and abilities with a range of instruments yields an expressive performance with shakuhachi inflections and beautifully curved notes. The koto's role is essentially supportive, a lovely, fast, recurrent and fluid line of high notes that the flute can rise out of and float meditatively above. (See the review of Anne Boyd's *Meditations on a Chinese Character* on page 38.)

Barry Conyngham, a student of Toru Takemitsu, composed *Afterimages* (1995) for the 17 string bass koto, marimba, vibraphone and *taiko* drum. It pulses between a quiet eerie intensity and more driven passages, between a dissociative modernism (that suits the koto, an instrument that seems to offer itself to every distortion) and a warm lyricism. Despite its jagged edges and deep rumblings, *Afterimages* is, true to its title, a reflective work replete with telling spaces. Lewis notes, "that (the work) seeks balance, both between traditional techniques and innovative effects, and further between the Australian condition of space and isolation, and the Japanese philosophy of music existing 'inside' the sound". The koto in *Afterimages* is deeper, harp-like in sweeping arpeggios, its role less predictable, often one instrument amongst others, or in rich interplay, for example, with vibraphone and marimba.

Liza Lim's *Burning House* (1995) is dedicated to Odamura who plays koto and sings a 10th century poem by the poetess Izumi Shikibu set by Lim. In an act of imagining typical of the composer, she wanted "to evoke something of the presence of an ancient song that Shikibu herself might have recognized". To do this, Lewis reports, Lim "went to the extent of learning the traditional Japanese tablature system of koto notation, a system which, she explains, 'guides the musician's choreography of actions to produce sounds'". The result is intensely physical, and curiously personal. Few of the conventional koto patterns are exploited and Lim's sense of drama has the play of breathing and music richly entwined, with voice and instrument equally weighted. This is the collection's most rewarding if, initially, demanding work.

Satsuki Odamura, Tony Lewis and the Australian Music Centre's Voxaustralis are to be congratulated on the *Burning House* collection. The title is taken from a verse in the Izumi Shikibu poem: "Should I leave this burning house/of ceaseless thought/and taste the pure rain's/single truth/falling against my skin". *Burning House* doesn't offer any single truth or comfortable meditative music, but it does yield beauty, drama and some serious and productive engagements with a relatively unfamiliar instrument. It would be interesting to know what Satsuki Odamura feels she has learned from these collaborations. *KG*

CD reviews

Anne Boyd, composer
Meditations on a Chinese Character
Various artists
ABC Classics ABC 462 007-2

One of Anne Boyd's best known works, *As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams*, will be sung by the Adelaide Chamber Singers in the *Australian Dreaming* program at St Peters Cathedral in the Adelaide Festival. To prepare yourself for that event, ABC Classic's selection of four of the composer's works in *Meditations on a Chinese Character* is an excellent introduction to her works as well as a tribute to a powerful and subtly sustained vision. Her creative surrender to and absorption of the traditional musics of China, Japan and Bali mark her well apart from Australian modernist contemporaries in many of her works and even from somewhat like-minded composers, (her teacher) Peter Sculthorpe and Ross Edwards, as well as the starker if similarly delicate Toru Takemitsu. Apparently Takemitsu was an admirer of her *Anklung* for piano, played here by Roger Woodward with the same precision and sensé of space that he brings to the works of the Japanese master. It's not that Boyd mimics traditional Asian music, rather that her grasp of it musically and philosophically seems so complete, there's no sense of appropriation or of occasional quotation: her own voice rises distinctively out of other modes while using mostly western instrumentation.

The works are essentially meditative and should find a willing audience in the late 90s. The disk opens with *As All Waters Flow* (1976), a pre-dawn meditation, a choral work with guitars and percussion, including small bells held by each performer, a cool stream of heavenly voices twinkling with chimes. It's an ideal opener with the right meditative duration, some 20 minutes. *Angklung* (1974) follows, momentarily alien on such a recognizably western instrument, but soon settling into its evocative equally meditative otherness. Some listeners will want to skip *String Quartet No 2 "Play on Water"* (1973) and take it in on another occasion. It's a demanding and more obviously dramatic work predictably modernist but embracing string distortion, shakuhachi mimicry from the cello, considerable percussion on the instruments, and moments of clanging Peking opera density. The 1996 *Meditations on a Chinese Character* is a deeply satisfying work with its eerie interplay of flute, shakuhachi and countertenor (initially a collective keening almost out of Japanese Noh), of pianos (sometimes spare, sometimes in Debussian waves) and harp (koto-ing), of silences, a punctuating Chinese gong, xylophone and vibraphone. *Meditations on a Chinese Character* is the perfect compliment to the opening track, *As All Waters Flow*, and I found myself playing one after the other, switching from the ethereal, pure preparation for the day of the latter to the more complex meditation of the former based on the Chinese character *Sheng*. As Boyd's informative notes tell it, the character stands for the Chinese mouth organ (influential she says in Japanese *gagaku* court music so important, in turn, for her) and for 'sage', 'holy', 'divine': "for me, composition is essentially a spiritual exercise...also, in a sense, an exercise in calligraphy, each brush stroke being represented in a musical gesture", a pattern of movement felt profoundly in the work. Recorded in concert, *Meditations on a Chinese Character* has its rough edges, random noises and some taxing top notes, but it's a vivid, spontaneous and moving work. *KG*

Chronic Rhythmosis
Brassov, musicians: Robert Guzmanyi, Christine Evans, Kim Sanders, Boyd, Peter Kennard, James Pattugalan
Rufus RF032

Chronic Rhythmosis. Is it a disease? Certainly the time signatures for each track are given for those who really want to know and love their disease. (For the 1982 Adelaide Festival I directed the staging of an outdoor ballroom dancing spectacular. Speaking of chronic, the ballroom dancing association was furious at having to work with a live big band and insisted on sticking obsessively with their collection of scratchy but rhythmically reliable LPs. I won in the end, but our big band conductor had to suffer the indignity of being conducted in turn by a dancer who knew the association's repertoire inside out.) Infectious? Definitely. Symptoms? Dancing in your armchair or round the loungeroom, throwing in the odd cross-cultural gesture and step. However, *Chronic Rhythmosis* is more than the good time CD that the cute cover image and playful track notes suggest. This is serious, richly layered brass instrument playing ranging from the aerobic fast and furious—sometimes reminiscent of the soundtrack for the movie *Kusturica*—to the sublimely lyrical and emotionally sustaining (the laid back, gently insistent "Mastom Mastom" and, album highlight, the deliciously slow, transcendent "Kong's Dream"). *Chronic Rhythmosis* is good for you. Yes, Brassov are infected with drum tattoos, Bulgarian bagpipes, traditional Persian tunes, Turkish drumming and Macedonian Gypsy clarinet (the Balkan Romani influence they admit to) and they transform "Stormy Weather" into a snappy, believable quickstep; but it's a brass band that has absorbed its world music, bebop and big band influences and remains true to itself with a rich and distinctive voice. Chronically good. *KG*

Clocks
Elena Kats-Chernin, composer
Sydney Alpha Ensemble
ABC Classics 456 468-2

Accessible, grimly witty, rhythmically rich and complex, and astonishingly orchestral for such small instrumental forces, *Clocks* has to be one of the best CDs of 1997 from anywhere and deserves a wide audience. Certainly it would appeal to, and stretch, those enamoured of the rhythmic certainties of Gavin Bryars, Michael Nyman and Michael Torke. Go straight to the 21 minute four movement title work (originally composed for Germany's Ensemble Modern, guests of the 1998 Adelaide Festival) with its dark, engaging pulse and energetic outbursts. In his generously detailed sleeve notes, David Toop (librettist for Kats-Chernin's first opera, *Iphis*, about to premiere in Sydney) observes that "the dark character of the piece...partly reflects the idea of an 'imaginary clock' which beats through and beyond each human existence". Kats-Chernin is a marvellous orchestrator, making the most of a small number of instruments (driven with requisite force, subtlety and alertness to genre references by David Stanhope). In *Clocks* (1993), Kats-Chernin adds layers of haunting sampled sound. In fact she adds the instruments to the taped sound which was, as Toop explains, "finished before a note of the instrumental music was written...not only the idea of four movements, but their tempo and exact length were given in advance". As in most of the works on the CD, percussion, including the percussive use of other instruments, plays a key role in fusing striking half-melodies and the sonic extremities of a skilfully absorbed modernism. The glorious *Purple Prelude* (1996) works an ostinato-like melody seamlessly from one instrument or intrumental group to another with a melancholy that threatens but always pulls back from some wilder emotion. *Cadences, Deviations & Scarlatti* (1995), although a more rhythmically diverse work, has the same kind of insistence and percussive brilliance as *Clocks* and is an indicator what a great writer for brass and other wind instruments Kats-Chernin is. This is also evident in the vertiginous *Concertino* (1994), a series of sharp orchestral shocks against which a solo violin works with increasing fluency (and occasional companions) in ascents and descents, scaling as if in search of a resting place. Stephanie McCallum reveals that the composer's distinctive voice is just as evident on solo piano in *Variations on a Black Dress*. The composer appears on an unusually attractive ABC Classics CD cover in a painted-on-film portrait by Kirsten Winner whose film on Kats-Chernin was shown at the Sydney Film Festival a couple of years ago. If you're tempted by *Clocks* the CD, and so you should be, sample the 'Blues' and 'Crash' movements of the title work, the first with its depth of field percussion and jazz-inflected almost big band brass, the second with its rapid alternations between a fierce wall of throbbing percussion and brief distant moments of respite. The final movement of *Clocks* is also worth a hearing on its own and played loudly, as evidence both of the fine recording and of the power of Kats-Chernin's vision, an "evocation", writes Toop, "(of) both the pre-history of the dinosaur age and an apocalyptic 'end of time'". *KG*

In *RealTime* 23 (February-March 1998) we'll be reviewing two recent books, Andrew Ford's *Illegal Harmonies, Music in the 20th Century* (Hale & Iremonger, Alexandria, 1997) and Hazel Smith and Roger Dean's *Improvisation, Hypermedia and the Arts since 1945* (Harwood Academic Publishers, Amsterdam 1997). Among CD reviews we will be covering the Warner release on the Erato label of the world premiere of the complete music of Kurt Weill's first Broadway work, *Johnny Johnson* (1936) on *Music for Johnny Johnson* (Erato 0630-17870-2) with the remarkable Otaré Pit Band conducted by Joel Cohen.

The rising Son, millenial anxiety and other pleasures

Vikki Riley reviews recent CDs including *The Buena Vista Social Club* from 1998 Sydney Festival guests, The Afro Cuban Allstars

A few months back it seemed every local quality book shop and houseware boutique was suddenly shelving away the bossa nova and Jeff Buckley and replacing it with new muzak of soothing, old world tropicana, the sound of Cuban Son finally cornered by a corporate music industry who don't waste time waiting for Castro to drop and who aren't interested in re-releasing the tons of vinyl lying dormant in the island's Egrem and Sibony vinyl storehouses.

The *Ry Cooder presents series* (World Circuit distributed through Festival) of elegantly boxed CDs with elaborate booklets fetishing Cuba as a 1950s oasis of style are the impressive Fania school musicological realisations that Latin afficionados oft indulge in. The Afro Cuban Allstars' *A Toda Cuba le Gusta* (WCD 048) is a century's worth of Son styles and spin-offs including forms like guaguanco and mocambique popular with New York divas like La India. The Allstars are four generations of musicians; from pianist Raul Planas who played with Celia Cruz in the fifties to singer Jose Antonio Rodriguez, Sierra Maestra's Marvin Gaye soundalike. Man behind the project is très virtuoso Juan de Marcos Gonzalez, also from Sierra Maestra.

Cooder of course gets to be in on the jam (buddy pics are featured well in the booklet) but Son, with its own built-in crystallising melodies has survived for nearly a century without lap steel guitar elegies or the blues for that matter. Ry gets to do more of his own thang on *The Buena Vista Social Club* (WCD 050) but any audible traces of 'colonisation' just aren't there. In fact it's funny just how easy it is to market Revolution as hot music and cool, indigenous, aging talent—just get whitie to stand back from the desk.

Revolution is the catchcry of Carlinhos Brown, Brazil's own George Clinton of hybrid political pop strategy, already dubbed the new Bob Marley and proving that Hip Hop has indeed run its course as a credible activist forum for reinvention. Brown is the public face and unofficial Minister for the Arts for Olodum, the syndicalist-inspired thousand-strong percussion youth movement of which Melbourne group Bad Boys Batucada are the local pop 'arm' (see their new self-released *Instrumentos*). His brilliant sidebar release to his Timbalada recordings is *Alphagamabetizado* (EMI/Odeon 38269), produced with Arto Lindsay and with cameos from big stars Gal Costa, Marisa Monte and Caetano Veloso. It's not, however, the pan Afro-Liberationist reggae you'd expect but a funky socialism of sound poetry, music concrete and restless alternating Bahian thunderings, a natural techno from Planet Drum.

Brazilian experimental music is a rich and living multicultural genre whose signature multimedia sixties movement, Tropicalismo (see Tom Ze, Gilberto Gil, Cinema Novo), never really died and this CD is in part a return to its original schema, a spaceship of found object music made with mattress springs, eggs, flugelhorns (the inside booklet looks like a score for a Lettrist happening). What makes this stuff so compelling is the huge leaps it takes in describing an approximation of the velocity of change the globe is currently surviving. Incisive first/third world word pics like "Uganda Cubana Ipanamana" and a backdrop of sonic claustrophobias and disorientations makes Tricky's orbit look like a tidy attic. Remapping music's spread is the agenda too on the Euro dance floor where cross regional duende pleas and the Maghreb groove continue to dramatise linguaphonic emissions. Madrid combo Radio Tarifa's *Temporal* (WCD 048) is all Strait-hopping blurs and edits of rumbas, bulerias, Bedouin pulses and the tarab cry—Medievalism as new essentialist passion. As their groovy 'post colonial' name hints, it's concept music about a pre-1492 'sound and feeling' heard for decades in Flamenco and Rai but never cauterised or given one speaker to share, another clue to a possible meditative space where mutations of these kind of collective 'ecstasies' now land.

The song of the exile is the voice of the heart being heard across the Euro Arab divide (hear Aisha Kandisha, Trans Global Underground, Fadela & Sahroui). Rai king Cheb Khaled's stunning Brel-meets-La Haine disco on *Sahra* (Barclay 533405-2 distributed through Polygram) not only managed to get Arab on to the French charts but defined for all the forces of danger and eroticism which drives this music's seductive power. Natacha Atlas' florid Halim (through Shock Records) of lamp-lit Moorish barrio *sans amour* scored points with the trance dance set but was more interesting for Jaz Coleman's co-production which broke its tapestry pump with the sounds of a real war (Algiers? Beirut?), guns and the lot happening somewhere in the *mis en scene*.

Fast tracking to 'world' experimental electronica, *avant garde* footnotes to all these virtual soundtracks for new worlds are making for an authenticity shake up. Melbourne duo Trial of the Bow's release *Rite of Passage* took a sophisticated Folkways via contemporary music route to the post Dead Can Dance caravan but more sampled souks and campfires under closed lids means more postcard ambient. For a wake-up call came number two of Merzbow's *Music for Bondage #2* (Performance XCD 034), from the file-under-'other' Extreme label—writer, musician and installation artist Masami Akita's investigations into the right brain. The Merzbow international 'project' is a complex one (it's just CD number 51 in Akita's output), a Kurt Schwitters inspired sound art of S&M as audible ritual, sociology and history well situated within the huge Japanese 'Zen' noise genre (hear also Keiji Heino, Otomo Yoshihide). The first of the series was one of the most terrifying recordings I've ever heard—no vocalisations here though and it's packaged with an illustrated informative text; Edo period class origins discussed. The music itself is a devastating mesh of generated and sculpted sonic 'oppressions' giving way to exquisitely frail skeletal abstract zones. Forget classifications about this kind of stuff being spirit-quashing dystopian 'industrial' music. Merzbow is advanced micro-gender politics for a global culture of violation.

Finally, for those seeking a way out of music's entrapment in land-locked systems of production and authorship, comes Einsturzende Neubauten's breathtakingly audacious *Ende Neu* (Mute LC 5834 through Mds), possibly the first truly postmodern rendition of sound art cast out as free radical 'atomisations' of live reception experience. Trashing the very idea of a *mensch* dominated sonic space where 'the body' mediates meaning, they have given over some of their best known emblematic pieces to other artists to 'mix', including Jon Spencer, Panasonic, Barry Adamson. Neubauten's theatrical and radio broadcasting side activities also check in for major reassessment. Track two is titled "Installation no 1", a self-appropriation of a sound art piece staged at East Berlin's Akadamie der Kunste then transposed to the machinations of the studio (and non-band member 'receiver') where electronica makes for a loss of intention and the sound of a motorised autonomia blissfully moulding and zapping sounds into new futurist spaces. If drum'n'bass (utilised here as one of many rhythmic narratives on hand) is becoming post-Techno, a new free space for all kinds of dissenting experimentalism to flourish in (hear Squarepusher's *Burning 'n' tree* (LC 2070 also through Mds), then Neubauten has quickly taken up the mantle opening it out as a practice for fresh resistance strategies. Non-tuned steel and metallic weapons and tools of destruction and construction are reintroduced as the primary instrumentation for this new take on the man-machine story.

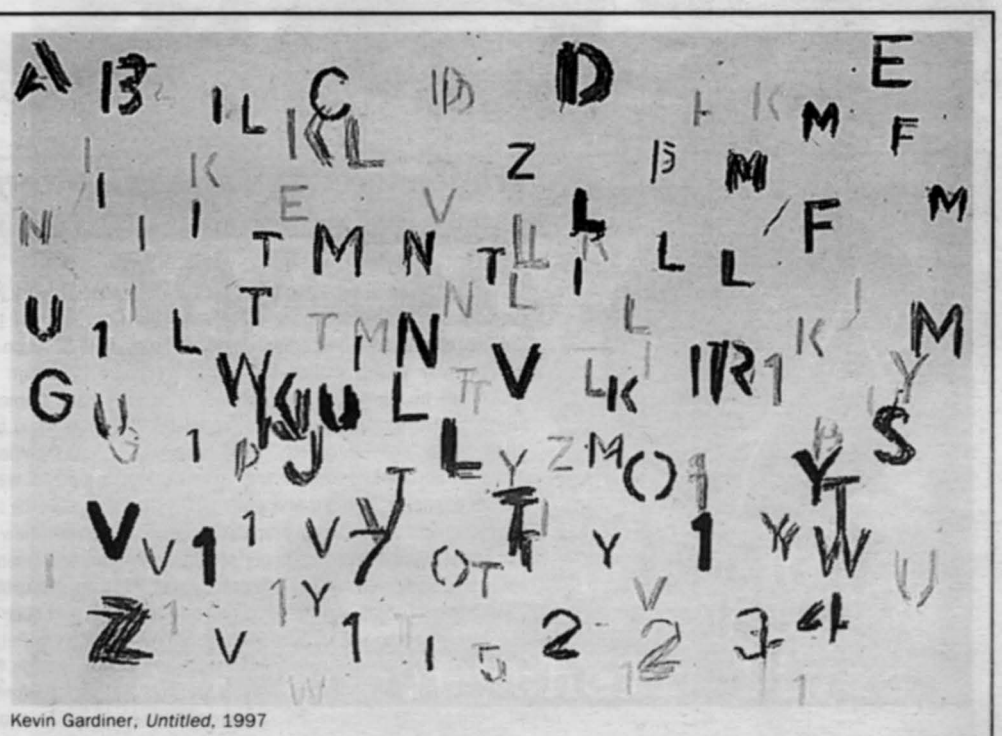
And while drum'n'bass' outfits like Tortoise, LaBradford and Stereolab may be about an Anglo revision of electro Krautrock and 80s German *avant garde* krankrock there's nothing like this Beuysian ad hoc 'culmination' of the work of DAF, Neu, Faust and Ton Steine Scherben to show us the real theme of anxiety behind its emergence at the end of the millenium. The intense whirring and cog shifting din of machines out of harmony when 'hands off' technology takes a front seat easily subverts popular Prodigy-fuelled myths of electronica as potential psychic killer. *Ende Neu* finally gives permission to get back to the on/off switch as partial arbiter for new interventions to materialise.

Pillowsongs is a new audio installation by Poonkhin Khut opening at Salamanca's Side Space Gallery January 16. Using digital sound, found objects and graphic imagery, the exhibition presents an underworld of aural fragments inspired by the unsettlingly suggestive stains left on pillow-cases. The ambiguously charged presence of these found textiles serves as a starting point for a consideration of personal space. Speakers inside pillows set on iron frame beds combine continually shifting sounds from a bank of CD players. The prone posture required to fully engage with the work together with the dark and brooding atmosphere of the gallery space, removes the audience from the usual experience of public space towards a more intimate and tactile encounter. The soundscapes suggest aural residues, secret histories and the passage of time—music becomes noise, silence becomes music.

Poonkhin Khut has been working in the area of sound installation, performance and design since 1987. He graduated from the University of Tasmania in 1993 and has since produced several performance and installation projects including a highly acclaimed 18 hour staging of Eric Satie's *Vexations* at Hobart's Theatre Royal which he produced, directed and designed; video projections for IHOS Opera's *Mikrovion*; art direction on the festival club for the New Music Tasmania Festival and *Mutiny on the Docks*, an audio-visual installation with camera obscura at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Customs House Building for last year's Hobart Summer Festival. *RT*

The exhibition *Popular Windows* is the culmination of the *Building Art Project* which ran over six months and was funded by the Community Bridging Services, the Australia Council, Art SA, and SPARC Disability Foundation. The project involved the collaboration of two established Adelaide artists and artists with intellectual disability, utilising professional studio space so as to develop, over the six months period, an on-going and sustained body of work. Crucial to the project was an approach to practice that shifted the grounds for producing from those of institutionalised art therapy to those of institutionalised art industry.

There are complexities presented here with this agenda and arena: intellectual disability, professional studio practices, taking seriously the work as art. There are too many stories to be wary of, mindful of, to be careful in introducing or pronouncing old stories about art's relation to reason, or accounts of working on and within the margins, or issues about spaces of the seen and the predominance of exhibition space as that which institutionally sets up reception of a work. But what this exhibition presents, and presents powerfully, is the question of community.



Kevin Gardiner, *Untitled*, 1997

It is not that anything is resolved by the event of the studio project and exhibition. It is not as if, because of the inclusion or embracing of art predominantly marginalised from gallery exhibition, there is a stronger sense of identity and community for the visual arts. Rather, the effect is quite different. If we somehow celebrate the sameness here, a sameness of art or even good art, or a formalist sameness determined by the homogenisation of works by framing and hanging, or even the most impoverished of samenesses, that 'everyone is an artist', we really miss the point. It is, in fact, difference that most powerfully exhibits itself here, in spite of the homogenising and framing effects of the gallery. *Popular Windows* events the inventing of the most viable of communities, that of a being in common of difference. Mark Jackson

Popular Windows, *Anima Gallery, Adelaide October 1-November 2*

Blasts from the past

Joanne Harris on Samstag Scholarship winner Craig Andrae's *Album* at Adelaide's EAF and *Documenta* in Kassel, Germany

At the opening address of *documenta's 100 Days. 100 Guests* lecture program Edward Said spoke of his decreasing interest in the politics of 'identity', preferring instead the development of an 'awareness' or re-appraisal of 'history' in order to move forward—no longer shackled but informed by the past.

In retrospect, being the 10th and final *Documenta* in this millennium, it now seems inevitable that *dx* would have favoured an 'historical perspective'. Rather than exclusively presenting the latest trends in contemporary art, it included an early and a recent work by each living artist. Throughout the course of the exhibition one became increasingly aware of the dates of production—reminded that exciting works with particular contemporary currency had been made nearly thirty years ago, with Öyvind Fahlström's *Meatball Curtain (For R. Crumb)* (1969) a good example.

At the time, *dx*'s historical focus seemed overwhelming, with a surfeit of small, black and white photographic works supporting this premise. One couldn't help but gain a sense of the 'history' embedded in European culture. *dx* did, however, offer a vast body of (historical and) contemporary work, to which there is little access in Australia—other than as received information gained from books and magazines.

Much criticism has concerned *dx's* Eurocentric focus. The lack of work from the third world (not to mention Australia) and ethnic minorities was questioned by journalists at the press conference. Catherine David, in keeping with her audacious French reputation, bluntly replied, "This is not the United Nations".

In an interview with Robert Storr in the May 1997 issue of *Art Forum* David outlined some of the reasons behind the inclusion of 'retroperspectives' by Marcel Broodthaers, Gerhard Richter, Helio Oiticica and Lygia Clark and *dx*'s 'historical perspective': "What is very difficult is that you don't have an immediate genealogy. What we find disturbing about a number of young artists is that they have a very loose relationship to history. So I don't think most of them know these artists, or pay specific attention to them. The idea was not to establish or to forge a link between generations, but to privilege a very open cultural attitude".

Album, a word from the past (photographic or vinyl), was the title of Craige Andrae's recent solo exhibition in Adelaide. With much of the work made in response to recent travel overseas, Andrae's *Album various artists* referred to a number of historical art works including Monet's 'gardens', Mondrian's 'compositions' (using Powerade bottles instead of paint), Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* and a designer version of a Calder mobile. Quotidian objects, clothing and elegant drawings were used to investigate art history, criticism, contemporary practice and popular culture via the framing of cultural tourism.

Craig Andrae

A compilation of the 'best' (and sometimes less desirable aspects) of Adelaide's art scene over the past few years were woven into the works, cut with a touch of local gossip. A number of reviews of past Adelaide exhibitions, each of which included artists who have recently departed, were used in *Pruning*—presented as five graphic, flower-shaped line-drawings, reminiscent of those by Ellsworth Kelly eg *Two Irises* (1983). Made from text on acetate strips, these quiet, beautiful drawings crawling with commentary, affixed to the back wall, floor, toilet and storeroom doors, suggested a keenly sceptical view of criticism. These 'review drawings' included Louise Haselton, Greenaway Gallery (*rose*); Shaun Kirby, Sym Choon (*poppy*); Hewson/Walker & David O'Halloran, Post West (*poppies in bud*); *Jemmy*, group show, 1994 Adelaide Festival (*daisy*); Simon Cardwell, Greenaway (*tulip*).

A poster of two copulating praying mantises, one with black-rimmed saucers attached as eyes and a big "thank you" printed below was an amusing intervention by Andrae, with certainly a sting in its tale. A gigantic black and white *Guernsey* awaited discovery behind a small opening between moveable walls—the 'A' emblematic of the so called Adelaide A-Team? Made from designer garments hung mid-air on a large Calder-like *Mobile*, Andrae's large structure was host to a Zegna (soft) shirt, Armani suit, Yves Saint Laurent underwear and Hugo Boss socks.

The art scene sometimes seems a poorer, less glamorous version of the fashion world, driven by an equivalent currency of physical beauty, sex, sleaze, envy, ego, gossip, bitchiness and insecurity, with frequent social occasions featuring beautiful people in chic clothing chinking champagne glasses—with 'what's new' the principal ingredient. The merging of these two worlds seems to be on the increase, with many young British artists (YBAs)—such as Sarah Lucas, Damien Hirst, Gary Hume—elevated to near pop star status, and the growing corporate sponsorship of contemporary art exhibitions by major fashion labels.

In London recently I visited the Ellsworth Kelly retrospective at the Tate Gallery, sponsored by Hugo Boss. Prominently displayed at the entrance to the show was their logo and a statement by Chairman and CEO Joachim Vogt, acknowledging Hugo Boss's support and commitment to this project and contemporary art in general: "Art rewards people who exert themselves—those who allow art to disturb, challenge and stimulate them. For such people art becomes a laboratory of life and creativity. This conviction has led Hugo Boss to embark on its extensive program of international art patronage, exemplified by our company's partnership with the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. Hugo Boss' arts program promotes the work of emerging and established artists who bring productive unrest into our lives...We hope you find it a challenging and enjoyable experience".

Other corporate collaborations included Laurie Anderson's installation in Hugo Boss's Regent Street store-front window and Anya Gallaccio's flower work in the Serpentine Gallery garden—one could purchase her 'special edition' facsimile patterned material at Selfridges in Oxford Street.

At *dx* Hans Haacke addressed this growing phenomenon with his street posters in *Standortkultur (Corporate Culture)*,"made up of quotations from business leaders who use corporate sponsorship as a communications medium" (*dx* short guide) including, for example, a revealing comment by Peter Littman, President, Hugo Boss: "We are not patrons. We want something for the money we spend. And we are getting it".

Considering its length, the surrounding competition and the number of people on a limited time schedule, Johan Grimonprez's *Dial H.I.S.T.O.R.Y* (1995-97) assimilated the re-presentation of history perhaps most successfully at *dx*. Presenting an "exhaustive chronology of airlane hijackings" in a pseudo-documentary format addressing "the way the media shape culture, history and reality today", Grimonprez "highlight[ed] the value of the spectacular in our catastrophe culture" (*dx* short guide). Accompanied by a fabulously funky soundtrack with a fictive narrative, Grimonprez's lively and amusing 52 minutes of viewing consisted almost exclusively of documentary footage convincingly spliced with re-enactments—as a form of rewriting. Fragments included particular facts and details—among them, the airline whose hostesses wore the shortest skirts also had the highest number of hijackings; the well known hijacker who had a facelift before her forthcoming hijacking (in preparation for the ensuing media attention); or the endearing footage from the 50s of a young boy in a red skivvy and heavy black framed glasses who had been held captive by hijackers. When asked by the press pack if he would like to do it again, he replied, with more than a glint of excitement, that no, he'd probably miss too much school.

Album was Andrae's first solo exhibition in Adelaide since 1993. A graduate from the Sculpture Department at the South Australian School of Art, University of South Australia, Andrae is a one of the latest recipients of a Samstag Scholarship (1997). In Adelaide it is generally considered that the SASA's strength lies in studio practice and theory, with the art theory department focusing on popular culture and 'theory' rather than art history. With the lack of art history sometimes regarded a weakness of the courses on offer, it is maybe this lack, which, by default over time, cultivates a heightened interest in art history amongst some graduates.

Album offered multiple 'readings' which reaffirmed the intelligence and complex thinking in Andrae's practice. Following this exhibition and the timely award of a Samtag, it seems that Andrae will be able to continue to move forward—informed by, but free from the past.

Album various artists: *Craige Andrae, Experimental Art Foundation September 11-October 5.* Documenta, *Kassel, Germany June 21-September 28, 1997*

Milan Knizak, *Destroyed music (red)*, 1963-80

Francesco Conz and the Intermedia Avant-Garde

On display at the Queensland Art Gallery in December-January will be the collection recently donated to the gallery by Francesco Conz, one of the world's leading publishers of *avant-garde* editions and multiples. This donation of 100 works by 39 international artists makes the gallery's Fluxus collection one of the most significant in Australia. The exhibition has two main themes—those artworks known as Fluxus, and also works that blend images and text from the movement often called "concrete poetry". The term "Fluxus" was coined in 1962 to unite artists in Europe and the US who were working in parallel ways to create a new culture of energy, humour and anarchy. To Fluxus we owe the term 'intermedia' as the movement attempted to eradicate boundaries between new creative forms and to connect visual art, music, performance, film, design, poetry and literature in surprising and inventive ways. There are plenty of gags in Fluxus-inspired work but it's the play of ideas and free experimentation that is particularly important.

Artists connected with Fluxus include Nam Jun Paik, Charlotte Moorman, Yoko Ono (see Douglas Kahn in RT#21), Robert Watts, George Brecht, Joe Jones, Philip Corner, Ben Patterson, Alison Knowles and Dick Higgins. These artists are all represented in this exhibition with their playful, idiosyncratic imagery conveyed through large-scale screenprints on cloth, portfolios of printed images and original objects. Other artists in the exhibition are from the concrete poetry movement: Robert Lax, Eric Anderson and John Giorno, for instance, have collaborated with Francesco Conz to produce distinctive visual statements. The exhibition will also include video footage and documentary photographs of the artists. In the spirit of Fluxus, Francesco Conz, Nicholas Zurbrugg (co-curator with Anne Kirker, the QAG's Curator of Prints and Drawings and Photographs) and artists Alison Knowles and Eric Andersen will travel to Brisbane and contribute talks and performances to various events surrounding the exhibition. There's a forum on Saturday 20 December 10-4 pm. The Fluxus exhibition and related events will be covered in the February-March edition of *RealTime*. Information: Queensland Art Gallery 07-3840.7303.

RT

Maryanne Christodoulou, *Untitled*, from *New Q*, National Gallery of Victoria

Midsumma Festival (January 15-February 15 1998) featuring performance, visual arts, music, literature, film and special events highlighting the depth and diversity of Melbourne's queer arts opens with the FurBall Gala at Melbourne's Forum Theatre.

New Q at the National Gallery of Victoria exhibits works by 15 contemporary visual artists. In conjunction with the exhibition, readings by young queer writers are featured in *Generation Q2* (January 21) and *Quake* (January 28).

In *Questioning the Queer Aesthetic* (February 4) practitioners discuss conceptions of queer art. *A Quiet Afternoon with Midsumma* offers a selection of performances and music as well as the presentation of the inaugural Gay & Lesbian Business Association (GLOBE) Visual Art Award.

The Universal Theatre will be the focus for the theatre productions: *Software*, a two-week season of queer performance; a cult soap-opera, *The Sun Also Sizzles*, the Australian premiere of Fred Silver's award winning off-broadway musical *In Gay Company*; and the *aGender* Cabaret.

Queer Film Australia presents The Best of the Fest—Oz Shorts including *Night Out, My Cunt, Proof, Resonance* and *This Marching Girl Thing* at the State Film Theatre and Movies Under the Stars at Fairfield Amphitheatre.

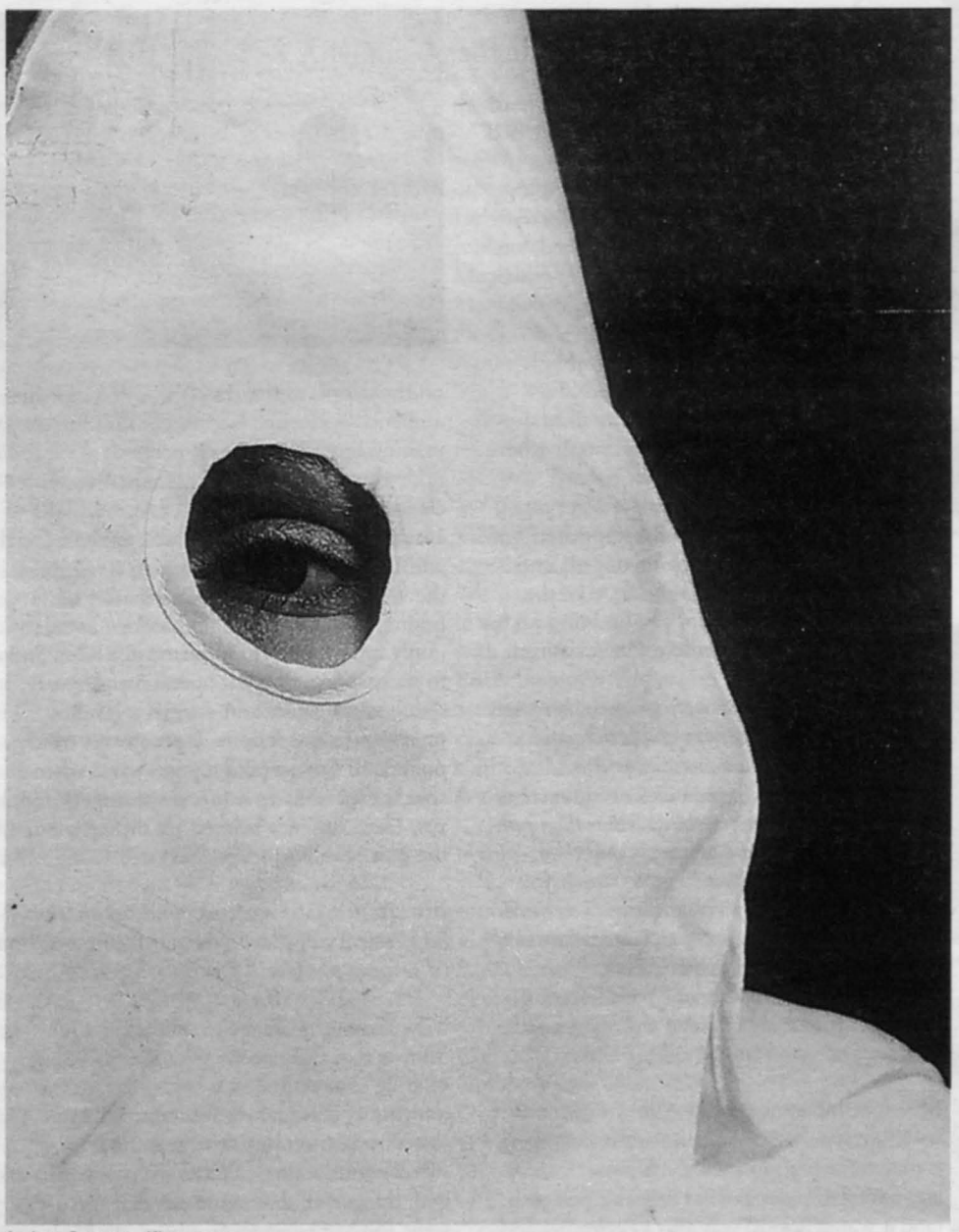
RT

The (in)delicate business of art vandalism

Rachel Kent picks up the pieces of *Piss Christ* at Melbourne's International Festival of the Arts

October proved to be a tough month for contemporary art in Australia. On Friday October 10, the exhibition *A History of Andres Serrano* opened in Melbourne at the National Gallery of Victoria, despite hate mail received by gallery staff and an unsuccessful law suit brought by Catholic Archbishop Dr George Pell. Toured by the Groninger Museum in The Netherlands, the exhibition formed part of the visual arts component of the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts. On Saturday October 11 one work within the exhibition, *Piss Christ* of 1987, was removed from its wall and allegedly kicked at by a 51 year old Sydney man; and, the following afternoon, it was destroyed altogether by two teenagers with a hammer. On Monday October 13, amidst unprecedented media excitement and just three days after it had opened, *A History of Andres Serrano* was closed to the public by gallery Director Dr Timothy Potts in the interests of staff and public safety.

In the furore surrounding the exhibition and its subsequent closure, the very real issue of vandalism towards works of art has been largely overlooked by the popular press and in public debate. Instead, a media trial of gallery officials has—rightly or wrongly—focussed mainly upon the gallery's original decision to stage the exhibition, the inclusion of *Piss Christ,* the premature closure of the exhibition, security measures taken during its brief display, and the capacity of the gallery to mount exhibitions of contemporary art in Melbourne. Certainly these issues are very real but one might also ask: in what sort of society does vandalising of art take place? And, how does a piece of art so enrage certain elements within a community that this sort of violence is acted out upon it?



Andres Serrano, *Klansman*

Australia has quite a rich if unfortunate history of art vandalism, both on and off-shore. It was Australian resident Lazlo Toth, after all, who took a hammer to Michelangelo's *Pietà* in the Vatican in 1972. Toth attacked the seated Virgin with a hammer, destroying parts of her face and veil, while claiming: "I am the real Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ has risen from the dead". An incident of international proportions, the *Pietà* attack registers as an all-time low in the history of art vandalism (and, later, a high in terms of its restoration by leading art conservators). There have been various, less spectacular incidents on shore as well including the slashing of an Ivan Durrant painting in 1978 and the firing of a bullet through a Keith Haring mural on the water-wall of the National Gallery of Victoria in 1984. (This was the second such firing of a bullet through the water wall and might not have been connected directly to Haring's work.) Thefts have included that of Picasso's *Weeping Woman* in 1986, also from the National Gallery of Victoria and later retrieved from a Melbourne railway locker; and, most recently, of a small multiple work by British artist Tanya Kovats entitled *Virgin In A Condom.* The latter work was on display within the touring exhibition, *Pictura Brittanica* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney.

One hesitates to draw a direct link between the theft of this work and the recent attack upon *Piss Christ*. In the wake of the Serrano controversy in Melbourne, however, a number of complaints were received by the Museum of Contemporary Art regarding Kovats' work and its apparently offensive nature. Its subsequent disappearance therefore leaves one to ponder the interrelationship of these two events and the ripple-effect that the Serrano controversy has generated. One could suggest that the attack upon Serrano's work—which is both deplorable and inexcusable—may be matched in severity by its repercussions. It serves to legitimise the possibility of vandalism towards other works of art deemed by community groups to be offensive or, as Serrano's work was described, 'blasphemous'. More broadly it impacts upon an artist's freedom in a democratic society to display their work without fear of reprisal or censure. After all, *A History of Andres Serrano* was a fee-paying exhibition, restricted to adults only, and was thus open only to those who actually chose to view it.

Described as "a one-man Hispanic fly in the ointment of the mid-to-extreme right of US public opinion" (Peter Hill, "Andres Serrano: Pissing on the Klan", *Art+Text*, 42, May 1992), New York photographer Andres Serrano is a veteran when it comes to controversy. The original display of *Piss Christ*, a cibachrome photograph of a plastic crucifix immersed in urine, impacted directly upon national arts funding in America during the late 80s. Along with an exhibition of works by photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, it acted as a catalyst in the reduction of funding for the National Endowment for the Arts. (See Carole S Vance, "The War on Culture," *Art in America*, September 1989). Other subjects tackled by Serrano have included the Ku Klux Klan, homeless people or 'nomads', and a particularly hard-hitting series of morgue portraits. When asked about the content of his works and their potential to shock and disturb, Serrano cites intellectual provocation and the desire to challenge what one can or cannot do as an artist as motivations. Whether or not one believes this, or even finds Serrano a particularly interesting or 'good' artist, the works do impact upon viewers in terms of their gritty subject matter and bald, descriptive titles, including, for example, *The Morgue (Jane Doe Killed by Police)*, 1992.

Most recently Serrano has produced a body of explicit works in the Netherlands titled *A History of Sex* commissioned for a Groninger Museum exhibition. A selection of four key works was chosen for the National Gallery of Victoria display while the complete series was exhibited simultaneously at a local commercial gallery, where it still remains on public view. Interestingly—or perhaps prophetically—Serrano noted in the Groninger Museum catalogue:

> Piss Christ *made me infamous and branded me a provocative artist. After that, my reputation started to precede me. It has followed me for the past six years, even when I do things that I think lack conviction.*

The theme of art vandalism was taken up recently in a publication by Dario Gamboni entitled *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism Since the French Revolution* (See Daniel Birnbaum, "The Art of Destruction", *Frieze*, Issue 35, June-August, 1997)), which examines case histories ranging from the purely ridiculous to the frightening and disturbed. Here Toth finds good company in Tony Shafrazi, who sprayed the words "Kill Lies All" across Picasso's Guernica in 1974, and the German student who kicked, punched and spat at Barnett Newman's *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue IV* in 1982. Since the book's publication several other highly publicised cases have taken place. They include an ink attack upon a canvas depicting convicted child-killer Myra Hindley and the spraying of a green dollar sign on a Kasimir Malevich painting.

In the first instance Marcus Harvey's painting *Myra* was on display at the Royal Academy, London, as part of the Saatchi Collection exhibition *Sensation*. Following the attack it was discretely removed from display, conserved, and returned to its wall in a protective perspex frame with two additional security guards stationed nearby. Ironically, Saatchi's immense personal collection also contains several works by Andres Serrano including *Piss Christ* (which is in limited edition). The latter case—the repercussions of which are still being felt in the correspondence pages of prominent international art journals—involved the defacing of Malevich's *White Cross on Gray* by disillusioned Russian artist Alexander Brener. Described by Giancarlo Politi, editor of *Flash Art*, as a radical artistic gesture on behalf of its attacker, this episode has attracted unprecedented debate in recent months. After all, as critic Daniel Birnbaum points out, there is a vast difference between revolutionary statements and violent physical acts. Hence Malevich's own desire to "let all periods burn, as one dead body", or Duchamp's suggestion to "use a Rembrandt as an ironing board", should not be confused with actual incitement to vandalism against artworks.

The recent attack upon Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* merely perpetuates an established pattern of vandalism. Before making value judgements as to the quality of the work or the competency of its custodians, one might stop and reflect upon the nature of violence itself and its implications. As Joseph Beuys once said, "Before we can ask WHAT CAN WE DO? we have to first consider the question HOW MUST WE THINK?".

...but the poh-piah was truly delicious!

Matthew Ngui cooking and communicating at *documentaX*: an e-mail exchange with Barbara Bolt

Matthew Ngui was the Australian, or should I say the Singapore/Australian representative at documentaX *1997 in Kassel Germany. His project,* You can order and eat delicious poh-piah, amongst other things *was a site-specific work involving installation and performance. His site was part of an old railway station in Kassel.*

Although currently based in Singapore, Matthew's practice has him travelling between Singapore, Perth, Kassel, Vienna and Venice. To track him down I decided to resort to e-mail. Our dialogue proceeded in fits and starts as e-mail does. The nature of e-mail seemed to us to open up a different way of conducting interviews. No more tedious transcription, the possibility of mutual editing and ongoing revision. I could e-mail Matthew anywhere in the world, technology permitting, he could respond anywhere in the world. That is the theory anyway.

BB As a starting point, I'd like to get a handle on what you actually did in documentaX.

MN I did a piece which worked primarily as an installation but with a performative element added onto it—people order food through a long tube which travels the building and other parts of the installation and I engage with them conversationally through a keyboard and monitor. They read the monitor which I cannot see and I hear them through the tube from a location I cannot see.

BB What do you mean by performative element?

MN The poh-piah (soft spring roll) performance involved a mix of old fashioned communication technology, in the form of a long tube, and contemporary technology. This is not to say that the fashioning of the PVC tube does not require high technology, but that the speaking into it doesn't. People order the food through the tube, and when this happens, I engage them in a conversation around art, its contexts, their cultural background, their preferences and biases. A lot of the time, they take over and lead the engagement by interrogating me about *documentaX*, its curator, about Singapore/Australia or about my personal life. When all is done and the conversation draws itself to a close, I re-offer the poh-piah and most agree that they would want to have some, so I proceed to prepare some for them.

BB What was the thinking behind this weird mix that had people talking into a tube, receiving a reply to their request via a video monitor and then having to proceed to another space to watch the preparation of the poh-pia?

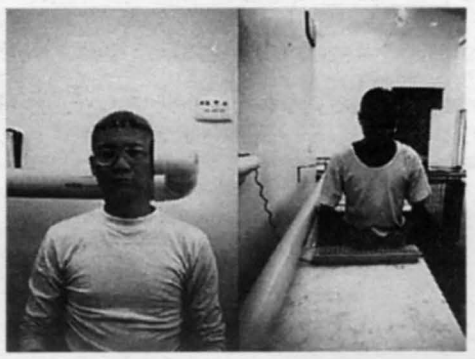
MN I think at first instance, it was more or less a game I devised back in PICA in 1992. Perhaps I was just lonely and needed company, or needed to sharpen my typing skills, or to allow more interaction, or to develop a cycle (the text never proceeds on the same path—people speak, I type) which by its very nature creates problems in communication. I suppose the test then comes if people are willing to surmount those problems. The tube installed at *dX* was not less than 120m, with fire doors (the fixation of German engineering); where the tubes enter into a different room, sections were made of narrower steel pipes (eg in the staircase which was supposed not to contain any combustible material) and the numerous bends required to take the pipes up the stairs, out of the building and then back in again to where I was sitting.

BB In the video of the performance there was a real sense of dislocation in both time and space between the audience and you as performer, in terms of the visitors making their initial requests (often for things other than poh-piah) and receiving the text reply and then having to find out where to go to watch you prepare the poh-piah. This dislocation seemed to produce all sorts of miscommunications and odd digressions. What issues did the performance open up about communication and in particular the effect of technology on processes of signification?

MN I see miscommunication as synonymous with misrepresentation but the interesting thing is that in the performance, the person attempting to order and eat delicious poh-piah (and it was delicious) was also a performer and, together, we did communicate some ideas and desires which resulted in them receiving some food which, so far, was enjoyed by all who got it. The misunderstandings were sometimes hilarious but at other times, irritating and frustrating, resulting in despair and sometimes anger. The problems in communicating related to that which was technical as well as cultural difference. Accents were strong and though for the speaker, it was clear, plain English, for me it may as well have been their native tongue.

BB Contemporary performance often involves 'muteness' of the performer. In ...poh-piah, *you are engaged in the preparation of food, a culturally gregarious activity, yet you prepared the food in a self-consciously silent way and your communication was solely via the keyboard.*

MN This allowed me, I think, to concentrate



on the detail, rather than the whole, as the audience-performer had to concentrate on making himself or herself properly understood by enunciating the words with clarity. Speaking is all too easy, especially at earshot, and it carries all the attendant facial and bodily expression which go to support the verbalisation. So it was a matter of finding a way to focus the performance, to imply an evenness in imposed disability and to seek appropriate co-operation. Anyway, I didn't want to act and desired a level of precision in my actions. I am always overly polite and floppy (aka a pup's ears) when I speak (especially to a foreign stranger) and, yes, I was and am being a bit difficult, but the poh-piah was truly delicious!

BB In this performance, and others that I have seen, you place yourself in the position of serving people. Why?

MN I have a tendency to do that, but the irony is that I get incensed by it. It's like offering something but trying to say, at the same time, don't take advantage. I did not consciously try to say anything about a subservient/dominant culture (I have gotten on with things): all that matters is that there was some form of enticement, some encouragement for interaction, which was necessary given the premise for the work—a testing of the representation, "You can order and eat delicious poh-piah". I would do almost anything to engage the audience in an interesting manner—and I don't think I mean to be sensationalist. By "interesting" I mean "thinking", even if all it achieves is that they have received some delicious food at *dX* (within the exhibition hall, not the food court).

BB You talk about working in a site-specific way, yet there were some aspects of your performance that seemed to work against the specificity of the site. For example, you were in Germany, yet you adopted English as the language for the text-based communication. Why English, why not German or Chinese? What does the work have to say about intercultural communication?

MN Site-specificity does not necessarily mean using what is familiar to the site, it means engaging with the site in a way which allows for aspects of the work to coincide with the cultural landscape of the site which, in this case, produced the conversations. Intercultural communication is the outcome of the work, it does not pretend to prescribe or pronounce a statement about anything in particular. It all has to do with the processes of engagement—desire, attitude, perspective, understanding and sometimes, hard work.

BB In the video, at least, it seemed only to be men who engaged with the talking tube. Was that how it was in the performance? Did that sort of interactivity affect who was prepared to engage?

MN No, I would say that there were an equal number of both sexes who engaged with the installation during the performance. Men would say there were more women because they were interested in cooking and women would say there were more men because they were more daring or more 'techno', or men would say that there were fewer women because they were too busy holding on to their arms or women would say that there were fewer men because they were too stupid to see that food has a place in art. In any case, it is a fact that both men and women eat, and they both have to order at restaurants.

BB Did you have any problems with the health inspectors, amongst other things?

MN Not with the health inspectors but I did have problems keeping the utensils, pots and preparation boards clean because *Documenta* just did not have kitchen facilities for art.

BB The curator Catherine David talks about globalization, speed and democracy. How did your work articulate with the curatorial aims of documentaX*? Why was your work selected?*

MN Because I come from Singapore!

BB The organization of the Venice Biennale seemed to remain focussed on the centrality of European art. Was this the same for documentaX?

MN Catherine David operates from a European perspective and, I believe, thinks that the definitions of art are not similar between Western and non-Western cultures. The nature of *Documenta* is that it is prescriptive in that it attempts to indicate an umbrella concept to explain the condition of art in the world, which is different from "the globalisation of art". David's knowledge centres around Europe, South America and the US more than elsewhere and she is interested in how space articulates its way to art, or the visual culture of the land.

BB Amongst other things, you are currently lecturing in a bridging course in Singapore, preparing Singaporean art graduates to travel to complete graduate programs in Perth. What issues face Singaporean and other Asian artists in their negotiation with European centred art institutions?

MN They have to get over Pauline Hanson first, then read Lacan and Foucault, Baudrillard, Eco and Ponte. Then they should graduate to Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous. You see, I have much to learn myself and I don't know all that much about the Chinese philosophers...why should I? I am Singaporean after all. I think that the most important aspect of learning is being able to contextualise what you are being taught. In this fashion, any Singaporean or Australian can read anything s/he wants.

When we saw Matthew Ngui's work at documentaX *the cook was no longer on-site. In the gallery was the speaking tube and a screen at our feet to receive the answers the artist would have typed on his computer keyboard. The pipes led us to other rooms—in one next door, a table held a line of paper plates with chopsticks displaying the remains of delicious* poh-piah *eaten by others. Some verified the artwork's title in written messages on their plates—"thanks, it really was delicious". Transcripts of some more difficult conversations with the artist were also displayed. In another part of the room, fragments of an anamorphic chair lay strewn across the floor. Upstairs among the array of cooking utensils, was another three-dimensional illusion to puzzle at. The installation covered a lot of territory literally and metaphorically, the tubing invoking 19th century methods of communication, the sight games small analogues for the complexities of listening, all of the elements contradicting the accuracy of the singular point of view.* - Eds

Letters

*A typographical error In the article "Top End Mix" (*RealTime *21, October-November) made incorrect Suzanne Spunner's reference to DEC (Darwin Entertainment Centre) being offered a production of Nigel Triffit's* The Fall of Singapore. *This should have read DTC (Darwin Theatre Company). Editors.*

October 14, 1997

Dear editors,

It was with pleasure that I commenced reading Suzanne Spunner's article regarding this year's Festival of Darwin. But with anger and some disgust that I concluded.

Ms Spunner as a past member of the Centre should know how it operates, yet her comments reveal a great deal of confusion between the organisations she attacks and what they do. In short the Entertainment Centre is simply not funded to be a producer, however it may fantasise about the possibility of becoming one. The Centre is spending public money and this has been deemed not to be their role.

As a non-resident writer commenting on a particularly Darwin issue it would have been polite at the least, if not merely professional, to check her facts before putting a personal attack to print.

I feel that it was not her intention in this instance to subscribe to personality, but that in light of her comments she has to some extent been 'duped' by individuals with highly personal agendas.

There is always more than one side to a story, and many ways to 'fight the good fight'. Perhaps if she had cared to speak to more than one individual and organisation an alarmingly different picture would have emerged.

It is undeniable that 4WD was an exceptional event, conceived by some outstanding artists. Yet having had some involvement throughout the event (through, dare I say it, my position at the Entertainment Centre) I feel that the credit must lie primarily with Tracks Dance. The Festival may facilitate and promote events, but primarily it acts as a kudos gatherer. Do it at Festival time, and without the Festival it could not have happened. Certainly in some cases this is true, but some snowballs exist even in the tropics.

Sincerely,

Hania Radvan
Formerly casual staff member of most of the above arts organisations, including the Festival, and currently full-time publicist at the Darwin Entertainment Centre

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October 14, 1997

Dear editors,

In response to the comments about Darwin Entertainment Centre by Ms Spunner in her article upon the 'pleasures and plights of the Festival of Darwin', we would like to take this opportunity to address and correct a number of inaccuracies.

Darwin Entertainment Centre has had a varied association with the Festival Office. Past involvements have included Cafe DPAC and on-site visual art installations made possible by special grants from the NT Office of the Arts, recently transformed into a Department of Arts and Museums. In addition we have also been the venue for a number of shows over the years initiated by individuals and supported or acquitted through the Festival (*In the Body of the Son*, directed by Nicholas Rowe is a recent example).

Arguably the most successful was the first ever outdoor, free entertainment cafe in 1994. Since the inaugural success of this joint venture there have been hopes and attempts by both parties to make it happen again. Unfortunately although it has appeared in lesser guises the full initial glory has never again secured the injection of cash needed to make the project fully viable.

Perhaps it is best to point out that Darwin Entertainment Centre operates as a hiring venue as much as it attempts to operate as an entrepreneur. In other words, in many instances, both for local as well as national and international performers, the Centre has no say in the nature of the event programmed. In addition it is not our place to comment upon or discriminate between hirers.

The conference alluded to by Ms Spunner refers to a booking of the Centre some two years in advance by a major international organisation—out of Festival times. Some twelve months after confirmation of the booking the Festival changed its dates quite dramatically. This was not an event that could have been foreseen and yes the conflict was regrettable, but unavoidable.

Ms Spunner is wrong in saying that our contributions to the Festival were *Theatresports* and *Skylight* (that two-hander "set in a freezing London flat"). These were both productions by the Darwin Theatre Company, utilising the venue. It should be noted that this year, Darwin Theatre Company had planned a family show for Festival time, which was to have been held in the Centre's Studio Theatre. Unfortunately, at the last minute, after suffering the loss of a major sponsor who instead directed the full force of their funds elsewhere, Darwin Theatre Company decided they could not afford to run against the unexpected visit by the Great Moscow Circus. As a result the company changed dates from Festival of Darwin time, to coincide instead with the Territory wide Youth Festival.

What the Centre does do is attempt to fulfil our charter by enabling local arts presenters to utilise our facilities at an affordable rate through a Local Hirers Subsidy created specifically for this purpose. The Festival did, at the Centre's suggestion apply for this subsidy, but unfortunately that particular application fell outside of the deemed criteria.

This year the Centre also supported and facilitated Tracks Dance by way of sponsoring the rehearsal space for 4WD (indeed for all their major projects this year and next) and in offering reduced rate ticketing services for the 4WD event itself. We are very proud of our involvement with this exceptional company. *Bodies of Light* for World AIDS day is another Centre sponsored event and the next highlight on our calender.

This year, the Centre did also manage to secure a performance by Leigh Warren Dancers during Festival time and was at an earlier stage involved with negotiating with Circus Oz for performances at the Centre. With a very limited entrepreneurial budget, however much we would like to commit funds during the fortnight of the Festival, we cannot do so at the expense of eleven months of darkness for the Centre.

It is not easy on a very limited budget to secure the acts we would like for the exact dates we would like against a background of unpredictability from the Festival itself.

The Darwin Festival has a very clear agenda—and whilst we may wish them every success, we feel that other agendas are equally valid. Perhaps there is a further question to be raised by the fact that "the three best placed organisations" in Darwin are all talking, co-operating and working together for a fuller arts future for our region, yet the Festival continually stands alone? Co-operation does require just that, and a level of commitment from both parties.

Meanwhile we are all working towards 1998 and the next year of programming–including the Festival. If Mr Calafuri is unsure of his next step, our vision is clear.

Yours sincerely,

Bob O'Callahan
General Manager
& the staff of Darwin Entertainment Centre

October 23, 1997

Dear editors,

I write in reference to "Top end mix", Suzanne Spunner's calamitous and grossly misleading 'report' on our involvement in the 1997 Festival of Darwin.

Ms Spunner makes a series of quite stunning and baseless assumptions concerning our attitude to the Festival. Her report is capricious and wrong in nearly everything she says concerning Darwin Theatre Company and the Festival. She wonders why we have not been as involved as in previous years. A simple phone call would have alerted her to facts that may have caused her to alter her tone and content.

Darwin Theatre Company has been an emphatic supporter and participant in the Festival of Darwin for many years. We see the Festival as an opportunity to present work that is innovative and, perhaps, not seen in our regular programming. Thus, in 1996, we programmed the award winning play *Skylight* by renowned British writer David Hare. The play was directed by eminent Australian director Noel Tovey, and was an example of theatre rarely seen in Darwin. This was the "minor British two-hander" referred to by Ms Spunner.

As well, we presented the inaugural season of *Theatresports* in Darwin and this drew very large numbers of participants and sold out audiences.

A strong involvement by DTC in the 1997 Festival was precluded by the very late loss of our major sponsor. We also faced extremely strong competition from the Moscow Circus who drew over one third of the available Darwin audience. Nevertheless, we still presented a hugely popular season of *Theatresports*.

Ms Spunner cites the non-programming of Nigel Triffit's *The Fall of Singapore* as an example of our unwillingness to take a risk. Again, a simple query would have alerted Ms Spunner to the inability of our budget to cover the costs of this rather large project.

Ms Spunner's 'report' implies that the Festival is badly served by organisations such as ourselves. Better research would have enabled Ms Spunner to present a truer picture. I spoke to the Festival Director, Ms Spunner's unappreciated arts 'messiah' Fabrizio Calafuri, who expressed views quite opposite to those expressed in the comments concerning this company.

This sort of 'report' will only serve to make it more difficult for the Festival to construct creative relationships with the five organisations so unfairly discussed.

Having lived here for ten years Ms Spunner should have known and done better.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick Mitchell
Artistic Director
Darwin Theatre Company

Suzanne Spunner responds:

I am quite frankly amazed by the implication in these letters (all from people who know me) that I was somehow 'duped' or influenced by anybody else's agendas. I am not known for lacking critical views or the courage to voice them and have done so consistently publicly and privately over the last decade in Darwin.

Being critical of local product is often seen in Darwin as tantamount to high treason, and it is this entrenched parochialism that contributed to my decision to leave. The situation is exacerbated because there is no coverage of the arts in the local press—all the NT News *ever does is capriciously regurgitate press releases without acknowledgment (vide* Media Watch*).*

When interstate media cover the Festival, the articles are laudatory reportage. This year, the articles in the Sydney Morning Herald, The Australian *and* The Age *focused on the same highlights I did and made no mention of the contributions of DTC nor DEC; and only Joyce Morgan in* The Australian *commented on the DSO, attributing its "reputation for innovation" (sic) to the brightly coloured clothes worn by the musicians.*

Having the opportunity to read all those articles and the privilege of a more informed context than they had, I felt it was my role to praise the highlights and my responsibility to raise other issues. I proposed the article to RealTime *when I knew I would be in Darwin during Festival time on other business. I had no agenda when I proposed it and I certainly had no-one else's agenda when I wrote it in Melbourne.*

Darwin Theatre Company—Yes, David Hare is a significant British playwright, however Skylight *was not his best work and had no relevance to audiences in Darwin; it was worthy as a reading to keep local audiences in touch with recent West End successes, but it was incomprehensible as a Festival offering in a year when the theme was Myths and Legends.*

Darwin Entertainment Centre—The Festival did change its date "quite dramatically" from June to August late in 1994 ie The Darwin/Bougainvillea Festival has been in August in 1995, 96 and 97, which contradicts the point about the major international organisation's conference. One must also ask, if DEC has a "clear vision", why does it have "no say"? I was aware of the entire history of DEC/DPAC's involvement but in an article of this length I was only able to focus on this year and allude to last year and could no more detail contributions of DEC, DTC, the DSO three or four years ago than I could mention last year's contributions by 24 HR ART or CIYT.

Hania Radvan's remarks about Tracks bespeak the very point I made in the article, about the fear of making the Festival look good.

None of these letters addresses the main thrust of my article which was that The Darwin Festival builds on the unique strengths of the place—community arts, multiculturalism, the nearness to Asia and the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders—and that what it calls for is a relevant, innovative, creative and willing response.

November 21, 1997

Dear editors,

Thanks for including the exhibition *Between Two Worlds: Contemporary Balinese Painting* in the *RealTime* article "Top end mix". I have enjoyed looking at it on the *RealTime* web page too. Could we request that you link to the Agung Rai Museum of Art homepage at: *http://www.chica.com/arma/* and also *http://www.nusantara.com/arma/* as this was the institution which organised the exhibition.

Best regards,
Michelle Chin
Agung Rai Museum of Art
Ubud, Bali
armaubud@denpasar.wasantara.net.id

Sport

TEE OFF

with Vivienne Inch

In the golf clubs of the nation this month, there has been a lot of heated talk about the anticipated raft of native title claims on our beloved greens if this Wik business goes unchallenged. Efforts to quash rumours of golfers waiting lifetimes to play through while sacred ceremonies are performed have been inept. We look forward to some words of wisdom from our little captain who, judging the full seriousness of the issue, will put our minds at rest in a 10 minute chat to the nation tonight. As John's sometime coach, I have often quoted my own coach, Paddy McGuirk, "Golf is not played over 7,000 yards but over six inches—the six inches between the ears". So, John, let me say this. You're not dealing with the issue of fairplay here but with the national psyche. As you know, Australians abhor complexity. They thrive on ridiculous simplicity, unwavering certainty, the power of one. They dislike inflected speech, interruption, irritating digression and more than two people talking at the same time. You got it right when you said we're either proud or ashamed; we can't be both. We like nice clean sweeps of lawn. We like to park our arse on our own seat on the bus, to sit tight and shut up. It is no secret that the fantasy of the average golfer is a course to yourself where you can swing, chip and slice away at anything you like without another living soul within coo-ee. So it is with the Pastoralists of this great nation who we now know have a spiritual connection with the land which borders on the Indigenous. Snug under our Onkaparingas, dreaming Hans Heysen dawns, white city dwellers smile in their slumber as out in the rural heartland, graziers remove their Akubras, scratch the backs of their heads and gaze in wonder across vast acreages that are safely and solely theirs. Meanwhile, on the banks of the Gordon River, a 2000 year old Huon Pine tree falls, weary with the sad weight of an avaricious age.

TOOTH AND CLAW

with Jack Rufus

As I said, sportspeople speak their own peculiar version of English. And like I said, the oddities they use when speaking to the media tend to replicate, until all sportspeople employ the same strange, mouldy expressions. Language like a virus? More like a fungus in this case.

For some years now, the leading figure in sportspeak has been Mark "Tubby" Taylor, Australian cricket captain. As he holds the most important post in the nation, that's only natural. Tubby long ago popularised the trick of talking about himself in the third person, then moved on to splitting himself into two. "I have to concentrate on Mark Taylor the captain and Mark Taylor the opening bat," he is fond of telling interviewers.

Now he regularly inserts "as I said" into his monologues, even when he hasn't actually said anything. Following his lead, sporting personalities across the land begin their interviews with "like I said", with no-one bothering to ask what it is they actually think they said. And frankly, the two Jack Rufuses are getting pretty sick of this nonsense. Like we said, if it doesn't stop soon, Jack Rufus 1 and 2 might just march over to their TV sets and put their boots, as we didn't say, straight through their screens.

Keeping stills

Jacqueline Millner reviews the exhibition marking the opening of Stills Gallery's new space in Sydney

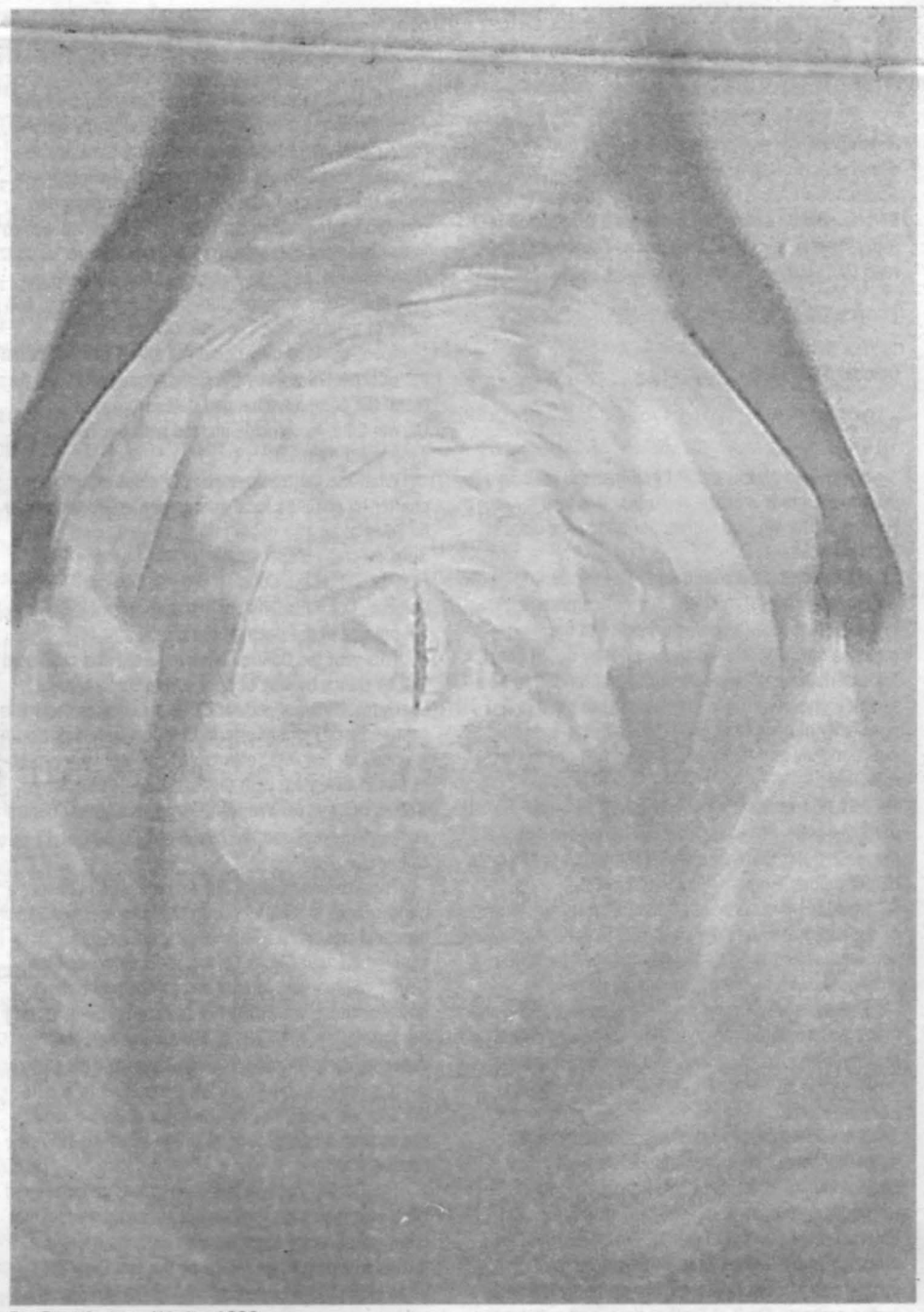
Inaugurating elegant new premises in a refurbished Paddington warehouse, Stills Gallery appears to be making a grab for the big end of town—photographically speaking. Of the three relatively recent photographic spaces in the same suburb, including Byron Mapp and the Australian Centre for Photography, this is arguably the most distinctive and flexible, striking a balance between intimacy and breadth. With corrugated steel arcs, polished concrete floor and natural light, this is, thankfully, not your archetypal white cube. A particularly nice touch is the loft-style installation room. The directors have also clearly relished the novelty of capaciousness by featuring some massive works, logistically impossible in their previous accommodation. Moreover, by choosing this particular collection of works to open their new gallery, they appear to be marking a change of emphasis, adding video, installation and computer-based practices to their on-going support for traditional photography.

While perhaps the architecture makes the biggest splash, some individual works also make a strong impression, particularly Pat Brassington's series. Brassington has had a long career using traditional photo-media to create Surrealist effects, blending sex, menace and humour in assembled images. Here, she has altered her original photos through digital means, to create subtly coloured ink-jet prints depicting what might be dream fragments. The graphics technology complements Brassington's work well, her use of it distinguished by its restraint. It is the merest wisp of manipulation that gives these images their integrity. Most striking is *Akimbo*, a torso of a woman, arms stretched alongside her, the satin creases of her simple wedding dress disturbed by a small red cleft. What might seem like a clichéd set of elements becomes poetic in this treatment, the marginal tonal variations (white on white) and the graceful dynamism of the figure rendering this image a gentle reminder of the painful rites of femininity. This theme is given another twist in *Drink Me*, which features the same figure, this time clenching her stomach as if retching, an iridescent red gnome at her feet. Allusions to pregnancy, self-induced miscarriage, Alice's travels and the malignant, phallic presence of this fantasy-child, the gnome, make for a comic but potent brew, all handled with aesthetic reserve. What does lurk behind the seemly facade of the wedding photo?

Surrealist concerns also inform Merilyn Fairskye's *Sleep*, a video/sound installation comprising, according to the artist, "a voyage into the turbulent nightlife of the unconscious". On a split screen, Fairskye has juxtaposed a series of fairly readable images—waves lapping soothingly on the shore, suddenly interrupted by a shark and a flash of red, a close-up of an eye blinking as drops are inserted, a broken doll alone on a swing in a ramshackle yard—to evoke the absurd, often amusing, clash of associations in dreams. The edit is slow, the pace producing a mesmerising effect as we are seduced into tracking minor variations in each scenario. This effect is heightened by the soundtrack, which is also simple and repetitive: cloying and tuneless humming marks the rhythms of absent-mindedness, a crisp bell meters out our thoughts. While *Sleep* does not display the conceptual subtlety of some of Fairskye's other work (most notably, perhaps, *After Image* of 1995), the confluence of sound, image, installation and tempo creates a surprisingly dream-like state for the viewer to enjoy.

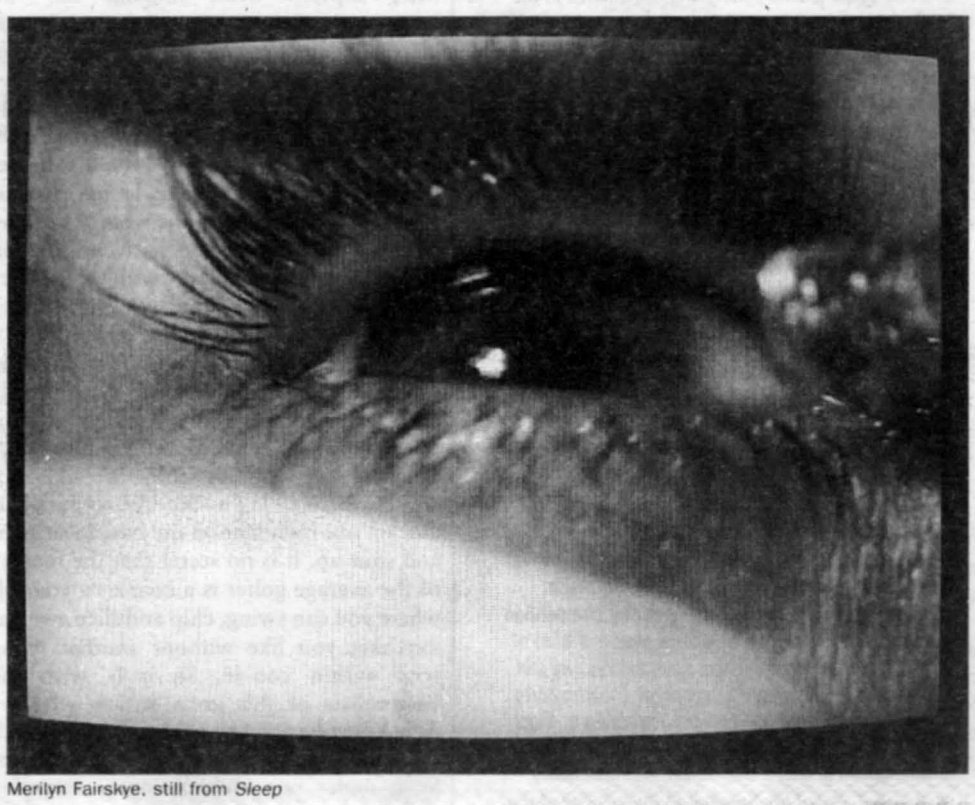
Harry Nankin's shadowgrams also emerge from a desire to give shape to the ineffable, an attempt, however impossible, to grant nature its own voice. Nankin records landscapes through the most basic of technologies, relying on the forms themselves to solarise their impressions directly on the photographic paper he pegs up in their midst. The results are large black and white works, verging on the abstract as superimpositions of trees in various tones vie with each other on the picture plane. Amongst these works, the diptych *An epochal ecology of being/Last flight of the brolga* appears to signal a departure. The organisms represented here are not plants, but animals, or animal-fragments to be more precise—wings, feathers, skeletons. These barely discernible images oscillate between dense black tones and brilliant spots which could be unadulterated sun splashes dropping through the gallery window to catch an edge below. The simplicity of the shadowgram appears to underline the primordial equivalence of life, animal, human, plant, amounting perhaps to a gentle plea from the environmentalist Nankin to respect ecological balance.

In counterdistinction to this muted and tender essay on nature hangs Emil Goh's monumental-scale digital print, *The Couple (New Australia)*. Goh has enlarged an old family snapshot, depicting his youthful Malaysian-Chinese father and a female companion on the back of a motorcycle, dwarfed by the dregs of mineral exploration in outback Australia. The low-resolution, blue-tinged colour print cannot but recall the Socialist Realist propaganda posters of Mao's China. It's all here: hoarding-style dimensions, a wholesome Asian protagonist, and the central, almost sacred role assigned to the symbols of resource bounty and industrial potential. Perhaps it is worth exploring the conflation of propaganda and personal memory, the relationship between the discourse of 'new Australians' and the cynical celebration of empty symbols. However, developing this dynamic might need further contextualisation; Goh originally exhibited this digiprint together with images of his mother, to better effect.



Pat Brassington, *Akimbo*, 1996

Some will mourn the loss of another exhibition space characterised by the warmth and 'charm' of the domestic; there is work which demands the embrace of intimate dimensions. However, Stills' new premises will undoubtedly allow for greater flexibility (not that bigger is better, of course). Given that most of the works in this show hail from the peripheries of traditional black and white photographic practice, the radical change in architecture might also allow for a diversification of the work Stills has promoted to date, an opportunity to acknowledge the impact of new media technologies on contemporary photographic practice.



Merilyn Fairskye, still from *Sleep*