What's missing from RealTime 23? You’ll find LOUD, the national youth media festival, the 1998 Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival, the Festival of Perth and the Adelaide Festival (interviews with Deborah Warner and Mark Amerika on pages 7 and 20) but you won’t see anything about the Sydney Festival, except for Eleanor Brickhill's response to Tharp! (page 36). Firstly, we have to admit to not being impressed by Leo Schofield’s programming, the majority of it looking pretty much like the stuff that shows up year round in Sydney. Secondly, as with his Melbourne Festivals (and in direct contrast to the Adelaide and Perth Festivals), Schofield is no great supporter of Australian talent, especially where it is innovative. Thirdly, and this tallies with the last point, Schofield persistently agrandizes his own festival by focussing on box office income (as morally responsible) and belittling other festivals, declaring that his festival “is not a playpen for experimentation”. Fourthly, we weren’t invited. Well, we did receive four double passes apparently picked out of a hat. Enquiring about why, for the first time in RealTime’s four years, we’d been left off the list, I was told by a festival staff member that the festival had decided not to extend passes to street papers but if we wanted any to make up a wish list and fax it in or call for daily leftovers, they’d see what they could do. Meanwhile, the press had a good time with Schofield who was allocated more page space than for any Sydney festival I can remember. David Marr was the Sydney Morning Herald festival correspondent and occasionally let fly about Schofield’s box office imperative. A full page report card (I kid you not) listed box office figures (where available) and critical responses. Despite some very tough reviews for major festival acts—Peter Hall’s An Ideal Husband, Joaquin Cortez, and Tharp!—the overall tone was, in the end, nonetheless approving. In fact, approving from the very beginning. Who wrote this SMH editorial on January 31? “A problem with festivals everywhere is that they can be caught up in over-sensational and, often, with avant garde pretentiousness. Festival directors, like second-rate lecturers, are inclined to believe that the quality of their festival is measured by its capacity to bore audiences.” The Australian, posted glowing commentaries by Bryce Hallett despite a deliciously barbed overview of the festival from theatre critic John MacCallum. We didn’t see Schofield’s festival, so we’re not going to judge it.

RealTime at the 1998 Adelaide Festival

After the success of its UK engagement at LIFT 97 (London International Festival of Theatre), RealTime returns to the Adelaide Festival, where in 1996 our festival live-in editions were initiated. This time, as with LIFT, we’re part of the official program. Every four days of the Adelaide Festival will see the printing and distribution of 2000 copies of a special edition of RealTime responding to the festival as it unfolds. Short responses, reviews, interviews and overviews will convey the feel of the festival and the pleasures and tensions of provocative productions and debate. The four editions of RealTime will be distributed to festival venues, city cafes, bookshops and galleries throughout the city and will be found on-line at http://www.realtimearts.com.au/.

Adelaide Festival Souvenir Program

Commissioned by the Adelaide Festival, RealTime editors Keith Gallasch and Virginia Baxter, with assistant editor Kirsten Krauth, have selected an international collection of articles, interviews and artist statements for the festival’s souvenir program. The collection is about the ideas and forces that drive artists, the processes of creation, the role of language in performance, the interplay of tradition and the new, and, true to a festival theme, the dialogue between the sacred and the profane. It’s a book of ideas and artists rather than a conventional introduction to festival productions and we hope it will add to the festival experience.

NSW moveable ARTS

The NSW Ministry for the Arts has collaborated with RealTime to produce a liftout detailing the work and achievements of NSW artists and companies appearing at the Australia Council’s 1998 Performing Arts Market and the 1998 Telstra Adelaide Festival. The liftout also offers a selection of other NSW artists and companies whose work is available for touring. An impressive 60 entries reveals a high percentage of work in contemporary performance and, in all forms, considerable experience in national and international touring.

Farewell and welcome

After two eventful years, goodbye to David Varga, RealTime’s first assistant editor. Thanks, David, for the energy, the dedication, the hard work and the goodwill. For whatever’s next, best wishes to you from all of us who’ve enjoyed working with you. Welcome to Kirsten Krauth, our new assistant editor who initiates her RealTime venture with an incisive and tasty report on the progress of LOUD. We hope you enjoy your stay.

Cover image: NSW performing artists and companies

(left to right)

now 1. Unofficial Brothers, De Quinny Lynch, Company B Belvoir Street, Bell Shakespeare Company, Flying Froufi Froufi Clous
no 2. Delorah Cheatham, Theatre Physical, Soderick Performance Group, Etterura, club SENT (The Performance Space)
now 3. Sydney Theatre Company, Matthew Doyle and Colin Offord, Leah Purcell, Bangarra Dance Company, Gravity Feed
now 4. The catholicis, Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre, opera Project, Chrome, Grimm Theatre Company
now 5. Theatre of Image, The Partyline, Stalker, Legs on the Wall, One Extra Dance Company

inner design by Paul Sanit

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Disposable youth culture?

Kirsten Krauth gets the munchies and tucks into LOUD, so far

Plates of hors d'oeuvres coming around at a hot summer's party: the offerings look scrumptious, little morsels of flesh, heaps of variety, both everyday and tantalising, but not substantial enough to fill your gut. A training ground for the senses—but where's the main course?

The LOUD rules state that you must be between the ages of 12 and 25.

Dry crackers with Kraft cheese and sweaty salami. Past use-by date.


The Pursuit of Happiness. The vitality of working lives for young Australians. Amway tactics. Races, with car park areas burnt down by protests. The manager, affectationally calling his troops "you fuck". The sales drive and descent into madness. Sexist tactics in marketing: how to make them work for you. So these are the employment prospects for Australian youth. The anti-thief or a slave to market forces—no wonder we have such a high suicide rate. Ineligible. Director Tim Mummery again.

Pizzas and going off... Yox pops with festival goers. No intimacy—where's Front Up? More a promo for the 'Gurge. Uttermentality with shots of crowd from behind barriers. Feral and nonconformists ignored. Get the camera in the moss pit. Indulgent. Director Online Waters and Matthew Roeke over 25.

The LOUD programming (especially on TV) shows the media giants are just not willing to risk putting cameras into the hands of under-26 year olds. Channels 9 and 7—the ratings refiners—never put their productions over 18. Above 18 and SBS were generous with screen time but often in shows that already target the youth market like Recovery and Eat Carpet. Were the submissions by younger filmmakers too daunting? Too challenging? Too raw? Weren't they meant to be? After initially offering funding to doco and film makers 25 years old, the age limit was changed the age limit to 30 (or even older). Not this defeat the purpose?

Most of the documentaries featured a "young person" but weren't made by young directors. Doesn't this defeat the purpose? With LOUD's budget and three years of planning, there was time enough to develop young people's scripts to make them workable.

Caracoci. Raw beef fillet, sliced extremely thinly with olive oil, lemon and parmesan cheese. Exotic. Sharp and easily digested.

Tangerine Dreams. Vital, pseudo-futuristic bargirl meets deadpan dude with collective in Newcastle, they are put together. Above 18 and SBS were generous with screen time but often in shows that already target the youth market like Recovery and Eat Carpet. Were the submissions by younger filmmakers too daunting? Too challenging? Too raw? Weren't they meant to be? After initially offering funding to doco and film makers 25 years old, the age limit was changed the age limit to 30 (or even older). Not this defeat the purpose?

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High performance

Mardi Gra Festival Artistic Director Jonathon Parsons describes to Keith Gallasch an expanding Australian theatre and performance component and the visit of American Holly Hughes and Nao Bustamente.

The 1998 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Graz Festival Guide, 20 Years of (Revolution), is more than a program, it’s a collector’s item, a celebration of 20 years of political, organisational and artistic development, the overcoming of odds internal and external, described with pride and relish in essays by Stephen Dunne, Alana Valentine, Bill Whitside, Frances Rand and Barbara Farrell, and Richard Cobden. Valentines often tell the truth and tentative the development of the arts project has been while Rand-February the report halting evolution of lesbian involvement in the management of Mardi Gra.

As you browse through the festival’s considerable offerings and a mass of slick, sexy advertising, sideways document 20 years of fun, violence, profit, separation, Fred Nile-doon-Moss, AIDS tragedies, Patrick White vs Oxford Street, and personal accounts of the pleasure and community realised by Mardi Gra.

And from time to time the straight reader is reminded they’re about to enter a different world with language that is distinctive (“fem top”, “bubble butt”), if sometimes predictable (“bitchy and bitter”, “extremely moving, deliciously bitchy and outrageously funny”), “explosive and tender”, “explosive, erotic and controversial”) and debatable—“gay” means what “gay” and lesbian means now “this is the blues for the Great Debate, its subject: ‘That camp was better than queers’.”

Jonathon Parsons speaks with correction and without cliché, intuitively unfolding an image of a festival that sustains a sense of community, develops new artists, allows established ones new freedoms, makes new national connections, encourages international exchange and brings unexpected nations into the Australian Gay and Lesbian ambit. He’s ambitious for the festival, at the same time new acknowledging the peculiar challenge of directing a festival with community imperatives.

“The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gra Festival’s artistic director Jonathon Parsons has a number of agendas that a Robyn Archer or a Leo Schofield doesn’t have to worry about when they program. We were a bit like a fringe festival in the early days, with not a lot of curating. But now the stakes have been lifted. After consultation with a very conservative advisory board, I make the final decision on what goes into the festival and there is an expectation now of a reasonable standard. It’s a long term project and will take a long time to be realised.

The parameters that concern Parsons’s festival, he says, “all the usual ones of running an arts festival” but also its being by and about the gay and lesbian community and its concerns. And it entails a huge range of aesthetic interests. “Last year, some thought there wasn’t enough theatre, whereas, having worked at The Performance Space, I was very happy with what I saw. However, this year sees more plays including a significant number by Australians”—something Parsons is clearly proud of. WA’s Sarah Bell has written a transny saga, Fashion Tips for the Young and Beautiful, starring talented dancer-performance James Berlin. Pianist and satirist Phil Scott (in the title role) and director Richard Wherrett have come up with Liberace—the style, the jewels, the scandal and a mountain of fun”, says the publicity. No Future Business, ranging through gay culture from pre-Stonewall days to today, was written by Dona Atela. Paul Rogers’s Bridges is about a straight father in search of the meaning of his late gay son’s life. The late Tim Conigrave’s double bill, Like Stars in My Hands (scripted by filmmaker Tony Ajrami), comes to Sydney in the burlyque production which was a sell-out success in Melbourne. Also programmed are several American plays, locally produced, and, in a special visit, the Drill Hall Theatre (London) with their production of Beryl Travis’s The Dyke and the Fantasist (“an intimate evening of nouveaux-noir-voice exploring the difference between public and private personalities”, says the festival guide).

Not surprisingly, given Parsons’s years at the Performance Space, the Australian performance component of the festival is also expanding confidently with Barrie Kosky directing diva Paul Caplin in The Baroque Tour, Numinous Dance’s combination of opera, dance and theatre in Senorita about the world of cartunists, and PACT’s Heteroscedastic.

The latter announces “This is NOT a coming out show” and examines “the experiences of exclusion and the strategies developed by Heteroscedastic (heteronormatively socially) youth for getting along in a straight world”. It’s directed by performance veterans Victoria Spence and Chris Ryan. And, of course, there’s Club BENT at The Performance Space. But first, in the same venue, a season of female performances curated by Parsons, Solo’s at the Space, including popular Club BENT regular Groove Biscuit in her first full-length solo work, The Unruly Child. The others in Solo’s... are Americans Holly Hughes and Nao Bustamente.

Parsons says that Hughes, like Andres Serrano, was made famous, in part, by the attacks on the National Endowment for the Arts by Jesse Helms, and it’s a shame she therefore feels some ambivalence about. In the conclusion to the printed text of Gê Nota, he writes, she’s performing, “...I came across an excerpt from Robert Hughes’s Culture of Complaint which asserted that Karen Finley and I represented everything that was wrong with American art today. I folded up the paper and scowled out of the coffeeshop, having reached my target heart rate without the aid of caffeine. Who would think this Robert Hughes gay anyway, and what had I ever done to him? I figured he must be a relative. That would explain it; the bulk of my work comes from my own perspective. Holly Hughes is a droll and engaging writer. Parsons feels that performance she takes herself somewhat less seriously than Karen Finley and will have a stronger rapport with Australian audiences. In Australia’s increasingly censorious moral climate, he feels that having Holly Hughes perform here and into the next into the PACT BENT wing in Sydney would allow for some important dialogue. Parsons also wants local and overseas artists to mix (something that the pace of festivals often doesn’t permit), creating possible opportunities forAustralian artists to tour internationally.

Nao Bustamente, a second generation Mexican and bisexual “burling ball of energy”, grew up in California and now lives in San Francisco. She’s performing America the Beautiful about seizing virility in the mythic model of beauty from Monroe to Baywatch. Purtan’s observer that while Hughes is in the tradition of direct confessional address to the audience, Bustamente’s work is rather theatrical, more ironic, more satirical, and dangerous: “it’s a really physical show—very funny—she performs through her body. I wanted to show another American performance tradition in the festival”.

On the music front, Stephen Sondheim’s Follies, historically more a concert in music than in performance, is being presented as a concert—with a cavalcade of Australia’s leading musical theatre stars. In some ways Follies, proposed by independent producer Alastair Thompson represents a safe choice, an almost operatic-historical four-fanke evening of star turns; but its singing and acting demands (even in concert) are considerable and should reward the same audience (attended to be at the other end of the same spectrum) who will seek out Marshall Maquie’s program of music events Transfigured Nights. In what should be one of the festival highlights, The Tale of Two Cities concert, virtuoso US pianist Anthony de Mace, singer Jane Edmiston and harpist Maguire play the words and music of Leonard Bernstein, Peggy Glazewine Hicks, Paul Bowles, Gottarde Steiner, John Cage and Tennessee Williams. De Mace’s solo concert, in which he presents company member Meredith Monk (with whom he has worked with) and Frederic Rzewski’s De Profundis, “based on Oscar Wilde’s My Friend John and Alfred Douglas”, Rzewski’s powerful, theatrical, and often politically driven works are fairly heard here. Richard’s performance of live works by American John Corigliano and Robert Magnagio (his AID’s homage Winter Tastcuit for virtual cells), and Australians Carl Vine, Gordon Kerry and Moya Henderson. Parsons comments that, “the breadth of the community allows for programming as unique as programming”.

The festival also offers a stronger than ever visual arts program that now reaches beyond the US and the UK to India and Vietnam through the works of Bhupen Khakhar (to be shown in the context of the AGNSW’s Asian Gallery) and Tran Quan Tan (A4 Gallery), both well known in Europe and about to make an impact here. Both will attend the festival. William Yang, the late Cuban-born American artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres, the Boommall Riza solo show, and Blak Babe and Kuwer Kari (Res and Brook Andrew at Garrie Weir Gallery) are part of a large visual arts program. A one night only multimedia event, Singing up stones, Lisa Anderson uses faxes, films, slides, performers and John Drummond’s sound design to reshape Circular Quay. A new media arts work at Artspac, Country Squares, an address, is web-based and site-specific installation queerifying deviance...a collaborative installation by local cyber artist Virginia Barrant and New York web queen Beth Strecker”.

The 1998 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gra is a rich and varied program, vividly performative in itself, over and above the programming of plays and performances, and one that is increasingly open, frank, and reaches out to a wide audience. But its ambitions are for its community and the arts, that the modest development fund guarantees support for the evolution of works by PACT, Caps, and Kosky, and others. The greater role the presence and influence of gay and lesbian art on the mainstream is evident, says Parsons, in the increasing number of projects supported by funding bodies like the Australia Council.

Before we part, Parsons hands me some thing he’d been reading: Holly Hughes and Nao Bustamente, and I’m taken by a San Franciscan writer seeing Bustamente for the first time: “...she was performing a Burro Alaburita routine on the straight white men in a Theatre Audience audience. She offered a sympathetic bite into her strap-on, vegan, no-chills, burrito-dildo and release their burden of guilt of 500 years of Colonialism. I thought this is just the kind of offer that might work for a Prime Minister who can’t say sorry on behalf of his nation.”

For access to all the information you need by phone or need by http://www.mardi gra.com.au

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Sarah Miller previews the 1998 Festival of Perth

At the launch of the 1998 Festival of Perth program, director David Blenkinsop had some sharp words for Perth’s city fathers regarding the parsimony and poverty of venues for live performance in ‘paradise’, as Perth is sometimes called by the native born. With a degree of wit and savage conviction, Blenkinsop struck out, noting that major theatre and dance companies had no choice but to present their work in vastly inappropriate venues. He’s right of course, but on the other hand, one of the charms of the Festival of Perth, is precisely this discovery of the most unlikely sites.

This year I’m looking forward to discovering some of Perth’s major sporting venues which seems only fair, given that the arts sponsorship dollar, has increasingly been taken over by sport! It will be interesting, for instance, to see whether the Challenge Stadium, recently the venue for the World Swimming Championships, receives the same degree of media attention when Robert Lepage’s long awaited The Seven Streams of the River Ota is presented there. Perhaps not, Robert Lepage seems unlikely to be the centre of an international drug inquiry. Dear me, no wonder the term avant-garde lacks currency these days!

I’m also very taken with the idea of the Royal Kings Park Tennis Club as the venue for a Louisiana Dance Hall night—’patrons must wear flat heeled shoes on the centre court’—and the extraordinary music of Beau Joce and the Zydeco Hi-Rollers. Zydeco, for the uninitiated, is the blues and dance music of Louisiana Creoles, the French-speaking blacks of the state’s southwest region; but artists such as Beau Joce and Keith Frank have introduced elements of rock, rap and reggae into zydeco, transforming it into a contemporary African-American dance music. If you want to dance, you’re advised to get there early to pick up the steps from a special Cajun dance instructor. Also at the tennis courts (pass on the cucumber sandwiches), will be Yulduz Usmanova, a phenomenon on the international present day scene with her particular blend of music embracing Uzbekian folk, Turkish, Persian and Central Asian influences mixed with western rock, pop and dance music.

Down in Fremantle, the Endeavour Boat Shed will house the odds on favourite for local punters: Cloudeater, presented by Black Swan Theatre in association with Belvoir’s Company B while Deckchair Theatre presents the Fremantle Prison for John Rommel’s new musical, Kate ‘n’ Shiver. Also in Fremantle, the spectacular Titanium (not the movie) will create that sinking feeling on the Esplanade utilising 30,000 litres of water and one helluva lot of pyrotechnical wizardry. Those still looking for a cucumber sandwich may get lucky at the Government House Ballroom, where The Song Company will perform Sir Malcolm Arnold’s Simmings, a seminal work in the history of vocal music. The real venue problem, however, lies less in the exotic or slightly odd venues more than in those designated performance spaces which are outdated, overly formal, relatively inflexible and expensive to run. Contemporary dance and physical theatre are not seen at their best at His Majesty’s Theatre where The Lyons Opera Ballet and Le Cercle Invisible by Jean Baptiste Thirere and Victoria Chaplin will be presented. The Regal Theatre is hosting not only Les Ballets C de la B/Mexico Ltd but, even more strangely, Acrobate, touted as “circus for the attention deficit generation”. The Regal is a commercial theatre known as the one place where those most reluctant of patrons—the husbands of women who love the arts—aren’t afraid to go. The very formal environs of the Perth Concert Hall present some interesting challenges with a production of Carmen, Le Chatelet de Seville, that features “magnificent white stallions” and “a 30 strong authentic Andalusian drum and bagpipe band”. It will hard to refrain from a degree of puritan curiosity about the problem of horse poo in such an environment.

Winthrop Hall at the University of WA, having been air conditioned at great expense, should provide fewer problems for musicians and their audiences, who last year nearly expired in the 40 something degree heat. The problem this year, given the weakness of the Australian dollar, may mean these visiting artists simply expect from exhaustion. Given the price of purchasing European and American airfare, walking to Australia may be their only option. Such a pilgrimage should, however, lend a certain authenticity to the bus route.

Sometimes, the sun does seem to be taking a rather longer time than anticipated to set over the empire, a sensation perhaps exacerbated by outgoing Festival Director, David Blenkinsop’s recent CBE for services to British culture—kind of weird given he’s been running an Australian Festival for 21 years! There is no doubt, however, that Blenkinsop’s commitment to a multi-disciplinary, international Festival of the Arts has made the Festival of Perth one of the most important and substantial events of its kind in the southern hemisphere. Blenkinsop will no doubt continue to utilise the strength of his position as the retiring director (he still has another festival to go) to continue to harangue the city fathers—hopefully over a range of issues—but when it comes to venues, his criteria will be looking out for, is the one in which they announce the new Festival Director, set to take over the reins in the year 2000.


Lepage talks

Robert Lepage, Connecting Flights, Le Page in conversation with Rimé Charron Methuen, London 1997 198pp $29.95

For Adelaide and Perth festival-goers wanting to add to their knowledge of the innovative French Canadian director (The Seven Streams of the River Ota), this accessible volume has Lepage reflecting on his stage works and filmmaking, after director, the peculiar evolution of his works (including his solo film where with the aid of new technology he plays all the roles), and, in a witty chapter called “Glossary”, he muses over the cultural shifts he has to make as his work takes him from country to country, from actor to schauspieler to player, from audience to spectators, from director to metteur en scene to regisseur, and, in Japan, to different notions of shokugyo and jujitsu, east thought.
The power of found spaces

Alexs Sierz interviews Deborah Warner director of TS Eliot's The Waste Land for the 1998 Adelaide Festival

Extremists come in all shapes and sizes. Best known in Europe for her work on Shakespeare and the classics, director Deborah Warner is also passionately interested in experimenting, using found spaces to extend the language of theatre: "Theatre is dead the moment we recognise it." "The Waste Land" is another strike at that. "It's a very different entity," says Warner. "I've always been interested in experiment using found space. There's no time to lose. Theatre is still an endangered species."

Warner's next project for LIFT 1999 will develop this success. "What I want to do is to take a large group of people on an epic journey by bus, hopefully during the night." This was partly inspired by a chance event in Dublin, when the first preview of "The Waste Land" was cancelled at short notice. "The audience arrived in buses and, because there was no show, the drivers started reading them bits of the poem."

While The Waste Land is "an experiment with using poetry as text and space as experience," Warner feels that "theatre has somewhat exhausted its present, conventional form. What I would really like would be to get a play through the post and be able to say about its form: 'Hold on, is that really a play?' Until this happens, audiences can explore the 'unreal city' in Eliot's evocative company.


Alexs Sierz is theatre critic for the London Tribune.

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Decision without Vision?

Mary Travers looks at the consequences and the implications of new funding strategies in the Australia Council for theatre

At least 10 theatre companies have lost Australia Council funding for 1998, five in South Australia. A few companies have less money, and the Council’s new annual grants policy means more companies will be cut, later this year. Australian theatre could be described as in a state of crisis, with visionless arts bureaucracies failing to come to terms with the state of the art.

In South Australia, Junction, the community theatre, considers its future without Council money, the Caroussel Puppet Theatre is closing, Corkids, a participatory children’s circus, will battle on with State support. A question mark hangs over Red Shed and Maggie 2. Arts SA (the State Arts Department) is considering a recommendation that the two could merge, although this also depends on the companies’ views. Maggie, a wing of the State Theatre of SA, repositioned itself as a theatre for 18 to 25 year olds, after two decades of performing for school aged children and teenagers. (Murray Bramwell, “A future for a blown youth”, page 9)

The gravity of the Council’s decisions became clear in January when I phoned an officer at Arts SA to find out what was happening. A few hours later, no less than the Director of Arts SA, Tim O’Loughlin, called me back. While the SA government is the major sponsor of all of the companies in question, he said what state governments usually say, “We are not prepared to plug the gaps left by the Australia Council”.

Polyglot Puppets in Melbourne, the Canberra Youth Theatre, Zozanto in Hobart, Theatre South and the Q Theatre in NSW, have also been cut. Five regional companies in NSW have slid off the Council’s list in the past few years, leaving the Riverina Theatre Company in Wagga Wagga and Hothouse Theatre in Albury. The NSW government is supporting a new company to replace the Q and the old New England based companies. Those listed here as cut are long term regular grant recipients, but there are also others missing from the list who had a grant the previous two years, some further back. Although the Coalition government cuts in 1996 have not helped, the reasons for the cuts are less clear as they go back further. For years the Council has stated it cannot keep taking on companies reliant on surpluses from previous grants, and the cutbacks have gradually emerged and more and more. Last year the Council did two things. It limited the grossly overpaid for the arts support of organisations to 45 per cent of an organisation’s budget. And it established triennial grants.

The Theatre Fund offered 10 companies triennial grants, starting in 1998. Twenty-six others were awarded a grant for one year—although there is no policy for this. The triennial grants total 20 per cent of theatre grants available for the year, but add the one year grants and annual funding is 58 per cent of the budget of the Theatre Fund. Presumably a few more companies will drop off next year, as the Fund works downwards to its 45 per cent ceiling.

The Fund seems to have suffered a decision-making block by offering 20 per cent, not the possible 45 per cent of its funds in triennial grants, removing the possibility for more companies to forward plan. One officer said it was so they can be flexible and perhaps offer it to other companies next year. Do they think a new company will emerge over the next few months so that it is extraordinary a three year grant will materialise? Hardly. Are they waiting for some of the companies to become better organised? All but four on the current list existed in 1986. Why, for example, are companies such as Skylark, Handspan and Leg on the Wall good enough to get grants for overseas touring (last year), but not to get triennial funding? The Fund simply decides making the hard but inevitable decisions.

More questionable is how the decisions were made. The SA member of the Theatre Fund is based in Mt Gambier, four hours drive from Adelaide. The Council has no presence in Adelaide, since staff ceased regular visits to companies, and the decision-making part-time members stopped crossing the nation to see the work. They say they can’t afford to travel, preferring to limit the administration budget and maximise the money available for grants. It seems the monotonous decision to cut five companies was based on written reports, and one assessor from Adelaide sitting in on the grants meeting. “I would like to see Australia Council staff and panel members in Adelaide more often”, emphasised O’Loughlin. This is obviously a very sore point.

The Council’s Major Organisations Fund also supports eight drama companies and Circus Oz. On the surface, 40 subsidised companies, including the MOF companies, sounds a good number. That is, until you divide this between circus, drama, visual and physical theatre, puppetry, youth theatre, children’s theatre, across states and territories. Also, suppose realise that many of the 1990s companies produce only two or three shows a year, and few have full-time performers on staff, a situation vastly different from the 1980s. In 1986, for example, there were 48 annual grant companies, most presenting works all year. If flawed, behind the funding decisions there was a structural vision for theatre in Australia. For example,

that the state theatre companies needed alternative companies as a source of creative frisson, hence companies such as Troupe and the Pram Factory were supported. Sometimes the Council supported state government initiatives, for regional theatres in NSW, or professional companies working with communities in Metro Australia. There was also a commitment to children’s theatre (building audiences for the future). The new visual and physical theatre companies that struggled along on project grants, and gradually gained regular grants, adequate to keep a company afloat. For example, if Caroussel, founded by Polish trained puppeteers, has a good enough record, why lose the only example of that art-form in the State? Also, how well can the one remaining children’s company, Patch Theatre, serve the children of South Australia. In a period of declining subsidy, can SA afford more than one “alternative” to the State Theatre? Doppio Teatro has produced some of the most interesting ‘alternative’ theatre in the country, starting from an Italo-Australian perspective and determined to explore the new multimedia possibilities. Can the state government adequately fund a merged Maggie 2 and Red Shed? Would it be better to support the base of Doppio? These are hard questions in hard times, but are they being asked?

Without a drive to get companies, beyond the so-called major organisations, to an adequate financial base, none can become a near household name, nor can their principal creative artist(s). Face it, after Robin Nevin, Neil Arnfield, and Barry Kosky, who else have you heard is hot in theatre. But this is drama, and there is far more to theatre than that. Yet without resources, small companies will always be marketing badly and uphill. Would fewer companies, better funded, end up in better work? Merry, Th. The levels of some company budgets has obviously diluted both the standards and the expectations of standards.

At the big end, companies such as the Sydney Theatre Company earn over 80 per cent of their income, and have to charge over $100 a ticket. They are out of reach of the majority of citizens. Is this right for taxpayer subsidised theatre?

Exceptional occasions to this gloomy picture do exist. The Sydney Opera House season of The Hobbit was a sell out for Company Skylark. It is almost unheard of, for a company on $100,000 annual subsidy, to rent such an expenses venue, and tour 10 performers. The puppet company, from the ACT, forged business partnerships for this show. The big sets and lavish production values complete the high quality if conventional show, and the audience loved it.

The Council strongly encourages this kind of enterprise, but it simply won’t work for all kinds of theatre. Such sporadic achievements will not build a solid core of Australian theatre conditions. Even the States stretch their budgets a little further, without a clearly developed artistic vision by the funding bodies, one thing seems certain. We are heading for fewer companies, no better funded.
A future or a blown youth?

Murray Bramwell on the fate of Benedict Andrews' Magpie 2

It was only in July last year that I reported in these columns the arrival of a new funded company in Adelaide. Well, it was not so much a new company as a makeover of an existing operation. In an effort to rescue the long-term subscriber base for State Theatre, then Executive Producer Chris Westwood grasped the nettle and changed the charter for Maggie, the government's State's operation, which had run almost as long as the parent company itself.

As it happened, Features opened in Adelaide's Queens Theatre only a few months after its Melbourne debut. Performed only weeks after Mark Ravenhill's Shopping and Fucking toured, the local work—with its narrative based around a group of singles living, and partly living, in a run-down tenement—compared strongly. Some themes—like the systematic abuse and exploitation of the vulnerable young are even more graphically displayed in Cortese's play. Performed in Justin Kurzel's dizzyingly high doll-house-like set we peer into the besieged lives of Dove (Valerie Berry), Rot (Jed Kurzel), Isabella (Elena Carapetis),

group they are largely hostile to theatre, unless they or their friends are in it. And, generally, they are tribal, atavistic, volatile and justly suspicious of most of the usual attempts at niche marketing. So, for newly appointed Artistic Director, Benedict Andrews the Maggie job, if not a poisoned chalice, was certainly what the sports writers like to call a Big Ask.

Remarkably, with only two productions slated for the year, Andrews came very close to making his mark. Opening with Future Tense back in May last year he brought together a double bill—Mercedes by German writer Thomas Brauch and In the Solitude of the Cotton Fields, a densely poetic dialogue by French writer Bernard-Marie Coltes. It was accomplished, bold work, well-performed with assured direction from Andrews and memorable design work from Imogen Thomas.

In December Benedict Andrews capped the year with Features of Blown Youth from the gifted Melbourne-based writer Raimondo Cortese. Having read his earlier work Larceny, the director had contacted the writer in 1996 when there were plans about for Andrews to work with the Red Shed collective. Then, when his appointment to Maggie was announced, the hunt was on for new, gritty and local work. Cortese and his new venture into naturalism, Features of Blown Youth, was just what the director ordered.

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Oron (Richard Kelly)—among others—as they are preyed upon by the sinister new landlord, Strawberry—played with eerie energy by Syd Brisbane.

Features played for two weeks drawing late season houses that suggest a third would have sold out. As usual, combining performances with rave nights run by leading techno wizards Dirty House, Benedict Andrews believes his ventures were succeeding in creating a new and increasing loyal following—many of whom had never been to the theatre before. Unfortunately, in that night of the Australia Council long knife late last year, Maggie, along with veteran playwright Daniel Keene. And hope persists that a four work season might still eventuate in 1998.

But it won't be called Magpie 2, which despite a fine brace of productions has been permanently grounded. State Theatre, under new Artistic Director Rodney Fisher has other ideas about programming and that is fair enough—the flagship has a big job this year just keeping itself afloat. But Adelaide can't afford to lose the likes of Andrews and Maddock—or the circle of dedicated artists they continue to attract. It is in everybody's interest that a revitalised third force emerges—and quickly.

Daniel Keene's The Architect's Walk, Red Shed production, Telstra Adelaide Festival, The Arts Theatre, February 26-28, April 8, March 1, 3, 8, 10, at 6pm; March 4-7, 11-13 at 8pm.
The performing contraption

Don Mamouney interviews Joey Ruigrok Van der Werven

DM Before settling in Australia you spent quite some time working as a core member of the Dutch company Dogtroep. Can you tell us something about Dogtroep?

JR The company is based in Amsterdam but it performs all over the world. They mostly make outdoor, site-specific work, inspired by the site and the country they are in. The 10 core members and 30 freelancers are sculptors, musicians, visual artists, technicians, actors and movers. In principle each member comes up with ideas for a scene, makes the props or machines and puts it into a little performance which is then shown to the rest. Gradually over three or four weeks these scenes grow towards each other and with the aid of the director into a show. The result is a highly visual, poetic, and musical spectacle. Stories are often taken from everyday life. Most people are touched and can find something in it for themselves. The size of audiences can vary between 40 and 4000.

DM You have only been in Australia for a very short time and already your skills are in great demand. What projects have you accomplished since you arrived?

JR I worked for last year’s Sydney Festival on Ned Kelly as a consultant/builders. For Leg’s on the Wall, I designed and built the set for their new show Under the Influence where I taught a 3-day workshop called "The Contraption in Performance". My main work though is with Stalker as a core-member. I created special effects for their show Man and Ash showed up as a member of the production team. For Stalker’s current project, Blood Vessel, I made the construction design and built the set (with others). It is really an acrobatic rig which images an old sailing ship. During the creative development period I created and rigged test machines on which the performers were able to explore the creative, technical and movement possibilities. This work was then used to design the final set and the story.

DM Your contraptions in performance workshop at Contemporary Performance Week attracted a lot of interest from an amazing range of artists and technicians. It was easily the most popular in a very strong field of other offerings. Why do you think this was so?

JR I cannot really answer this. Apparently there is a big interest in uniting sculptures for and within theatrical events. A lot of people want to make theatre with objects and machines because they feel they can communicate something important or amusing with a well chosen fantastic contraption—more so than with words for instance. It is a highly fascinating theatrical form, because it uses images, visuals, touch, even smell within a narrative event... a show.

I was happily surprised when people responded so enthusiastically at the workshop because at that stage I had met many people in Australia who made this kind of theatre. Actually there are quite a few... Splinters in Canberra, Snuff Puppets in Melbourne, Neil Cameron with his fire events, Tryclops in Sydney. There may even be more and, if so, I really hope to meet them.

DM It would seem that your work with objects and machines far exceeds their capacity to be categorized as simply set design or stage properties. In many ways they use with the human element and in some cases even dominate the action. What is the thinking behind this?

JR I wouldn’t say that my machines are in competition with the performers, or that they make them insignificant. Machines may sometimes dominate but it is not the aim. I use them because that is where my passion is. That’s how I tell my stories. I just love how objects, sculptures, machines, buildings etc, through their visuality are able to speak to us and I aim to find and use such language for artistic and dramaturgical purposes.

I try to give props, technicals and set a very important role in a performance. I try to bring them alive, in a way that is equal to the performers, to make them function in a way that they tell part of the story and effect the emotions of the audience, maybe even to become their heroes. At the very least the integration between props, set, performer, action and story can be strengthened.

Most often machines seem clear and straightforward in their function and reason for existence. Two machines why do the same thing can look very different though. We humans give them something else on top of their first function, that they make them in images of how we shape and use them. This mix of clarity of purpose and underlying meaning is very important. It is possible to tell a clear story but leave room for all sort of other meanings and emotions. The beautiful thing for me now is that somehow using machines in performance gives the audience a lot of space to have their own associations, emotions and interpretations.

DM I wonder if there is a kind of comic nostalgia at play in some of the object-based performances that have been delighting festival audiences here recently? I’m thinking of Royale Deluxe and Semola with Hybrid in particular, both of which employ gross and overtly mechanical devices to great theatrical effect.

JR Nostalgia probably yes. Comic I don’t know. In a way it is funny that I now love the shape of some cars which I hated five years ago. Our tastes change over time and because of what is available to us. Why do we love old steam locomotives and not so much the new electrical ones? Or the typewriter above a computer? I think it is a highly serious matter that we seem to enjoy simple machines, that our imagination can take flight when we see an old cane basket, for example. The other day I saw a father struggling to get a baby’s pusher down some steps at Bronte beach. He said, “If only I had some bungy I could make springs in the trolley and jump it a few steps at a time!” Machines, contraptions, props, sculptures and whole sets can make a fantasy actual. Shapes and forms can be endless, changes in time and place can be very sudden without dramaturgical difficulty. It is possible to evoke a wish for freedom of imagination, to break free from the boundaries of the conventional.
Brilliant Bunraku business
Suzanne Spunner encounters a Japanese-Australian hybrid at Playbox

Love Suicides is unquestionably an ambitious and complex work which arises from playwright John Romeril's mastery of visual and dialectical theatre and his deep immersion in Japanese theatre culture. Romeril is both a quintessentially Australian writer and the first local playwright (and still one of the very few) to have undertaken an Australian-Japanese relationship. In The Floating World (1974), Les, the Australian POW, and his good wife Irene were so Australian you winced in recognition, while the Japanese they encountered on their Cherry Blossom Cruise was nothing but a bad dream, located in Les' nightmare.

Love Suicides is set in boom town late 80th Perth, but the Japanese characters and the creative forces behind their being in their memories are almost more real than the Australia they visit. Romeril is so inside Japan and the female principle that Australia and the male are swamped and lost, receding into a dream.

The difficulty is in believing that Mark Paris, the Australian businessman, is a businessman let alone a major player. Much has been made of the connection with the artifices and Members of the Oacka of the 80s but in Paris we don't have Skase or Bond or Connell but a man with the sensibility and anger of a Bellelette artist and a sense of shame worthy of a Samurai—qualities notably lacking in the Australian high flyers and many Japanese businessmen today. Paris is frankly unbelievable, there is no sense he could call a deal anywhere.

Love Suicides is a homage to the Osaka playwright, Chikamatsu (1653-1725), dubbed the Shakespeare of Japan, who wrote in the genre of the double-suicide play for the emerging Bunraku puppet theatre. Bunraku makes the puppeteer a visible actor in the drama and creates a dramatic interplay between puppet and puppeteer.

In Love Suicides, the suicides are Paris, who is bankrupt and facing criminal charges, deserted by his wife and children and pursued by demons and creditors, and Ohatsu, a young Japanese woman educated and Westernised in outlook who is about to be married by arrangement and feels completely boxed in by her traditional parents. They met briefly in Osaka some years before when Paris was an international dealmaker, and she was the schoolgirl daughter of his business partner. They met again in Paris and Ohatsu realises that lacking a future, they share a desire to escape the present.

Paris' flimflam, however, creates an imbalance in the psychology and poetics of the play, but the Japanese women are marvellous. The play belongs to Ohatsu who is present as an actor, as a puppet, and by extension as a puppeteer (Peter Wilson from Skylark). Ohatsu in turn animates through memory and recollection the Cinderella story of her dead friend Keiko whom we never see except as a manifestation of a male artist and a sense of otherness. Keiko's absence is vivid and potent.

As Ohatsu, Asako Iwawa, a recent WAPA (West Australian Academy of the Performing Arts) graduate, was outstanding. She managed to be what we imagine a modern Japanese woman is, a steel camellia, and yet utterly particular and convincing as a woman of her class and culture. She carried the tragic weight and was the dramatic pivot of the action in the play and she stood out against the strong performances by the other two women—the narrator, the fantastically versatile Miki Oikawa and the superb Butch dancers, Yumi Umiumare.

The triangularity of the main characters—Mark and Ohatsu as actor/puppet/puppeteer would have been better realised if Mark's puppeteer had been a woman as was originally intended when Spare Parts' Noriko Nishimoto was involved. The multiplicity of relationships and plays on doubling needed that additional gender inversion.

The ripping reality of character in motion is stunningly and subtly realised in the exchange between the animete and the inanimate—the actor as opposed to the puppet as puppet and actor and in, some scenes, the puppets appearing to manipulate the actors as if they were puppets.

The music was a fusion of Western and Eastern, with a feel of the modern musical à la Sondheim interspersed with traditional Japanese music played on a koto. Its depth was revealed best in the lyric interpretations by Asako Iwawa who gave the songs a Brechtian edge in her self-consciously Japanese accent which led to odd and interesting stresses in the English words.

The writing has an authentic flavour to it, there is a coarseness and immediacy in the sexual scenes that refers to a Japanese erotic and a crassness in some of the lyrics, puns and jokes making it often feel like we are hearing a work that has been translated from Japanese into English. As a whole, it is overwritten in the detail and would benefit from some close editing, metaphors and similes tend to come in triplets when doublets would do, however there is no scene, element, or character that is superfluous.

Love Suicides is an important new Australian play from a writer who continues to set benchmarks for both the ideas addressed and the forms essayed in theatre.

Love Suicides, written by John Romeril; directed by Bruce Mydes; puppetry director Peter Wilson; designer Richard Jesoryor; lighting designer Philip Leblanc; composer Peter Neville; The Malthouse Playbox, Melbourne, November 12 - December 6, 1997

Circus in the ascendancy
Suzanne Spunner in awe of the Women's Circus' 'Pope Joan'

The Women's Circus began in Melbourne in the late 1980s, in the brainchild of Donna Jackson, and was renowned as much for its wit and spectacle as its militant feminist social agenda. Since its founding in 1987, the Women's Circus, now with an appointed artistic director and Pope Joan is her first full scale production. Jackson by all accounts was a hard act to follow but Bathurst has stepped boldly and led the Women's Circus into new territory.

Cathcart made her reputation as an innovative performer/mooter of Mysas, so it is interesting to see how she deals with the mass, and there are masses of women. The circus induced 40 new women into its fold this year and there were more than 50 including musicians on stage in Pope Joan, and as many again offstage.

The story of Pope Joan, possibly the first and certainly the only woman pope, is intertwined with the stories of Joan of Arc and numerous witches in an Herstoria interleaved with first person stories from women in the circus about their own experiences of nun, in schools and convents. There is no dialogue, only an intercutting of live monologues in which individual stories become the pivot for the circus. The emphasis is on the movement sequences performed by the group and, from time to time, individual women. The piece is fluidly and deeply becomes a particular character.

It mixes the grandly mythical and contemporary with the oral and urban trials of girlhood under the influence of powerful and intriguing women. And you are as often reminded of Madeline and the girls in two straight lines, or the温馨提示s of Erich Thake, as you are of the Salem witch hunts.

In Pope Joan, Cathcart was interested in "exploring physical composition-combining circus skills with an understanding of space, rhythm, form, performance skills and dance movements. So she worked with choreographer Beth Shelton and with Anni Davye and Christina Branton to create the Andromeda.

Shelton is an accomplished choreographer and one of the things she is particularly brilliant at doing is getting large numbers of people moving in interesting ways in big arenas, without your even being aware that it's choreography. It all seems to happen so naturally as one sequence flows seamlessly into another, but it's always changing and it's always perfectly judged, it just looks serendipitous.

The aerial work is what makes it circus, and it so easily crosses over into dance with ropes and trapezes. Some beautiful things were done with slack ropes and the women who were all garbed as nun and you saw it as ringing and pealing churbells. Later things got tighter and tauter and the ropes became slip knocs and nooses as the witches were strung up by their naked feet and swung there in front of us, like animals, live gane hung to season the hunt, and we were the villagers who'd come to watch the show.

However the piece de oeuvres was superbly fittedly, the sequence depicting the ascendency of Pope Joan herself. She rose on the backs of all those horrible, nameless, undifferentiated women from whom she came. She literally walked all over them, as they prostrated themselves before her. A long line of women is stretched diagonally across the space. She begins her procession, walking on their flattened backs, but as she goes further they rise up and square with a campanile in the distance.

The lighting design by Eberpi Soropou is exquisitely simple and utterly powerful with a sense of sharp European sunlight painting deep, long shadows. The music under the direction of Kim Benton combined polyphonic harmonies of hymns and Latin chants with contemporary pops in a rich and vibrant blend of missed voices and an underscore played on an eclectic range of instruments.

The audience response was amazing—I did not go up to the opening but on what I presumed was an average night in the second week, it was packed to the rafters and at the end they stamped and whooped like a foamy crowd in the bleachers. Clearly the message is getting out; everyone wants to see ordinary women doing extraordinary things.

Women's Circus, Pope Joan, Old Police Garage, Russell Street, Melbourne, November 20 - December 6

Malinché's Fire
a magic realist play about latinas, love and myths
showing at Belvoir St Downstairs Theatre March 4-8
Fairfield School of Arts March 14-15
not to be missed?

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The line of fire

A new latino performance in Sydney

The flame ignites in the story of la Malinche based on the life of a Mexican-Indian princess whose mother sacrifices her to slavery so her brother can be king. Later she will be handed over to the conquistador Cortez as a gift. To survive she will learn Spanish and become his indispensable translator, then his mistress. Fatally, she will fall in love with him and warn him when the Indians plan an attack. For this, her own tribe will call her traitor. La Malinche (prostitute). Cortez will marry a white woman and la Malinche will die stone and neglected, another symbol of the treacherous woman.

Later, La Malinche will be taken up as a more positive symbol by latino feminists. In Sydney’s west, Rosalma Miza, Maggie Escartín, Miriam Marquez and Beatriz Copello in collaboration with the Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre and Luci’s Off West Side Women’s Refuge set up The Malinche Project to bring together latino women for drama and movement workshops. Joanne Lewis, a singer with strong connections to the Latino community leads the music sessions. For 4 latino women, meditation on the spirit of Malinche fires strong emotions, shedding light on their own lives in Australia. Their stories are woven into words by poet Rosararela Meza, Miriam Marquez, Zulema Cappielli and Carmen Salines, director Gail Kelly, composer Lea Collins, choreographer Liliana Correa and designer Julia Christie. RT

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Writing the ineffable

Currency Press and RealTime announce the first anthology of Australian performance, Performing the Unnameable

Performance does not lend itself easily to documentation. Works in which movement, sound, music, projections and digital media combine and where the word plays a secondary role, or no role at all, are not easily scripted, except as a descriptive act after the event, side by side with an often unacknowledging archival video. Of course, these works might exist initially as scripts but quite unlike any playscripts that you have ever read. They might read as set of possibilities, actions, a list of instructions with occasional passages of provisional text. There are those who believe that performance scripts, in whatever shape, are so inadequate in evoking the actual performance as to be useless. There are those too who believe performance simply transcends the word. So why bother to collect performance scripts? Because there’s some great writing in them, because they suggest to other performers ways of working, because they inventively document (rather than forget) significant performances, and because they reveal writers, writer-directors, writer-performers to have played a significant, if often ignored role, in the development of Australian performance.

Many performance works don’t start from the writer, the writer is one of a number of collaborators, contributing as required by the evolving work and his or her input with other collaborators. On the other hand, a performance script can in some cases read like a playscript, albeit an unusual one, where a writer (often a writer-director) initiates a production. One way or another, the ideal performance script combines elements of the original set of ideas with descriptive documentation of the finished performance. Performing the Unnameable is a significant first—the first anthology of performance texts created by Australian performers, performance companies and writers. It will be published this year by Currency Press Australia’s Performing Arts Publisher, in association with RealTime. The book’s timely arrival coincides with the growing study of performance in tertiary education and the programmeing of Australian performances in major arts festivals here and overseas. More than 20 performances from over the last 20 years are included in a large format book, with photographs and introductions to each text. In addition to scripts, Performing the Unnameable includes artists’ observations about their works, and about how words work in relation to other media in performance.

The combination of scripts, artists’ statements and photographs, and the consequent interplay of theory and practice, along with the sheer range of innovative writing make Performing the Unnameable a unique and much needed resource for the practitioners, teachers, students and audiences of Australian performance. Besides, it’ll be a great read.

Editors Richard James Allen and Karen Pearman’s great labour of love. Performing the Unnameable, pays tribute to the largely undocumented work of a generation of artists working across the boundaries of theatre, performance, performance art and new media. The anthology includes contributions from The Sydney Front, Open City, Jenny Kemp, Lyndal Jones, Sidetrack Performance Group, Richard Murphy, Margaret Cameron, Josephine Wilson, Llogs on the Wall, Ent’Arts and many others. Date of publication to be announced. KG

Enquiries: Currency Press, PO Box 2597, Strawberry Hills, NSW 2012, Australia; Tel 61 2 9219 5677 Fax 61 2 9219 3469 currency@magma.com.au
Trackwork: a performance event on a train

Photographer Heidrun Löhrtakes the trip with Virginia Baxter →

Dance in the guard's compartment naked with a blue light. Plain dots and unformedlicepatethe train. (Defacement poem) → Waiting for the performance at Redfern station, a guard delivers a monologue to a woman who never replies. Starting on waste of public money he gradually leads into a dystopia for Pauline Hanson. When he moves to the other side of the track, she turns to me and says, "Why me?" A bride trails her dress along the grisy tarmac. → The cabin crew introduce themselves. "Passengers are instructed that the carriage fall on its side, regulations restricting the placement of feet on seats will be temporarily relaxed". They take our imaginary food orders. → Lidcombe station. Watched by Western Suburbs Elderly Asians support group, Mr Thao Chau in blue satin suit performs a sword dance to boarding passengers while Terry Woo in silver lamé cromm Begin the Regrets on the stairs. Opposite, two ballroom dancers do their best to glide on asphalt. At the other end of the platform the amplified North African rhythms of Ali Baha and the Forty Thieves. And all the time the passage of trains interrupts sight and sound. → The things you see. The diva of Beralia, Hilary Oliver, singing from Don Giovanni with walkman accompaniment. Four, five, six brides dumped onto the road from their wedding cars, weeping on the pavement. Some cars drive past without registering. → A junkie collapses onto the seat with her legs dangling over the side, her head on another passenger's lap. Just when we're wondering if she's part of the show she doches off. Eyes everywhere. → On the journey to Geelong, we're entertained by songs from the cabin crew—a Cambodian song of longing, and Barbra and Lily Solita sing a song from Suva. A man in the seat opposite

mouthes the words. Your mind drifts to the organisers who have had to negotiate the regulations of SRA and presumably a raft of other state authorities to allow the performers this small intrusion into public space. → We leave the train. Citymoon Youth Theatre performs a traditional Vietnamese folk tale of ritual marriage. A couple of hooves fall out of the Cabramatta Inn and angrily circle the audience. → In an anecdote to the diatribe at Redfern, at Granville—scene of the 1977 bridge disaster—rappers take on more recent calamities shouting "Pauline Hanson Sus". → Gravity Feed advance and retreat from the yellow safety line with sheets covering their faces. Definitely a case for letting performers indulge your fantasies for you. On the other side of the platform, a graffiti artist completes his canvas cryptogram with the caption "Don't be scared of our art". In the waiting room, an exhibition of paintings and a small poem inspired by a sleeping passenger. → Trackwork, 50 performers, five trains, six stations was created by Urban Theatre Projects in western Sydney, November 29-30, December 6-7
The joys of the writing class

Terri-ann White contributes to RealTime's occasional series on the teaching of writing

1

I should I risk reading you an invented voice: that of my great-grandfather in the Fremantle Lunatic Asylum in 1874, written by me? New and still raw writing.

"can I get once a master assistant pressing down on me every night telling me over and over and hour after hour and never thought such things before killing and pulling it apart it is the world and he wants me to do it be his servant do it for him be meek scared up to the top of this hill looking down on fremantle that busy town full of hastards my children"

well well here we are and you aren't safe there's a lion in here for the ladies and a big steel trap for the men a bucket of mangled anyone left will roar through after the disease has and there's a lion in here for the ladies

2

I'm caught between these two pleasures: the joys of my four-two hour writing classes each with a different group of students that stay on hold—never properly activated—of writing a book that I have been 'making' now for three years. In the other side of other occupations I have followed there was more clear time to get on with learning about fiction writing and more time to do it. In this job, which I am pleased to be in, I find difficulty in enabling my own work to move ahead. I don't come from an academic background—I hadn't tried this full-time teaching caper before until I started at the University of Western Australia at the beginning of 1996, so I don't have the experience of knowing how to say no. Or knowing what is a reasonable balance: teaching, research, pastoral care, the knockabout days. All that stern intention and serious balance: teaching research and believing body, and suddenly, there it is.

3

3 - I fall open with happiness. David Mowaljarlai

Mystery and Manners. There are plenty of intangibles embedded in this marriage: creative writing in a critical site, the assumption of a different register of work. (Which is such rubbish anyway—what's the difference when it's done well?) The common and everyday passions. I'm not interested in it now. In the other side of the brain, though, or anything else about finding the voice within. This, for me, is about shaping the world, and your voice through that. Being alive to it all.

4

Alison and Jane (not their real names) both come to me in week five of semester for advice or reassurance. They feel that they have become completely submerged in an obsession. And it is quite unexpected. They haven't ever felt this obsession although they have both certainly been in the thrall of love or mothering, didn't know that the commitment they wanted to the thrall of love or mothering), didn't

5

The writing you don't like: of course there will be writing that bores the life out of you. There is boring writing all over the bloody place, everywhere, and most of these students have never even tried to write a grown-up story. But the beauty of attempting to write a story alongside reading texts in other parts of their program of study is the recognition of all that is required to hold together those disparate threads, the needs and the elements of telling a story. And how you might read work written right now, almost on the spot.

6

I am affected and influenced by the voices that move around the writing class. For example, when I first started teaching I didn't think I could make declarations of our reading practices and obsessions, why we are here; to the second week when we all bring in our selection of favourite writing by someone else. It is hardly ever a flat or embarrassed utterance even with shy and lumbering adolescents. Mostly they light up when they read a page of something that has stayed with them since reading a means to read something to them. Of the tricks and pieces of advice are just there to start and then keep the juices going; to inspire the young writer by example. To try to offer, a range of ways to do things with, words, to make a story live, to discover something about something. To do a mysterious little dance. And to do it in a rather more communal context than usual.

7

I'm sharing all of my passions with these current students, as I do every semester, not sure about the limits of sharing, what I should hold back for my own pleasure, whether this will more than my favourite things, the work I love, will ever become depleted, whether it will wear down. Am I giving too much of myself? Only time will tell if my enduring passion remain intact that, it appear ro me, is the benefit of doing the work of a writer alongside reading theories of our reading practices and the referents offered through blood.

8

I have taken on other responsibilities: running a special Honours course of my making, handling Schools and Publicity in-teams for my department, writing various things for student publications, looking after our Writing-in-Residence program for twelve weeks. And I've probably written only, maybe 15 thousand words of this novel in two years (I haven't properly counted) in the province of it still as loose as anything. But if I could suspend that anxiety and admit to the still a year's thinking ground for voices that classes with first, second and third year students, some of whom will never write 'creatively' anymore and some who will be published, I should feel pleased that I am given access to knowledges and a dynamic that isn't possible just inside my head. As well as this, of course, is the need to re-acquaint myself with those materials that get me going: writing theory and method, and how I know that class, use it as a multiple launching pad for asking that question about why writing is important. And think about it as I grapple with my expression, my ordering of things.

9

I have to answer the power of the words on the Certificate of Lunacy of Theodore Krakouer, my grandson's grandfather, signed by HC Barnett in 1873. Theodore was suffering from delusions, was in a state of delusional excitement, and told the doctor that he bears a voice operating from his belly giving him messages from God Almighty to tell the world about his work. And his death certificate in May 1877 gives cause of death as Softening of the Brain, Paralysis and Exhaustions. But that appears to be the task I have set myself in my fiction.

10

My birthplace, where your family has continued to live in five generations. How marks are made onto physical spaces, how we approach this home-place changing, ourselves, with subtlety, often without even noticing. How will you tell a story from this place, about it, about your family? The heroic vestiges of great and colossal wars, don't work. The borders of official histories already too defined, too excluding. You need a few tricks up the sleeve to manage those trajectories, those maps of forwardness, of progress, to be able to order the information that comes your way.

11

You might be best employed to try for little: for imagined moments based upon long experience picked up along the path of research.

To live in a small place when it is a matter of choice is all the more you can do for yourself the past, to admit that there is enough pleasure lodged in the familial place. To do it in the face of the stability, the rock of belonging involves a nostalgia, perhaps. The funny thing is that you uncover the first detail of a secret, others will have to come digging in. And it's all been sitting there, close to hand, for years. At your fingertips, as the image of your own memory. This is the way coincidences operates, a clustering of sources, a little myth about a little town, a party at a party. Suddenly, everyone's your cousin or has happened upon one person in the family at the beginning of their life. A store of Perth stories that circulates for generations. And that seems to be a forward motion.

12

What does the university get out of this? Kudos, probably, when student writers or staff members win prizes or are published, or both. But much more than that, it appears to be the benefit of another slant on the pedagogical project, what a student can learn about learning by doing that. To use the image of your own memory, you can certainly learn about what is needed to make a story, and you may be able to learn about your own and collective spirit and how to enter a text as a reader and writer and discuss it. A repertoire of critical approaches. That parallel project of invention, play, wrestling with ideas and expression, alongside readings of theories and literature. The linking of ideas—about reading, about subjectivity, about the world.

13

The names, for me, are now incantations. Theodore Krakouer, Brina Israel. Sometimes the two names are all I have from your lives, as a record of you. An unsatisfying yield from many of your stories. To imagine a character to fit what I want from you? My worthy, honourable, pioneering great-grandparents.

Terri-ann White writes and teaches in Perth. Her first book, a collection of stories, Nighthaggher was published in 1994 by Fremantle Arts Centre Press. This is an edited version of a paper presented at the second annual conference of the Association of Australian Writing Programs in Melbourne in October, 1998.
Rats in the walls

John Baxter, author of books on Fellini, Buñuel, Spielberg and now Kubrick reflects on the challenges of writing biography

Just before Christmas, having failed to convince my producer that the same effect could be achieved on the roof of Broadcasting House, I found myself standing in an icy wind deep in sodden Hertfordshire, recording the introduction to a BBC radio documentary about Stanley Kubrick, whose biography I had just published.

We'd hardly begun when cars began issuing from behind the three-metre tall hedges and fences that mark Kubrick's rural retreat, Childwick Bury. One of them stopped beside us. A bearded Kubrick clone in donkey jacket lowered the window and regarded us expressively.

"Mr. Baxter, aren't you?" he said at last. "I liked your book on Buñuel."

It was a defining moment in my career as a biographer of film personalities, but one that I'd heard colleagues describe in similar terms of disquiet. From the time of James Boswell, intimacy with one's subject has presented problems of loyalty and responsibility. The biographer of the late George Turner became disturbed about his failure to communicate for some days, and, going round to his house, found him paralysed on the floor. Her intervention probably saved his life. But what did it do for her book—which, as far as I can gather, has never been published. Was Blanche D'Alpuget's life of Bob Hawke better or worse for the fact that it reached the parts that other biographies didn't touch?

Biographers are something between executant and observer, friend and enemy, historian and psychoanalyst. We inhabit a twilight created by the shadow of our subjects. The place we choose to station ourselves within that shadow—on its outer edge, to enjoy some reflected glory, or in its deepest obscurity, where our subject's enemies (or, indeed friends; surprisingly often friends) can approach us, confident of anonymity—becomes the essence of our style. Few biographers who sit down for tea with their subjects, let alone sleep with them, can bear themselves to reveal what they found when they flipped through the diary. Few who started by flipping through the diary accept the invitation to tea.

Journalists always ask, "Did X co-operate with you on this book?" How to explain that, for me at least, this isn't an option? That the sunny edge isn't the interesting place in the shadow. W.H. Auden, who knew from the gay underworld of the 30s how seldom authorized biographies told the truth, wrote in Who's Who that "a shilling life will give you all the facts", but went on to point out that such biographies, chock-full of information normally supplied by the helpful subject, don't explain why

he sighed for one:

Who, say astonished critics, lived at home:
Did little jobs about the house with skill
And nothing else; could household; would sit still
Or potter round the garden; answered some
Of his long marmalade letters but kept none.

The man who accosted us outside Kubrick's home—long-time assistant Tony Frewin, as it turned out—didn't order us off. "(We thought you might be tabloid photographers," he explained.) On the contrary, he invited us to stay as long as we liked—"it's a public road"—and left with the suggestion that I do a book about Michael Powell, though he wouldn't be drawn on what he thought of the Kubrick book, nor what Kubrick thought.

Would it have been better had he invited us in? Or ordered us off? On the whole, I would have almost preferred the latter to the ambiguous position in which he left us, tolerated, but outside the fence. At least, from where I stood, I could see the world beyond Childwick Bury. And very often it's how a subject fits into that world which is the real story of a biography.

Biographers have traditionally had the benefit of that distance because their subjects were dead; conventional wisdom dictated that you couldn't write a 'life' until that life had ended. A few, like Donald Spoto, who's done books on Alfred Hitchcock, Laurence Olivier and Ingrid Bergman, still make it a rule never to write about the living, but they're in the minority.

The vogue for journalistic lives of the living is a product of investigative journalism in the 60s. Its arrival threw the field into uproar. Readers who had been happy to wait until the will was probated, the papers indexied, the heirs dutifully interviewed, now demanded estimates of careers still in full flower, historical perspectives on last week's headlines. The primary risk of the biographer was no longer bad reviews but libel suits.

The right to privacy became an issue, as did the negotiable value of an image. James Dean's heirs registered his likeness as a trade mark. As long ago as 1978, Woody Allen had Lee Guthrie's book about him withdrawn and pulped, not because it defamed him, but simply because it used published interviews and publicity material without his authority. George Lucas's Lucasfilms has now claimed that, by virtue of non-disclosure agreements signed by actors in the original Star Wars trilogy, the company owns their every memory of the films.

In this climate of revelation, 'Authorised', once the ultimate recommendation, has largely become a synonym for 'anodyne'. But, while the label increasing turns off potential buyers, publishers, particularly in America, continue to find it soothing. Some of the reasons are obvious. No authorised biographer will ever be sued for libel. Also, a living subject will probably lend his/her name and, maybe, presence to the book's promotion—as, for instance, Clint Eastwood did to Richard Schickel's enthusiastic study of two years ago.

The public failed to buy Schickel's book in the hoped-for numbers, sensing perhaps that more remained to be said about the King of Carmel, Cal. Now, ironically, an American publisher is refusing to issue the revisionist Eastwood biography it commissioned from a major writer in the field, and which reveals startling new information about the star's private and business life. Nor is any other reputable publisher prepared to take it over.

A few weeks ago, the writer, an old friend, came to Paris. We sat in Les Deux Magots over coffee and gloomily reviewed possible reasons for the general rejection. Not fears of libel, since the book is meticulously researched and documented. Not the risk of poor sales, since it can hardly fail to attract attention. No, the main reason, as far as one could gather, was a sense that publishers didn't wish to be unkind to an icon; that, even if the writer didn't mind remaining outside the sunshine of Clint's approval, they did.

This answer rang true. It explained why American biographies of the dead great are so often less sparing than those of the living; no dead actor is going to cut your chairman at the next MoMA opening. And, to my satisfaction, at least, it accounted for the problems that Europe-based writers experience in finding American publishers, and the hostile reviews that often greet their work when they do.

A few years ago, a New York agent counselled me that, if I wanted to do better in the American market, I should study two recent best-sellers; the lives of automotive executive Leo Iacocca and test pilot Chuck Yeager. Both, of course, weren't biographies but discreetly ghosted autobiographies, by far the preferred form of most US publishers. Increasingly, however, American biography/autobiography is a field of its own, as distinct, and distinctively American as the self-help book, and almost as obsessed with the Feel-good Factor. The emphasis, even where the person spent most of their working life elsewhere, is on their time in the US. The author of the most recent American book on Kubrick, Vincent LoBrutto, devoted a third of it to Kubrick's childhood, but never bothered to go to Britain, where Kubrick has lived and worked since 1963. Joseph McBride did more than 200 interviews for his hagiographic on Steven Spielberg, most of them also about the early life, to which he devoted half of the book. Despite the fact that most of Spielberg's later films were made there, McBride never bothered to go to Britain either.

Should one be surprised? The embrace of the sunny, the optimistic and the chauvinistic by US publishers and biographers simply mirrors the prevailing attitude of its popular culture. European biographical methods, like European films, are more rigorous, their executants more sceptical, less easily seduced by a smile from authority. George Lucas's Lucasfilms has now claimed that, by virtue of non-disclosure agreements signed by actors in the original Star Wars trilogy, the company owns their every memory of the films.
Trapped in a wwweb of deceit

Alan Thomas inside the Age of (X-file) Information

As we are told loudly and repeatedly, by innumerable voices in innumerable places, this is the Age of Information. The explosion of information that characterises the ‘Age of Information’ brings with it a concomitant decrease in our capacity to determine that information as true or false, to assess the flow of information into a systematic pattern of truth and falsity, of determined knowledge. The ‘Age of Information’ brings with it a proliferation of information and its control horizontally as an infomatic field which organises the access and control of information. The more traditional forms of media (television, radio, print etc.) operate as centralised sites of information distribution and control, working on a 'broadcast' model of one-to-many, thereby concentrating power at the top of a fixed information hierarchy where information flows in one direction only, from the top down. The new media, on the other hand offer us a 'network' of many-to-many, distributing the flows of a rich tone (a single, continuous stream of information) and a pure tone (a single, distinct frequency) (Deleuze and Guattari would call this form of organisation ‘rhizomatic’, and that of the traditional media ‘arboreal’); see ‘Introduction to Capitalism and Schizophrenia’ [trans. Brian Massumi], Minneapolis & London, University of Minnesota Press, 1987). By facilitating mass participation in both the production and consumption of information, the accelerating spread of these new media democratises knowledge and the unlegitimised flows of information made possible by the new media, cannot be a perfect example of the net’s democratising potential; the mutation and multiplication of an originary legitimised source into an on-line community into a mass of chaotic and inconceivable 'responses' which turn the original material to its own illegitimate ends.

Perhaps it was this sense of their (copyrighted) material escaping from their control that prompted Fox to attempt to sweep the net clean of unofficial sites based on their shows, by threatening web-servers supporting these sites with legal action if they didn't boot the offending sites off-line. This attempt to maintain control of legitimate and unauthorised information has spawned a substantial on-line community; according to Steve Silberman, in an article in the on-line magazine RealTime (http://www.realtime.com/special/millenium), there are over 900 unofficial sites devoted to The X-Files alone. These sites aren’t just devoted to providing information about the show, but to the fictional plotlines that are provided by the show as a basis for their own wildly divergent fantasies, creating their own thoroughly unauthourised plotlines that remind the content of the show to match their own desires. There is, as Silberman notes, an entire "subgenre of these home generated parallel plot universes devoted to grey and lesbian plot developments, and gleefully X-rated contributions from the 'Gillion Anderson Testosterone Brigade' (Anderson is the show’s female lead; there's also a ‘David Duchovny Oestrogen Brigade' devoted to its male lead)" (Silberman, ‘The X-Files and Millenium’). The generation of new information about the show, and how to access it, has been an ongoing process since the show's debut.

The X-Files, developed around Carter’s other show Millennium, when it was premiered in the US. This would seem, on the surface at least, to be a perfect example of the net’s democratising potential; the mutation and multiplication of an originary legitimised source into an on-line community into a mass of chaotic and inconceivable 'responses' which turn the original material to its own illegitimate ends.

Perhaps it was this sense of their (copyrighted) material escaping from their control that prompted Fox to attempt to sweep the net clean of unofficial sites based on their shows, by threatening web-servers supporting these sites with legal action if they didn't boot the offending sites off-line. This attempt to maintain control of legitimate and unauthorised information has spawned a substantial on-line community; according to Steve Silberman, in an article in the on-line magazine RealTime (http://www.realtime.com/special/millenium), there are over 900 unofficial sites devoted to The X-Files alone. These sites aren’t just devoted to providing information about the show, but to the fictional plotlines that are provided by the show as a basis for their own wildly divergent fantasies, creating their own thoroughly unauthourised plotlines that remind the content of the show to match their own desires. There is, as Silberman notes, an entire "subgenre of these home generated parallel plot universes devoted to grey and lesbian plot developments, and gleefully X-rated contributions from the 'Gillion Anderson Testosterone Brigade' (Anderson is the show’s female lead; there’s also a ‘David Duchovny Oestrogen Brigade' devoted to its male lead)" (Silberman, ‘The X-Files and Millenium’). The generation of new information about the show, and how to access it, has been an ongoing process since the show's debut.

As such, I would suggest that superfluity of information offered by these new information technologies, divorced as they are from traditional modes of legitimisation, does not of necessity lead us towards an increasingly transparent and/or democratic society. Despite the expanded range of access it offers for ‘the masses’ to a variety of sources, the proliferation of sources that flood the net, every topic has such a plethora of contradictory and conflicting claims made around it that for every piece of information from a legitimised source on the net (a government or corporate web site for instance) there will be 10 unlegitimisable ones contradicting it, undermining the legitimised source without being able to take its place. In effect, the multiplication of sources and sites of information made possible by the internet and world wide web produces not so much an increase in knowledge as an increase in doubt.

There is an important distinction to be made here between information and knowledge; knowledge is in essence a structuring of information via the binary opposition of truth and falsity, as determined by mechanisms of legitimisation (ideology if you like). Information however, in its cybemetic sense, knows no negation, no oppositional structuring, no 'organisation' as such at all. The state of maximum information is the state of maximum indecipherability—what’s called ‘white noise’ or static (white noise is basically the sound of every frequency heard simultaneously. In context, a pure tone and static of a single discrete frequency), any structuring or codification of this static into a communicable message involves a redundancy of information (since any system of communication/representation is implicitly a system of repetition) which adds to the amount of information present and hence being given, at the same time as it makes it possible for that signal to actually tell you something. The new media of the internet and world wide web present us with an ever increasing amount of information that is constantly undermining the traditional sources of legitimisation and authorisation; at the same time that the flow of information is increasing, our capacity to determine that information as true or false, to assess that flow of information into a systematic field that characterises the ‘Age of Information’ brings with it a concomitant decrease in our capacity to order that information into a systematic pattern of truth and falsity, of determined knowledge.

The age of information could just as accurately be called the age of noise, the age of devoted to providing information about the shows themse lves; many take the material that information into a systematic pattern of truth and falsity, of determined knowledge.

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Book review

Road movie blowout

Noel King reviews a big new collection of road movie essays

The Road Movie Book, eds Steven Cohen and Ina Rae Hark, Routledge 1997. 379 pp. $ 34.95

By 1953, the US had 6% of the world’s population and 60% of its cars. By 1959, 1.25 million Americans had died in car accidents, more than in all US wars combined.


If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will get you there.

M. N. Chatterjee, quoted in Michael Atkinson, “Noir and Away: Notes on Two Detours,” Bright Lights Film Journal, 15, 1995

After reading the Introduction and 16 chapters you’ll be none the wiser on what constitutes a ‘road movie’ but you will have encountered some lively pieces of writing. Various genealogies are suggested, and the road movie is compared with other genres: the western, the musical, the screwball comedy, the film noir. As the articles cast their taxonomic net over their supposed subgeneric object, the unity of the collection seems to depend on the manic repetition of ‘road movie’ across a series of often fascinating discussions of quite different films.

Although the grab-bagness of the articles means their coherence derives from an agreed-in-advance conceptual object, I was surprised to find no mention of Wolfgang Schivelbusch’s The Railway Journey, which seems an obvious historical-theoretical point of entry to any reconsideration of the ‘road movie’. And in a collection which presumably purports to offer the latest word on the topic, it seems odd that no article refers to Mark Williams’ essays, Road Movies (Proteus Books, 1982). Some essays overlook earlier work on the films they are analysing. So a piece which mentions Joseph Lewis’ Gun Crazy (1950) only in passing cites Jim Kitses’ definitive analysis of that film in the BFI Film Classics series (Gun Crazy, BFI, 1996) while an essay which discusses Gun Crazy at length makes no mention of Kitses’ work. Two sets of editorial eyes should have identified oversights of this sort when assembling the collection.

This slightly pedantic bibliographical point indicates the nature of this critical enterprise. Various established critical paradigms (landscape-geography, hybrid genres, queer theory, nationalism/community, gender/gender, masculinities, Baudrillard’s America) are applied to a new object, the ‘road movie’. Given the professional-institutional location of most of the contributors (the US academic system) it would be silly to deny the reality of the road they must drive in order to secure tenure and/or academic acknowledgment and advancement. The result is a slightly tendentious, occasionally ponderous anthology which enlarges sundry c-vs and offers readers... what? Well, readers receive the upside of grab-bagness; the ‘road movie’ becomes a generous umbrella under which some lovely pieces of writing gather.

Ina Rae Hark’s engaging discussion of Midnight Run, Rain Man and Planes Trains and Automobiles (as ‘buddy-road movie’), together with her claim that these films critique yuppidom, links her with Jane Feuer’s recent work on Reaganism, television and yuppies (Seeing Through the Eighties, Duke UP, 1995).

As the chronotope of the road overlaps with the trope of the formation of the couple we hear of “outlaw couples”, couples defined by Otherness. Sharon Willis, who has written on Thelma and Louise, here turns her attention to To Wong Foo, and Boys on the Side; and Katie Mills reads Araki’s The Living End as “an AIDS road film”—but overlooks Ida Lupino’s The Hitchhiker (1953) and Agnes Varda’s Vagabondes (1985) when she says that To Wong Foo is “as far as I can trace... the first road feature directed by a woman”. Robert Lang has a good piece on My Own Private Idaho and the “new queer road movies” and Pam Robertson, author of Queer Pleasures: Feminist Camp From Mac West to Madonna (Duke UP, 1996) writes well on Priscilla, Queen of the Desert and To Wong Foo.

When Barbara Klinger contextualises Easy Rider by referring to the 1956 National Highway Act which generated the vast system of interstate highways in the US, I was reminded of Edward Dimendberg’s “The Will to Motorization: Cinema, Highways, and Modernity” (October 73, 1997, pp 91-137), especially the section where he mentions Norman Bel Geddes’ Magic Motorways (Random House, 1940) and comments on Hubert Cornfield’s “highway caper film”, Plunder Road (1957).

Klinger’s historical-historicising approach is similar to Steven Cohen’s exploration of “Showbiz culture and roadtrips in the 1940s and 1950s”, where he makes the Hope-Crosby-Lamour Road to Morocco and Road to Utopia, and the Claudette Colbert-John Wayne Without Reservations (1946) seem very interesting pieces of cinema. Elsewhere in the volume the Road to... films receive a more predictable processing from a camp-queer perspective and it’s clear they are in line for an approving critical reappraisal.

I enjoyed the way Mark Alvey’s discussion of Route 66 (1960-64) placed that program in terms of then-current US television formats. The action-adventure-serious drama format merges with the semi-anthology, so that the travels of two Corvette-driving urban hipsters is linked to the earlier western series, Wagon Train (1957) and to (Route 66 writer) Sterling Silliphant’s earlier Naked City (1958).

Across the essays all the usual road film suspects turn up (It Happened One Night, Sullivan’s Travels, Easy Rider, The Living End, Thelma and Louise, My Own Private Idaho) but sometimes the predictable turn is accompanied by an unexpected emphasis, in Julian Stringer’s delightful discussion of Russ Meyer’s cult-camp exploitation classic Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!, which is addressed mainly to make a case for the neglected Meyer genre, Motorpsychol.

Although there are several references to non-American objects—Bennet Schaber’s opening essay mentions Hitchcock’s The Thirty Nine Steps (1939) and Vigo’s L’Atalante (1934), Angelo Restivo’s piece focuses on the Italian autostrada, everyday life, advertising and modernity by way of a reading of Dino Risi’s Il Sorriso (The Easy Life, 1964), and Melbourne academic and novelist Delia Falconer writes on the Mad Max trilogy—it would have been nice to see more road movies from other cultures mentioned.

I also yearned for styles of writing not on offer here. I was nostalgic for something as readable as Greg Ford’s great review of Monte Hellman’s Two-Lane Blacktop 25 years ago (Film Quarterly 25, 2, 1971:72) and John Plauss’ lovely review of the same film in Metro (1997); I hungered for something like John Belton’s “Film Noir’s Knights of the Road”, (Bright Lights Film Journal 12, 1994), and Rick Thompson’s piece on Mitchell’s Thunder Road (1958), reprinted (disguised as a “translation”) in a recent Metro (“Maudit: The Devil got Him First”, Metro, No. 111, 1997). I wanted to read something that linked pleasure in cinema going with pleasure in writing; writing which produced pleasure in its reader by way of a feel for the sentence, the phrase, the quirky formulation that seduces, informs and, occasionally, amuses.

There’s not much of that on offer here but the virtue of The Road Movie Book is precisely its wide sweep. This permits readers of many ideological persuasions and paradigm interests to find their place under the umbrella. And any collection that can tell you that Hitler loved Capra’s It Happened One Night, and make you want to watch (in my case) The Road to Morocco, The Road to Utopia, Without Reservations, Motorpsychol and old episodes of Route 66 has to be an OK thing.

17—RealTime 23 / OnScreen—February—March 1998
Prostituting noir

Patrick Crogan reveals LA Confidential's critical engagement with film noir

The biggest laugh in LA Confidential is when Lieutenant Ed Exley (Guy Pearce) mistakes Lana Turner (Brenda Bakke) for a prostitute who has been 'cut' and costumed to resemble Lana Turner. Even the two investigating detectives, Exley and Jack Vincennes (Kevin Spacey) have a chuckle to themselves over the incident when they return to their car. At this point the incident indicates a thawing in the deadly serious demeanour of Exley and his passage towards a more pragmatic response to the evil ambiguities of the film noir world, ambiguities he is desperately trying to overcome.

This situation gag is a rich one that operates at a number of levels. The embarrassing misrecognition of the real Hollywood star for the counterfeit whore is all the more funny for happening to the light-assed Exley, who obviously doesn't go to the movies (or to sleazy bars) to relax. Then there is a Hollywood 'in-joke' at the expense of Lana Turner who had achieved scandal sheet notoriety in her day (the day of the film's diegesis) and media-engineered notoriety is an important thematic and plot element of LA Confidential. This Lana gag responds ironically to the manufacture of sensational incidents by Sid Hudgens (Danny DeVito) for his "Hush Hush" column. There is a complex symmetry between the contrived 'simunendo' and exposed inducements that are splashed across LA Confidential's pages and Lana Turner's insistence on being discovered carousing with a low-life punk who acts as muscle for crime bosses, that she is the real Lana Turner and not some prostitute remade in her glamorous image. The Hollywood star and the profoundly costumed whore who resembles her are variations, then, of a mode of constructed identity; they share in a false objecthood that stands in for the artificial Hollywood/LA world of LA Confidential. We are in the terrain of a classic film noir theme: woman as artiste, as destabiliser of social hierarchy and subjecthood and consequently as threat to the 'true'.

And this is to be expected because LA Confidential is noir through and through—albeit in a distanced, theatricalised fashion. Of course, one of noir's central characteristics is its theatricality; the pulp fiction plots, the characters who are damaged goods with their sick hearts on their sleeves or with masks hiding further masks and murky pasts, and the famous chiaroscuro lighting. All of these elements made noir foreground its thematic and meta-narrative preoccupations. But in LA Confidential it is as if theatricality is being theatricalised. Character motivations, mise-en-scene, narrative and themes are all 'virtual noir', a simulacrum of noir film that is in some ways more noir than noir. The seamy underbelly of noir LA is exposed more plainly—nudity, foul language and a more explicit representation of sexual perversion, such as the Betty Page-esque SM pictures and details of the DA's homosexual liaison—even if the noir ambivalence between exploitation and censure is maintained in the brevity of these shots and the film's overall exercise of a pre 70s restraint. The use of the Australians Guy Pearce and Russell Crowe for the two principal roles in the (very fine) ensemble cast seems to me at least partially related to their slightly alien American accents—their simulation somehow contributing to the distanciation sought in the creation of the milieu of 1950s LA.

LA Confidential's most obvious (and most remarked) antecedent is Roman Polanski's Chinatown (1974). Set slightly earlier in the 30s, Chinatown consciously imitates the noir films about corrupted (and corrupting) American urban life. But Polanski revisits noir in the manner of an evocation or invocation. His is a 'calling in' of noir modes and themes which amounts to a spiralling that both returns to and transforms the noir world via cross fertilisation with Polanski's eastern European penchant for the Kafkaesque. Also, stylistically Polanski adapts noir rather than attempting to reconstruct it as a convincing recreation. By contrast, LA Confidential director Curtis Hanson is intent on doubling noir in a kind of facsimile, using modes of documentary film and news reportage in its opening and closing sequences to provide a simulated authentication of the film's noir 'fax'. While this is a fairly conventional means of promoting the audience's suspension of disbelief and engaging them in the fiction, in this film such a framing resembles the kind of narrative scene-setting that introduces virtual reality rides—and it serves the same function of enhancing the virtual illusion.

And this returns me to the Lana gag, because beyond (or beneath) the laughs this joke provides and the narrative function it serves, it provides a leitmotif of the simulated authentication that characterises LA Confidential's engagement with noir film. The Lana Turner character provides just such an authentication of the film's fictive world—really early 1950s LA/Hollywood if Lana is there—as well as of the film's noir themes described above, those of woman/the social as masquerade and false identity. But this authenticity is a shaggy dog story: of course, it is not really Lana Turner. The laughter obscures momentarily the most ironically reflexive moment in the film, a moment where one can glimpse the film's theatricalisation of its noir thematic project. This results from its doubling, through the Lana Turner gag, of the very processes of falsification that the noir film seeks to control and eliminate.

Let me get at this another way. Exley's misrecognition of Lana Turner for a prostitute made to look like Lana Turner is set up by the preceding discovery of Pierce Patchett's (David Strathairn) prostitution ring specialising in whores remade in the image of movie stars like Rita Hayworth and Veronica Lake. The prostitutes stand in for the fictional personas of the famous stars in an ironic play on the literal meaning of prostitution: to cause to stand in public. This is the situation that backfires on Exley. And it is this danger of misrecognition, ambiguity and indeterminacy, thematically identified with prostitution in the film, that LA Confidential struggles to neutralise in typical, or rather, virtual, noir fashion. But inasmuch as the film repeats this dangerous game of re-making in the Lana Turner gag—and, as I have been suggesting, in its whole modus operandi with respect to film noir—LA Confidential prostitutes prostitution, including its own, causing it to stand in public.

This would be to say that LA Confidential prostitutes film noir rather than saying that it simply is film noir. This is what is most fascinating about the film for me. Some critics have celebrated the film for its ambitions to engage (as Chinatown did) in meditation on the social and political interconnections of the seamy noirish world of corrupt police, district attorneys and big business that is, the world of those who prostitute their talents and positions for unworthy purposes (another, related sense of 'prostitution'). But this kind of critical approach considers the film in terms of its virtual noir themes without struggling with the complexities of its prostitution of noir. In attempting the latter one may come a little nearer to the ethical impulse that drives the noir film and allows for its eternal return in Hollywood. To speculate, this impulse might be thought of as linked to an effort to re-consecrate prostitution, to restore its mythic function of communal restitution by means of a controlled substitution/sacrifice that would represent to society its regulation of the evil, the impure and the inhuman. In the midst of one's immersion in LA Confidential's compelling engagement with noir's symbolic terrain of shifting prostituted identities, one may glimpse in its virtual form that which fuels the narrative effort toward this restorative doubling of prostitution.

Philip Brophy is on holiday. His Cinesonic column will appear in the next edition of RealTime.
I don't need to talk to the converted

Lester Bostock on the experience of Indigenous filmmakers at the recent International Documentary Conference

I go back to the first documentary film conference held at McLaren Vale in South Australia 1987. At that conference the Indigenous filmmakers made an impact. There was a clear and powerful side issue and not included as part of the main conference. Although there were only a handful of Indigenous filmmakers they were seen as an important strand in the conference. In looking back to that time I felt that the Indigenous component was included as an afterthought, with the 1988 bicentennial activities being discussed at length. Of course this has been the pattern when dealing with Indigenous issues. There does not seem to be a place for Indigenous filmmakers within the mainstream filmmaking community, and they are always seen as something of a threat. A little later, the mainstream film funding bodies and television management is that Indigenous filmmaking is second class and doesn’t rate unless there is a white filmmaker in charge. This attitude is often reinforced by the way some people in the film and television industry view Indigenous films.

There are some filmmakers who have made names for themselves using Indigenous subjects, some winning awards for excellence. Not to say that these films are disrespectful or badly made. The latest in a long line of films on Indigenous issues are Mabo, The Life of an Island Man, and After Mabo which were previewed at the conference. As I stated at one of the panel sessions, there are many films made about Indigenous people going back to the early days of the silent era. It is ironic that the first film footage shot in the Murray River (the home of Eddie Mabo) people in 1898 and not long after the invention of moving pictures. Over the years Indigenous people have always been the subject of film, from early anthropological film up until today. In recent years Indigenous people have started to take control of their images by making their own films about what concerns them.

The development of the Indigenous film sector has grown from a handful of filmmakers a few years ago to the current crop of who are now working as professionals in the mainstream film and television industry. There are more Indigenous people on panels and taking part in workshops than in the past. Even though there were Indigenous workshops, they were on at the same time as many of the other workshops such as the multimedia session, the pitching sessions and the workshops where the Overseas Broadcasters were outlining what they require in the way of program content. Therefore many of the Indigenous filmmakers who wanted to take part in these other workshops were caught up in panel discussions in the Indigenous sessions.

What was missing from this conference was the general assembly gathering where everyone would meet together. As an Indigenous person with Brisbane being part of my tribal lands, I felt insulted that the conference did not open with the Indigenous welcome to open proceedings, followed with a series of keynote speakers to set the theme of the conference, where all the delegates could hear the point being made before going off into workshops, then reporting back to a plenary session. Many of the delegates did not have the opportunity to hear what the concerns and issues of the Indigenous group were, especially their concerns as finally. This was emphasised in one of the Indigenous sessions when one of the panellists stated, “here again we seem to be talking to the converted; what we have to say should be heard by the main body of conference.”

Lester Bostock is President of Metro Television with many years in the media industry. In recent years he has been very active in media training, especially encouraging Indigenous people to enter the film and television industry.

Macro and micro diversity

June Cullen reports on the New Frontiers documentary conference in Brisbane

The 5th International Documentary Conference, New Frontiers, held in Brisbane over four days last November, had an impressive attendance of over 500 delegates. Such numbers led to an energetic few opening night which set the pace for the rest of the conference. The reception was a raucous event of consumption and anticipation as Indigenous performers, members of the opening ceremony, were launched into their audience. In accordance with the unwritten law of conference events, the venue acoustics failed to live up to expectation. The audible excitement of the crowd coupled with poor amplification meant it was difficult to hear the speakers. Keynote speaker, Phillip Adams, intended to give his address on the second-class citizen status accorded to documentary makers in the world of cinema. However, given the circumstances, he very wisely stood down, making copies of his speech available to be picked up at reception for those interested.

It was in this environment that the conference program accomplished its promise of encountering numerous fronts. Professional, novel and policymaker alike were well served by what the program offered. However it would be a mistake to judge the conference solely on the number and variety of strands. The sessions were vigorous and extremely productive in challenging the filmmakers and the audiences with some critical and dynamic questions that extended beyond session times. One aspect of the highly charged debates at the International Conference Forum was the constraints which funding ultimately applies to cultural form. Discussion was prompted and probed for Remote, and Indigenous Documentary Fund schemes.

A look at the history of Indigenous involvement in conference events usually reveals little recognition of issues: sessions have a tacked-on feel in the overall program, often without proper consultation with appropriate cultural bodies. For the November conference this was obviously not the case. There was a healthy representation of Indigenous material across strands and a number of screenings with Indigenous content. This gave the Indigenous component its rightful place as a mainstream and legitimate part of any Australian conference, as opposed to an afterthought.

The large influx of Indigenous filmmakers at the conference ranged from CAAMA, TAIMA and BRACS people to independent filmmakers. There were more Indigenous people on panels than in workshops. Such numbers led to an energetic few opening night which set the pace for the rest of the conference.

Firstly the venues in which all the workshops were held were too far apart and getting to them was impossible not only for me but for other conference delegates who had difficulty getting around—so much so that towards the end of the conference I gave up trying to attend some of the workshops.

Locating the conference in Brisbane worked well not only to promote local documentary production interests but also to establish those interests as part of a wider national production paradigm. Several Australia artists were able to attend the conference for the "prize" of hosting the next conference in Adelaide in 1999. It is hoped that they have the same option to orchestrate the event themselves rather than being based solely on the "prize." The Brisbane base melded well with national and international delegates.

There were also doco newcomers to the world with the attendance of several of the Race Around the World contestants. It was a success of diversity with a micro and macro focus.
As one of few events in this year’s Telstra Adelaide Festival tackling the nexus between technology and art, the Australian Network for Art and Technology’s FOLDBACK project is bound to cause quite a commotion. Intended as both a celebration of ANAT’s tenth anniversary and as an opportunity to interrogate some of the central issues in new media art, FOLDBACK is a transmedia event focusing on media, technocore and screen culture. Featuring real-time performances by flesh and data bodies, the event will utilise virtual media to bring together a range of participants from some of ANAT’s most successful projects who continue to pioneer developments in cross-disciplinary art.

As coordinator of FOLDBACK, Director of ANAT, Amanda McDonald Crowley explains, “One of the things that strikes me is that media art is often referred to within a visual arts context only. It is important to remember that most artists working in this area really do work in very cross-disciplinary ways. The artists included in this event are all exploring and critiquing new modes of communication. They are pulling apart and reinventing the ways we are being told we can use communications technologies and exploring collaborative modes of artistic production in exciting new ways”.

Taking place on March 8, FOLDBACK will form a bridge between the themes explored at Writers’ Week and Artists’ Week. Drawing connections between the often divergent cultures of art and writing, FOLDBACK will include renowned computerist, the USA’s eponymous Mark Amerika, elaborating on the frictions between hard and soft publishing, the mechanics of hypertext and the correlations between electronic art and writing.

You are the primary catalyst behind one of the first online publishing projects, AIX (http://www.aix.org), a centreface which uses hypertext as a mode of constructing literary narrative. Tell us a little bit about what hypertext publishing is and how AIX uses this tool.

MA The first thing I would say about hypertext publishing is that it moves away from the Gutenberg-inspired print-publishing paradigm and enters more computer-mediated network environments. Ted Nelson, in the mid 60s, came up with the term “hypertext” to help describe a new kind of electronic text that practices multi-linear sequencing, that branches out and makes references by way of hotlinks.

You’re indicated in the past that hypertextual publishing “suggests an alternative to the more rigid, authoritarian linearities of conventional book-contained text”. At the same time you are the author of several books, what do you perceive are the tensions between the two modes of publishing?

MA Good question. The first, most obvious tension, is the struggle that takes place in what Walter Benjamin might have called “the literary production of our time”. My experience is that there is a kind of ‘false consciousness’ being promoted today via outdated literary forms like, for example, the novel. Having written and published two fairly popular yet very avant-novels, The Kafka Chronicles and Sexual Blood, I know the contemporary book world pretty well and still read a lot of books and respect a lot of the writing coming out of the alternative press scene. But the mainstreaming of so-called ‘literary’ books as mass-media by-products, especially these ‘suspension-of disbelief’ linear narratives, disgusts me.

The most interesting literature, to me, is that literature which breaks out of the mould of conventional realism and its need to predictably tell a story with ‘real’ characters, plots, settings, etc. Sorry, but my life doesn’t read like that. It’s much more multi-digestionary and has moments of linkage or connectivity that come to light due to associative thinking, parallel processing, collaborative networking, intuitive writing etc. And so what better way for younger, more adventurous writers who know this to be true—but have been quite literally bound by the mainstream book publishing industry—to break out of this rigid structure than to start experimenting with both their writing practice and their political or cultural work vis-à-vis the web.

Tell us about GRAMMATRON and Hypertextual Consciousness, two of your most prominent works? Will we be seeing them in FOLDBACK?

MY As you’ve indicated in the past that, perhaps, this was not the right moment, but I hope that now is the right moment. What is FOLDBACK’s role in your ‘hypermedial’ work?

My work and my research is a counterpoint to this. My research is a form of media and writing that’s experimental, online, experimental in the sense that it’s a web that has a life of its own. It can develop into something that cannot be printed—something more immediate—where it’s in the process of being told we can use the web as a tool for communicating, as a platform for communication and collaboration and exchange that is already taking place between AIX and emerging new media artists in Australia.

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Attention can ground an economy because it is a fundamental human desire and is intrinsically, unaccountably scarce.

— Michael H. Goldhaber, "Attention Shoppers!" Wired, Dec 1997

When Wired first came out a few years ago, I read it from cover to cover. Nowadays I still buy the magazine each month but no longer feel compelled to read every word: my attention has shifted elsewhere. Still, every now and again, concealed amongst the lifestyle advertising and self-referential American bullshit, there's an occasional gem. The December 1997 issue contained such a piece, by Michael H. Goldhaber, about the attention economy.

Goldhaber's central thesis is that in a world of material abundance (defined as "the US, Western Europe, Japan, and a growing list of other places"), attention is the only truly scarce commodity. For all our vaunted ability to multi-task (for example simultaneously eat dinner, watch TV, and talk on the phone with a friend), it is close to impossible to devote what we might call "quality attention" to more than a single activity at once. It's this kind of attention that Goldhaber sees what we might call "quality attention" to our vaunted ability to multi-task (for example a growing list of other places). "But no, it's the Sydney Morning Herald's Good Weekend magazine of January 3. You don't have to read past the first couple of paragraphs to figure out that the "profile" is just an extended advertisement for Ms Weaver's new movie, Alien Resurrection. Actually she has two new movies (The Ice Storm is the other). "But", writes the journalist, "we are here to talk about Alien". Just so. And, once you've read this puff piece, and been subjected to the relentless barrage of newspaper and television commercials, there'll be a TV special (The Making of Alien Resurrection), appearances on the Today and Midday shows, newspaper reviews, radio interviews, and probably a segment on The Movie Show, all telling stories about Sigourney Weaver and Alien Resurrection.

The line between news, opinion, and advertising is now so blurred that almost no media coverage is untainted by marketing imperatives. Marketing is concerned solely with creating and keeping customers. In other words, getting and holding our attention (or loyalty, which is essentially the same thing). If we accept Goldhaber's proposition that attention is scarce and therefore valuable, then attracting attention is difficult and frequently expensive. So it's hardly accidental that the marketing budget for a movie like Alien Resurrection usually equals and occasionally exceeds the production budget, the money it took to actually make the film.

The fourth in the Alien series, Alien Resurrection —despite its higher production and marketing costs—will inevitably return a far greater profit than Ang Lee's The Ice Storm. Why? Primarily because of branding. Both movies offer the Sigourney Weaver brand but, despite the success of Sense and Sensibility, the Ang Lee brand can't compete against the combined weight of the Alien, Winona Ryder, and Ripley brands. In fact, I suspect that the Ripley character (a tough, tenacious, resolute, courageous woman) has probably done more for feminism than Simone de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer, and Gloria Steinem together (and they comprise three formidable feminist brands).

Nothing attracts and holds attention like a successful brand. Coke, Pepsi, Madonna, Nike, Picasso, Adidas, Mercedes, Mles Davis, BMW, McDonalds, Louise Bourgeois, KFC, Microsoft, Salman Rushdie, Hotel, SONY, Peter Greenaway, Anotts, Claudia Schiffer, Végemite, Orange, Cathy Freeman, IKEA, Jane Campion, Peter Carey, Russell Crowe, Kylie Minogue, Susan Nonie, Mike Parr, Bettina Andt, McKenzie walr... faced with too much information competing for our scarce attention, we rely on the safety of a known and trusted brand. There's an old line that the reason academic politics is so bitterly contested is because the stakes are so small. I used to think that was true and that the art world was similar too. But the interminable warfare between artists or academics (or movie stars) is simply the Cold war writ large. The stakes are huge. Long term success in any endeavour means getting and holding an audience's attention. The key to success for individuals—as for cola manufacturers and movie producers—will increasingly depend on building a successful brand. Whether corporate or personal, successful brand building depends on telling the right story, for, as marketing analyst Michael Moon says: "Every brand tells a story, but not every story creates a brand". But let's leave storytelling for next time.

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### Issue #87/88 of CANTRILLS FILMNOTES

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- Meta Finimore reports on Laboratory, a multi-screen performance event by Universal Film Factory, Brisbane
- 'Cardoso Flee Circus Video' by Ross Rudesch Harley
- 'A Slow Leaving of 16mm Practice...Moving into Super-8' by Corinne Cantrill
- 'Hercules Road' — from London, Jane Madsen writes on her William Blake film
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CANTRILLS FILMNOTES is assisted by THE AUSTRALIAN FILM COMMISSION
Dissolving boundaries

Red Rossiter witnesses Women on the Verge of New Technology

Thinking I’d arrived late to the opening address by Zoë Sofoulis for the conference of the multi-component event Women on the Verge of New Technology (henceforth WoVNT) which took a back seat at Kulcha, scanned the room, as one does, and quickly came to the realisation that it was going to be just another Sodom or, worse, the ‘verge’ of this cultural-technological situation. I was one of perhaps five men in a room otherwise occupied by women, maybe 60. An audience this size, regardless of sex, translates as a successful event for a critical arts happening in Perth.

In the terms suggested by Sofoulis in her paper which drew on ‘actor-network theory’ (ANT) by Bruno Latour and Daniel Stern’s psychoanalytic notions of ‘inter-subjectivity’, male or female positionality shouldn’t make a difference based on binary distinctions. With ANT, the space of culture and society every-which-way is no longer defined through core-periphery, interior-exterior models; humans are no longer defined as subjects negotiating a field of objects, or by their gender identity or biological sex, but rather as elements of varying intensity performing strategic connections within their networks which might include artworks, institutions and new technologies. (See Zoë Sofoulis, ‘Interactivity, Intersubjectivity and the Artwork/Network’, Mesh 10, Spring, 1996. See also Bruno Latour, On Actor Network Theory: A Faust Clarifications, http://www.keele.ac.uk/depts/att/att/ant/latour.htm) However, the problematic of consciousness, and the political agency, still lingers with Latour’s notion of strategic connections: without consciousness, how can either a human or non-human actant have a strategic capacity? We start heading down the path of proto-subjectivity here... and I don’t wish to go there just yet.

The relationship between women and technology can be thought of in terms of the extent to which masculinity is produced by women, among others, is commodified, and the effect this has in terms of installing new materialities. Anticipating this, it prompts the question, what becomes marginalised as some artworks, artists, curators, administrators and academics ascend the ladder in the emergent culture industry of all things digital? Despite the defalcation of the internet and, by association, computer generated art, for its capacity to abolish the banality of geographic distance and almost overnight, download a world with a different culture happens as a provincial one. Here lies the apparent incommensurability of the time of new communication technologies with the dread of everydayness.

On paper, WoVNT appeared as a diverse, comprehensive and ambitious event. Along with its central act—a two day conference with speakers from academic, administrative, downmarket, and ‘Digital’ practitioner backgrounds—WoVNT included a web design workshop; demonstrations on new communication technologies in Yamaji and Nyoongar historiography, biomedical research, and stock marketeer entertainment; and Leah Irving’s video installation whose representation of ‘Millies’. Optically engaged wistfully with but didn’t exactly challenge the ‘gaze’ of this viewer as he circumambulated her outer electro-sensory reaches. Unfortunately the virtual component, Technolust: Desire and Technology, never virtualised. Computers were stolen from Antwerp’s MCA a few days prior to transmission preventing big-name lectures by the likes of Constance Penley, Rosie Braidotti, Linda Dement, Vivian Sobchack, and Claudia Springer, and video and CD-ROM programs from coming on-line.

Domestic Disturbances did its Perth leg of a national tour, with a selection of digital art and films, some of which had made an appearance at PICA last year in the technihub, and a number of which have been commented on in previous issues of RealTime as well. (Mesh #10, 1996). A video lounge featuring work by Perth-based artists was supposed to be there for the sitting, but on the two occasions I made the trip to Kulcha and the Film and Television Institute (FTI) this wasn’t to be. At Kulcha, Fremantle’s mayor had booked the venue for a VIP only elevated viewing position of the Fremantle Festival parade. I was able to get in the front door as some pretty inebriated and sunburnt VIP folk staggered out, only to discover that someone had beat me to whatever was the video lounge.

And, for whatever reason, Domestic Disturbances and the video lounge were not to be found at the FTI.

What is a reviewer to do? Obtain a partial show-reel copy, of course. Brigite Priestery’s A CARNA (Age DM is a sound-image loop that is kind of like Yoko Ono’s organis piece overlaid on images of metal more twisted than Cronenberg’s meditations on Ballard’s Crash, Vikki Wilson and Rick Mason of Retarded Eye contributed. The Only-Ma…

A scandal in Bohemia

David Matthews reviews ABC TV’s Bohemian Rhapsody

Sometimes, a television documentary can take something you thought was familiar and completely transform it, to reveal aspects you never imagined were there. And that’s just when it’s really bad.

For a lot of viewers in their thirties Bohemian Rhapsody was just this kind of Alice in Wonderland experience. There, once you’d got past the rather interesting recollections of the Sydney Push, the Emo Malley affair, Kenneth Hilder and so on, were some familiar figures: academic and newspaper columnist McKenzie Wark, writer and critic Catherine Lamby, Justine Etter and Edward Berridge. All in their thirties, bohemian, and they don’t care who knows it. All telling us what inner-city thrillings life is like these days. Travis has recognised it. And worse, some of us are getting tired of having the usual suspects enlist us to their corner and the might of—I’m referring to people who do not know nor have they ever known the lyrics to The Brady Bunch theme song—Don’t want to talk to us any more, bound up with the inanities of 70s TV culture, or with inventing slogans rather than having opinions. There’s no time for too. I’m too old for our postmodern élite to be political.

Let me coin an easy slogan (why should I miss out?) and say that 1997 has been the year of generationism. It’s been the year in which people in their late twenties/early thirties, broadly involved in the cultural appropriation and reappropriation that hit back at what they perceive to be cultural gatekeeping by an entrenched older generation which won’t let go of the reins. This has provoked a great deal of debate, some of it productive. I don’t need to go into the merits and demerits of the debate to point to two of the deep ironies it has produced. First, the commentators in their 40s and 50s who have been on the attack have been bought by writing from the security of their newspaper columns to say that of course there isn’t an older generation of cultural gatekeepers. And secondly, a small group of younger commentators have promptly grumbled that someone is talking rubbish when they pointed out that young people don’t have a voice.

And secondly, a small group which ever gets consulted in these matters, and this group is working so busily to entrench a position and then asking the world (or the ABC, at least) to believe that this is what we are all thinking.

So McKenzie Wark comments, “We didn’t have Vietnam, we had Countdown”. It’s a cutesy cliched little statement, this: it’s catchy, it’s memorable, it has a little bit of bathos; it’s got politics, it’s got popular culture, and it’s a bit dainty.

In fact, the only problem that I can see with this statement as a representation of my generation is that it is complete crap. It is based on a false opposition (wouldn’t it be possible to have both?), and it is too beautifully glib to cover whatever possible experience. Until I was about seven years old (in 1970), I believed that every Saturday night was the这不是 my first column for RealTime which began with a report on what was going on in Vietnam, before it moved on to other events. Going on anti-war protests seemed to be the only thing you just did. But the point is not to generalise from my experience; I grew up in a very specific moment, that of the politically policed urban middle-class of Dunstan-era Adelaide. It was a privileged life, in many ways, one in which people were allowed to get righteous about things like Vietnam. Others, no doubt, whose lives were less comfortable than Adelaide was in those days had other struggles to focus on and were indifferent to Vietnam. This, surely, is the point, is that I am saying not because my experience isn’t represented in Wark’s statement, but because you can’t represent a generational experience with one vacuous slogan—however cool it makes you sound when you mouth it in a bar on TV. When you make these kinds of slogans and assertions, you have to make them weighty by claiming to speak for a majority. If you went round saying “I didn’t have Vietnam, I had Countdown”, for example, you would run the risk of being thought a shit dumby, even a cultural commentator, but as a rather tiresome nerd. Simply by adopting a consensual “we”, you are deifying the audience, making the audience the centre of culture. If this is the case, the expression occurs in the dissolving of boundaries. Women on the Verge of New Technology; Event Director, Colleen Cruise with Cinematrix and FTI; November 20-December 14, 1997. http://www.imags.com.au/VOV

Red Rossiter teaches in the Department of Media Studies, Edith Cowan University.
Report

Radical re-coding

Cathy Cleland reports on the ANAT-Performance Space Code Red

Code Red was the third in a series of Australian Network for Art and Technology initiated events over the past few years bringing international new media artists and theorists to Australia to engage with Australian practitioners and theorists. The previous initiatives, Vingemnisse 1 & 2, curated by Francesca da Rimini, played on the metaphor of viral infection and replication, with international guests, Graham Harwood, Matt Fuller and E. "Gomma" Guaneri, spreading their own strain of subversive politicalised commentary on new media culture and production and finding willing hosts and co-conspirators in the Australian new media community.

Building on the successes of these earlier events, Code Red, curated by Juliane Pierce, brought together an impressive lineup of international and Australian-based theorists and artists to interrogate and critique contemporary information culture. Following the theme suggested by its title, Code Red acted as a time and place to call for a major change in the Australian new media arts community drawing attention to the growing commercialisation and state/corporate control of contemporary media and information culture as well as suggesting strategies for intervention and resistance. It is only possible to give a small taste of the important contributions and engaging strategies for intervention and resistance presented during this event.

Cleland begins her piece "Strategies for Media Activism", Geert Lovink (Netherlands) outlined his personal commitment to "cyber pragmatism and activism" in the face of an international climate of increasing media monopolies, surveillance and censorship. "New media is a dirty business, full of traps and seductive offers to work for 'the other side'," he cautioned, suggesting that artists and activists need to develop and defend spaces on the internet which are independent of both state and commercial interests. By way of example he discussed the practice of a number of autonomous organisations in Europe which are working to promote access to and critique of new media.

Jeffrey Cook (Australia) also spoke of the need for technosactivism and in particular the importance of a critical art practice in maintaining "a radical position in the homogenous soup of mainstream media and information". The imminent prospect of webTV threatens to undermine the most positive and productive feature of the internet, its facilitation of many-to-many communication with active participation by users to a dumbed down world of endless re-runs of sitcoms, commercials and infotainment. Free speech and expression of ideas on the internet are also under threat in Australia from a proposed web rating system that would require ISPs to ensure that all the websites they host carry a rating which will distinguish "safe" from "unsuitable" websites. This would allow browsers to lock out "unsuitable" sites leading to further marginalisation of much of the more challenging and creative content. In her presentation, "Luminous", Linda Wallace (Australia) took a pragmatic approach to the vexed questions of corporate/state funding for internet art, challenging notions that corporate money is "dirty" and state money "pure". She emphasised the fundamental importance of artists of the internet itself and "having the space and time and funds to create it". She drew on her own experience of working in either the state or corporate sector and performing the difficult juggling act of "taking the funds but still having the space to speak freely".

The final two presentations were by artists. Australian new media artist Brad Miller's "Art in the Age of Collaboration" discussed and advocated the collaborative art practice that is a feature of much new media work such as Miller's own collaboration with theorist McKenzie Wark in the production of the CD-ROM Planet of Noise. In "The Production of Visibility", Cornelia Solfrank (Germany) described strategies for parodying and subverting the power structures and advertising images of the media, business and public authorities. Using a technique of "over-coding", she takes already existing media images from advertising and promotional material (a technique she calls "ready-aesthetics") and subjects them to a process of "concept-hacking" to make visible their latent power-strategies. Cornelia is also a founding member of the German new media performance group Kien who use similar techniques and have successfully infiltrated European computer fairs posing as trade fair assistants handing out "unconvential" computer applications.

In addition to the main conference, Code Red included a number of artist projects and presentations in The Performance Space gallery. Visiting from Slovenia, Marko Peljhan’s exhibition and performance piece 178 EAST—ANOTHER OCEAN REGION was the culmination of a two week residency at The Performance Space researching Australian telecommunication laws and using satellite technology to intercept transmissions in the radio space above Australia. Part of this research resulted in a guest appearance by Adam Cobb (Visiting Research Fellow, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, ANU, Canberra) and the drafting of a satellite dish onto the roof of the Performance Space. Marko's performance elicited audience complicity as participants were required to sign a confidentiality agreement stating they would not seek to record or disclose any of the intercepted material they were viewing on screen.

Also dealing with themes of surveillance and privacy was Australia-based Zina Kaye’s (Humbopowered Minded) Psychic Rumble Part 2 which recorded and broadcast over the internet ambient sounds and mutated snatches of conversation from The Performance Space gallery. Another event taking place in the gallery on the day of the conference was an on-line performance The Word: The Wall directed by Ann Morrison exploring the anarchic lives and environments of three virtual characters. One of the most productive and useful features of Code Red was its facilitation of on-going debate and discussion between conference delegates and participants. Issues raised in the conference itself were followed up on subsequent days with two roundtables. The first (led by Geert Lovink and Australian media theorist McKenzie Wark) focussed on new media theory and strategies for communication and criticism of the secular society, mainly Cornelia Solfrank and Juliane Pierce discussed cyberfeminist practice and the creation of an alternative information culture, issues that were the focus of the First Cyberfeminist International held during last year’s Documenta X in Kassel. A Code Red outcome of particular interest to the Australian new media community is the creation of a new Australian/Asia Pacific email mailing list. The list recode@autonomous.org (System X) with support from ANAT and will be a site for critical commentary and debate by practitioners and critics on contemporary new media, online and digital culture as well as providing an outlet for publishing material online. Those interested in subscribing to the list or who want more information should contact the list moderator: owner-recode@autonomous.org

Code Red was a project of the Australian Network for Art and Technology and The Performance Space curated by Juliane Pierce with support from the New Media Arts Fund of the Australia Council, the Goethe Institut, ABC Radio and the Arts Law Centre of Australia.

Kathy Cleland is a Sydney-based curator.

Review

Virtual empire

Diana Klaosen reports on a public multimedia event across Tasmania

Empire State was an enterprising multimedia event staged in December across Tasmania (Launceston, Burnie and Queenstown). A production group dedicated to making electronic media more widely accessible. The Hobart-based artists in this collective are mostly recent graduates of the School of Art in Hobart and have experience across media such as video, film, photography and computer-generated image-making.

Matt Warren is a member of one of Hobart's more successful alternative bands. Mixed-media artist Sally Rees is probably best known for her anthropomorphic sculptures. Sean Bacon is a photographer and video artist. The work of Tim Stone and Sarah Cameron includes painting, video and computer-generated image-making. With its intriguing 'space-race' retro logo and promotional material, and its combination of video, light-works, internet, soundscape and large-scale light projections, Empire State is an ambitious collaboration. At each of its sites, large-scale projections from sources including the work of local artists and schoolchildren, were screened onto the exteriors of local landmark buildings. The installation incorporated a light show and was given an aural dimension by the inclusion of contemporary recorded music. In Queenstown, music by Annette Van Bethlen and Karen Burgess sang on a phone link-up amplified to the audience.

The project was not presented in Hobart, but its closing in Queenstown (a mining town on the remote west coast) was relayed to Hobart via a live internet broadcast set up at CAST, coinciding with the opening of CAST's inaugural Member's Exhibition and so ensuring a real-time opening.

The whole performance took two hours and created a festive atmosphere. In the previous year, Empire State had never previously experienced any experimental or performance art. It was advertised that "beneath the movement" was presented in regions which have too few opportunities to host major arts events and exhibitions, even those of the more conventional variety.

Empire Studios, Empire State, Launceston, Burnie, Queenstown; December 4-12, 1997
The Australia Ensemble, formerly known as the Australia Ensemble, is internationally recognised as one of Australia's finest chamber jazz and improvised music ensembles. Since its conception in 1973, it has been at the forefront of the development of the jazz and improvised music scene in Australia. Its repertoire includes compositions by leading Australian and international composers, as well as the works of Australian and international composers.

Sydney Opera House is another major performing arts venue in Sydney, with a diverse range of events and exhibitions. It is considered one of the most iconic buildings in the world, and a major tourist attraction. The Opera House celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2019, commemorating its legacy as a cultural and architectural landmark. It is a venue for a wide range of events, including operas, ballets, concerts, and conferences.

The Bell Shakespeare Company is a dynamic young theatre company presenting contemporary readings of the works of Shakespeare. In 1997, it presented its first production, "Richard III", and has continued to present a diverse range of Shakespearean works. The company is based in Sydney and has toured extensively to regional and other major cities, with a focus on bringing high-quality productions to a wider audience.

Synergy Percussion, an outstanding percussion ensemble, has established itself as one of the leading groups in Australia. It is known for its innovative and artistic approach to percussion, and has performed extensively across the world. The group is based in Sydney and is committed to promoting the development of percussion music in Australia and internationally.

The Performance Space is a contemporary performance venue and cultural institution with a focus on showcasing diverse and innovative performances. It is located in Sydney and is dedicated to promoting new and emerging artists. The Performance Space has a strong commitment to cross-cultural exchange and has presented performances from around the world.
Brink Productions’ working model reflects a desire to push the boundaries of theatrical practice both in terms of form and content. Working as a small independent ensemble, the company’s artistic needs, Brink Productions innovate with new and experimental ideas, styles, and media and film projects. Their premiere presentation of Hot Clay, an exhilarating reworking of the children’s classic, was a sell-out success in Adelaide prior to its highly acclaimed season in Sydney and the launch of the Brink Film. “Not so much deconstruction as...it’s the intelligent deconstruction of the text. It’s a dialogue...to discuss the brink...to speak to”, (Adelaide Review, Contact: Michael Keating, 346 Hutton Street, Marrickville NSW 2204)

Kate Champion is a dance-choreographer, performer and arts manager who has been involved in several major projects that have transformed the way dance is presented in Australia. Champion’s work often explores the relationship between dance and other art forms, such as music and visual art, to create a unique and innovative performance experience. She is known for her energetic and dynamic approach to choreography, and her ability to engage with audiences of diverse backgrounds.

The Flying Fruity Circus features children in the production, which reflects the company's commitment to providing diverse and inclusive performances.

Kate Champion is also involved in several projects that focus on creating employment opportunities for artists. Contact: Jill Berry, Manager, The Bell, 11612 9969 2111 Fx 612 9969 9405

Freeswheels Theatre Company has developed a strong reputation for creating highly relevant theatre with young people as its mission. The company works to gain more general audiences from its base in the Australian Capital Territory through a series of projects. In 1995, the company commissioned Nick Kirk’s A story of the Clouds, a play based on the experiences of young people with disabilities and the equally successful film Blacklock.

“Machine for Making Sense” is one of the most distinctive musical ensembles in Australia. They have a unique approach to creating new works and exploring the parameters of sense. The Machine’s synthesis of poetic and chaos has evolved through international collaborations and the use of a wide range of instruments. The ensemble is a group that is constantly evolving and experimenting with new sounds and compositions.

Sidetrack Performance Group works from its base in Marrickville, one of Australia’s most culturally diverse localities. Founded in 1996, the group is based at the Artspace building which is a major cultural hub in the area. They have been involved in several major projects that have transformed the way theatre is presented in the area. Contact: Neil Hunt, General Manager, Theatre of Image 4 Clifton Reserve, Surry Hills NSW 2206 Tel 612 9360 4734 Fax 612 9360 6256

Kate Champion is also involved in several projects that focus on creating employment opportunities for artists. Contact: Jill Berry, Manager, The Bell, 11612 9969 2111 Fx 612 9969 9405

Company B Belvoir St Theatre produces contemporary and experimental work. Their productions are often thought-provoking and in-depth, with a focus on new writing and works by established and emerging artists.

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Sydney Improvised Music Association’s success has been the promotion of contemporary jazz in Sydney. They have nurtured new talent and provided opportunities for dancers and designers who are offered space to create in the form of the Sydney Improvised Jazz Festival. The festival has included a range of events, from concerts and workshops to performances and commissions. The company’s work has been supported by a number of organisations, including the Sydney Improvised Music Association and the Australian government.

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NSW artists at the 1998 Australian performing arts market

_Bangarra Dance Theatre_ has developed a dance language which fuses aspects of traditional Indigenous dance and song with contemporary movement. Bangarra performed its first work _Praying Mantis Dreaming_ in 1992 followed by _Nimbi_ in 1994 and the immensely successful _Ochres_ in 1995. The company has toured extensively throughout Australia and internationally. Their most recent work, _Fish_ which premiered at the Edinburgh Festival in 1997 and in Australia for the 1997 Festival of the Dreaming. The uniqueness of Bangarra's work lies in its hybridity. The traditional songs and dance featured and adapted in the choreography of Stephen Page and the music of David Page come from the cultural library of the Munyanyurra clan from the Yirrkala community in Arnhemland. Dja 'kujarra

**Tyler Coppin** is a respected actor and the writer of _Lyrebird: Tales of Helpmann_ which he performs at the 1998 Adelaide Festival. This is not just another stage biography but bends and twists incidents from the life of Sir Robert Helpmann into an historical-entertainment. "Quintessentially Australian, very, very funny and also a great testimony to one of Australia's most remarkable and eccentric artists" (Robyn Archer). The production will transfer to the Railway Street Theatre in Sydney and in April to the Riverina Theatre Company with further touring in the planning stages.

Contact: Christine Dunstan Productions Pty Ltd, 118 Trafalgar Street, Annadale NSW 2038
Tel 61 2 9552 3648 Fx 61 2 9552 1309

erth—environmentally recycled theatre combine a manically energetic performance style with giant puppets, stilts and pyrotechnics. They began as a youth arts company in Ballarat and moved to Sydney to work on the 1994 Sydney Festival, recreating the Kelly gang as giant pyrotechnic stilts puppets in Nigel Jamieson's _The Story of the Fighting Kellys_.

**Deborah Leiser** is a performer with a strong interest in physical theatre. She trained in dance, corporeal mime and performance techniques and is a teacher of movement and the Tadashi Suzuki Method. Her solo performance _Hungry_ is a controversial work based on the performer's experience of growing up female and Jewish. The daughter of a Holocaust survivor, Leiser has created a performance set inside and around a gigantic Torah, the holy scroll that contains the laws for Jewish conduct—a scroll that women are forbidden to touch. Musical score by Elena Kaz-Chernin with charting by Australia's only female cantor, Janice Cohen, and images by computer artist Michael Sturm, design by Tim Moore. "Frolicous theatre of artistry and intellect." (_Sun Herald_). Hungry will be performed at the 1998 Adelaide Festival of Arts.

Contact: Performing Lines, Suite 62/4 Chalmers Street, Redfern NSW 2016, Tel 61 2 9318 2186, perfl etreeau.com.au

**MARA! Music** specialises in cross-cultural fusion with an Australian flavour. Originally a folk/jazz ensemble performing Anglo/Celtic domestic, global and futuristic, REM has performed throughout Australia and internationally in the UK, NZ, USA, Fiji, Korea, Singapore. "It's richly textured theatre: an integration of gesture, movement and image; of simple, powerful language, of lighting that creates focus and establishes atmosphere; and music, sometimes melodic, often strange, raw and compelling." (_Sun Herald_). Repertoire includes: Grasshopper's journey, a pop myth produced in conjunction with Sozow Arts Centre and Sydney Opera House; a number of works woven from Dreamtime stories and mythologies of the Pacific islands such as _The Story of the Fighting Kellys_, _Buranda_ and _The Kookaburra Who Stole the Moon_ which recently completed successful seasons in the UK. During 1998 the company will work with Aboriginal performers Maureen Watson, Mark Atkins and Tanya Ellis in _Arthurs Creek_. They have also recently toured internationally in _Tales of Helpmann_ recreating the Kelly gang as giant pyrotechnic stilts puppets in Neil Jamieson's _Praying Mantis Dreaming_ and _Oceanus_ in conjunction with_Soizow_ Centre Paddington, Sydney. The company has toured extensively throughout Australia and internationally. Their most recent work, _Fish_ which premiered at the Edinburgh Festival in 1997 and in Australia for the 1997 Festival of the Dreaming. The uniqueness of Bangarra's work lies in its hybridity. The traditional songs and dance featured and adapted in the choreography of Stephen Page and the music of David Page come from the cultural library of the Munyanyurra clan from the Yirrkala community in Arnhemland. Dja 'kujarra

**NSW moveable ARTS**

NSW artists at the 1998 Adelaide Festival

**Tyler Coppin** see above

Nikki Heywood see above

Deborah Leiser see above

The opera Project see above

Leah Purcell see above

Stalker Theatre Company see above

**The Song Company** see above

RealTime is Australia's leading contemporary arts commentator; appearing in print, on-line and live. Now in its fourth year and with a team of perceptive and idiosyncratic writers, many of them practising artists, RealTime appears bi-monthly as a 44 page free street paper, ranging across the arts with attention to innovation, hybrid forms and, in its OnScreen supplement, film and new media arts. RealTime also appears on-line via its website, and live at arts festivals. At the 1996 Adelaide Festival four editions of RealTime were produced responding directly to the Festival's program.
Michael Kieran Harvey is regarded as one of Australia's finest pianists. He enjoys a busy international touring and recording schedule, appearing at theatres and sold-out houses internationally, Poland, Spain and the USA. In 1993 he won the prestigious Ivo Pogorelich International Piano Competition, Canada. The tour which followed from Australia composers and is involved in collaborative performances with many leading performers, including the percussion ensemble Synergy. His two compact disc recordings, Michael Kieran Harvey and Impression of Australia reveal Harvey's interest in 19th and 20th Century piano music. Contact: Louise Godwin, Music & Management Promotions, 6 Smith Street, Richmond VIC 3121 Tel 61 3 9427 9012

The operetta is a collaborative forum of experienced Australian artists from the fields of music, dance and performance under the artistic direction of Nigel Kelloway and Rossen Serosier. Its project is to create a new operetta in a traditional form but rather to create innovative works of contemporary style and alternative 'operatic' expression. Repertoire includes This Most Wicked Body which will be premiered by the Canberra cabaret work Choux Bouquet, Operetta Collaborations and an operetta for Australia's bicentennial year, an exploration of the inherent eroticism of the voice and its relationship to the body. Composed by Richard John Adams.) French Nuits D'ete: "Informed, provocative, funny, oozing with exquisite music and unorthodox sensuality." (Sydney Morning Herald, 1995)

Leah Purcell is a performer, singer and actress. She was born in 1979 in an Aboriginal family in regional South Australia. Contact: Performing Lines, Suite 6/245 Chalmer Street Redfern NSW 2016 Tel 61 2 9316 2186 perfin@perfin.com.au

Legs on the Wall is one of Australia's leading physical performance companies. They are known for their distinctive approach to dance, acrobatics, dance, aerial and circus skills in narrative frameworks. The company creates works for all age groups, from the very young to the very old, and for specific spectacles and street performances. They have toured extensively in Australia and to South America, UK and Germany where they have been invited to showcase their work in shows in repertoires—All of Me, Cleanance, Expendable, Temptation and their most recent work, Under the Influence, Commissioned by the Sydney Dance Company. The five highly skilled performers collaborate with a variety of directors, writers, choreographers and technical creatives on projects and special projects. "Just extraordinary...gravity-defying spectacle that combines physical comedy in a Saint-Saëns, Catal選i and Dvorak.

From the Ministry

This directory offers a sample of the performing arts companies in New South Wales which are available for performance in Australia. The companies are well known for their work in the performing arts and are currently active in the industry. Contact information is provided for each company, along with a brief description of their work and achievements. The directory is intended to be a resource for arts professionals, educators, and anyone interested in exploring the performing arts in New South Wales.
The relativity of visible things

A three-screen film-performance by the Cantrills about Bali and Java at La Mama, engages Anna Dzensis

In the past artists represented things they had seen on earth, things they liked seeing or might have liked to see. Today they reveal the relativity of visible things: they express their belief that the visible is only an isolated aspect of the universe as a whole, and that other, invisible truths are the overriding factors. Things appear to assume a broader and more diversified meaning, often seeming to contradict the rational experience of yesterday. The artist strives to express the essential character of the accidental.

Paul Klee in Felix Klee, Paul Klee, George Braziller Inc. 1962.

The Bermused Tourist is the ninth film-performance work the Cantrills have presented at La Mama since 1977. Previous work includes their meditation on Baldwin Spencer, Edges of Meaning: works dealing with the intersection of Place of Vision and Passage; as well as Corinne Cantrill's deeply moving and evocative autobiographical, Leaping Through A Face, later to become In This Life's Body. More recent works have included The Berlin Apartment and How Sucked--On The Beginning and End of Cinema.

The Bermused Tourist is one of the most recent projects. It is the career of a couple who have been working as filmmakers since 1960. From 1990 to 1994 Arthur and Corinne Cantrill travelled, as tourists, extensively in Bali and Java, using a Super-8 camera to trace the contours and outlines of a landscape, documents the rich and diverse cultural activity. They recorded the stories in the faces of countless people as they worked and played, and also, precisely because they filmed so incessantly and compulsively, charted the changes in this part of the world over a time. A selection of these films was projected singularly and simultaneously onto three screens strategically positioned along one wall in La Mama. By using multiple screens the telling of stories goes beyond simple facts. Conventional images along one wall in La Mama. By using

Just as important is the screening of every filmmaker of the Year Award of $5000. The Awards and in encouraging work and genres that is important in the mainstream program.

KG Are the Awards regarded as significant by the local film and video industry?

RS Eight hundred attended last year’s opening, if that’s any indication, and we got excellent press. There was solid attendance at the workshops and forums which I see as an attempt to demystifying the industry for emerging filmmakers.

KG Are feature films part of the Awards program?

RS There are only a few feature films slated for production in 1998 and only one, I think, coming out of 1997 and yet to be shown, so it’s not the right moment for them even though they are given a place at the forums. It’s the documentary screenings that are really well attended and it’s the range of work and genres that is important in the Awards, in supporting established filmmakers and developing younger ones.

The 12th Annual WA Screen Awards, presented by the Film & Television Institute (WA), February 27 - March 2. Enquiries 09 3935 1055.
The aniconic and digital image

Heather Barton rethinks the spiritual and soft space in Malaysian New Media Arts at the First National Electronic Art Exhibition

There is, it might be argued, a kind of "techno-orientalism" surrounding new technologies when thinking the machine, soft space and the digital in the west: a pairing of high end technology with Asia in the western imaginary, if you will, ever so empirically inaccurate.

It gives rise to a ponderous situation where westerners operate with a technology and therefore a thinking which they do not 'own'. When using new imaging technologies in the visual arts of the modernist Greenbergian axiom around form and content and a Benjaminian assertion regarding the complex form of training imposed by modern technology can be indulged—what results is a kind of 'blank canvas' at the heart of thinking the digital image.

It was in this light that encountering the First National Electronic Art Exhibition at the Malaysian National Gallery in Kuala Lumpur raised particular considerations. It granted the license to think speculatively for a moment, one might wonder if the aniconic formulation of the image particularly in traditional Muslim art as it influences contemporary artists working with multi-media technology in Malaysia, does not somehow afford the greater propriety towards the digital image (if this is not to engage in a kind of techno-orientalism itself of another order).

The confounding of historical concepts of representation and analogy in western philosophies of the image are well documented in relation to the digital image (Binkley, T "The Digital Dilemma", Lexarindri, Supplemental Issue, Pergamon Press, Japan, 1997). What marks eastern philosophies of the image, particularly within the Islamic tradition, is the aniconic as opposed to iconic relation to the image that exists in the west. The aniconic are those images and symbols related to realities other than the non-figurative or non-representational.

Within Islam, Allah is inexpressible therefore non-representational. "No vision can grasp Him..." (Quran, [Koran], 6:103). The spiritual order determines the aesthetic-figural order. Songket weaving techniques exercised in calligraphy, illumination, geometric pattern and arabesque form the foundations for a tradition where the artwork in fact functions as a 'cosmogram'. Only art does the aniconic concept of art in Islam make for an art practice arguably predisposed to this knowledge and use of the digital image—"knowledge and use" here in the Deleuzian sense of 'savior' which is an ability to make active, "a knowledge by description", "a competence to produce" rather than reproduce (Deleuze, G, Negotiations, Columbia University Press, USA, 1995). But the "cosmogrammatical" nature of the art when applied to the digital image overcomes criticism often raised in relation to the electronic image in the west that it is slick, glossy, dazzling, decorative, all surface and therefore superficial.

Surface ornamentation is the core of spiritualising enhancement, not a superficial addition in the Islamic concept of the artwork. This is not to add foreign elements to the shape of the object but to bring forth its potential, enobling the object. "Through ornamentation the veil that hides its spiritual and divine qualities is lifted." (Eea, S Art and Spirituality, National Art Gallery, Malaysia, 1995) In Islam, beauty is a divine quality, God is beautiful and loves beauty. Beauty in art is that which generates the sense of God. Since beauty is a divine quality its expression has to be made without showing subjective individualistic inspiration. There is therefore no distinction between the material and spiritual planes. In creating beauty the artist is engaged in a process of spiritual alchemy and in doing so the soul of the artist undergoes a process of spiritual cleansing. This raises some very different notions around the artwork than those generated in the west around questions of abstraction, the sublime and the beautiful.

This is also not to say that the works exhibited during the First Electronic Art Exhibition in Kuala Lumpur were traditional in terms of technique or concepts. Far from it. The works that drew upon traditional methods or concepts did so with a rigorous critical distance and engagement. Nor were the traditional methods and form that were used and conceptual frameworks employed exclusively Muslim. Hindu, Taoist, animist and Christian traditions and metaphysics also come into play in Malaysian culture. But most contemporary artists in Malaysia have trained under a western art history syllabus with the majority, it seems, completing graduate degrees in the west. So there is certainly an engagement with western art history and art markets but often put to work in situations of hybridity. It is in this manner. Mohd Nazir Bin Baharudin's four monitor video floor piece, for instance, works precisely in this manner. It encourages a deceptively pious response, although for a westerner one is even less sure why. The viewer is ceremoniously positioned by the work—submitting to its lure, sitting submissively at its feet, as it were, encircled by silent monitors across the soft opaque screen of which, runs a fluid arabic calligraphic script. The effect is mesmeric and contemplative. However as the artist, who is also the curator at Gallery Shah Alam, points out to a Muslim observer there would be questions as to why the monitors containing sacred script have been placed on the floor, indicating a lack of reverence. The script, however, is not from the Qur'an but Jewish, and arabic script spoken in Bahasa Malaysian (which is also written in a roman script) and which in fact many Malay Muslims do not even read themselves. And the text, far from being the word of god is everyday diary extracts.

Baharudin's trick is a gentle one and works along side the temporal enquiries of the work, which are figured so that the piece never 'begins' as such. An allusion perhaps to the 'awan larat' (arabesque), a pattern so interconnected that it is impossible to trace the beginning of each motif. Within the installation the viewer is placed in one physical position but one which triggers many different and simultaneous readings of the position. The space in the midst of the monitors is also the space of the traditional cross-legged village story-teller, but the 'audience' of monitors tell story fragments that becomes the viewer's, the 'centre' of the piece's own, confusing the places of teller, told and tale.

Hasnul Jamal Saldan's CD-ROM work, Ong (slang for 'hot streak'), from his solo show Hypertevez, was shown along with his I'm trying to Locate, a video-projected, corner piece that creates the optical illusion of a three dimensional space out of a flat wall. The black and white piece uses Chinese pictograms, English and Bahasa scripts over a textured electronic wave, a developing traditional Songket. Textiles, historically have a sacred and ceremonial function as does calligraphic script which is said to be "the divinely written pre-eternal word which brings the faithful into immediate contact with the Divine Eternal Writer of fate and from there even profane writing has inherited a certain sanctity." (Islamic Calligraphy, Leiden 1970) This work and others exhibited, either overtly concerned, less or so not at all, with contemporary interpretations of traditional Malaysian cultural forms, never dip into parochialism. The works could function in the context of any international gallery in addressing the medium to be read side along works by Gary Hill, Mary-Jo La Fontaine or Eder Santoro.

Hasnul, who also heads the Fine Arts Programme at the University of Malaysia, Sarawak, curated the exhibition with Niranjan Rajah whose on-line work The Failure of Marcel Duchamp/ Japanese Fetish Event is available on http://www.su.hg-leipzig.de/auterdfall/
The piece is a parody of Duchamp's Estant Donnes which, in Rajah's words, interrogates the ontological and metaphysical, while marking the problem of cultural constituencies on the internet.

The first new media art exhibition in the country might wonder if the aniconic formulation of the image particularly in traditional Muslim art as it influences contemporary artists working with multi-media technology in Malaysia, does not somehow afford the greater propriety towards the digital image (if this is not to engage in a kind of techno-orientalism itself of another order).
Quer Screen, in association with the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, presents this year's Mardi Gras Film Festival from February 11-22 at the Pitt Centre and the Village Roxys Parramatta. The Festival includes a range of features, documentaries and special events.

Melissa Lee's documentary Mary's Place examines homophobic violence by looking at the Mary's Place Project, a community run project which responds to the many violent attacks on gays and lesbians in Sydney's Darlinghurst. The name comes from a lane in Darlinghurst: originally called Floods Lane; it was renamed in recognition of a woman who was bashed and raped there in a homophobic attack.

Canadian filmmaker Margaret Westcott explores three centuries of gay life as she weaves together lesbian history and cultural life in Amsterdam, Paris, Berlin, Montreal, Vancouver, New York and San Francisco in Stolen Moments. The film, narrated by Kate Nelligan, chronicles the "buried" stories of lesbian culture, with insights on sexual politics, feminism and life from writers such as Leslie Feinberg, Nicole Brossard and Audre Lorde. Witches and Faggots, Dykes and Poets, directed by The One in Seven Collective, captures a seminal moment in Australian gay culture, a gay liberation protest march on June 24, 1978, the first Gay Mardi Gras in Sydney, in which police clashed with marchers. The film takes a look at the oppression of homosexuals throughout history beginning with the Middle Ages, when social and sexual 'deviants' were burnt at the stake. It also examines more contemporary oppression, such as the illegal and provocative anti-gay behaviour of the New South Wales police force and the response of the gay community. From the US comes Pride directed by Paris Poitier. This doco explores how homosexual men and women have joined forces against homophobia, yet have been divided over issues around sexism in the gay pride movement.

In a special festival event, patrons will have the opportunity to meet the cast and crew of Buck House at the world premiere of the first gay and lesbian sitcom created by gays and lesbians. The first four episodes of the sitcom, directed by Brett Harrison of Quer Vision, will be screened at the Festival. Buck House can also be seen on the web from late February at www.quervision.com.au

Keith Howe, gay television historian, will introduce a special presentation of It's Our ABC Too which charts the way the national broadcaster has covered gay related issues and depicted gay and lesbian characters throughout its broadcasting history. Through an analysis of gay icons like Molly Meldrum and Kylie Minogue, the ABC's coverage of the AIDS debate, telecasts of the Mardi Gras and the depiction of gay characters like Dr. Martin Rice in GP, Howe explores how the ABC has reflected the moods and demands of the heterosexual and homosexual audiences.

This year's Festival is also strong on features. It includes Alain Berliner's Ma Vie en Rose (winner of Best Foreign Film at the recent Golden Globes) which tells the story of the cross-dressing seven-year old Ludovic. Sara Moore's Homo Heights features comedian Lea DeLaria and queer icon Quentin Crisp in their first leading roles in a feature film. Sean Matthias' feature film debut Bert is an adaptation of Martin Sherman's play of the same name. Set in the midst of Hitler's wartime oppression of gays, it focuses on a gay man trying to pass as straight in the Nazi concentration camp at Dachau (the Broadway version starred Richard Gere). Bert features Lothaire Bluteau (Orlando, Jesus of Montreal, Black Robe), Mick Jagger (as a transvestite club owner) and, as a storm trooper, Jude Law (the Bosie of the recent film, Wilde).

For further information please call 02 9332 4938 or check info@queerscreen.com.au

Andrew Tasakos and Mark Finlay in Crocodile Tears

Chris Bannion

Quer Screen's 1998 programming looks intriguing and potent, especially on the documentary front.

Preview

What's on in the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Film Festival?

Quer Screen's 1998 programming looks intriguing and potent, especially on the documentary front.

Newsreel

Million dollar movies announced by the ACF and SBS

Fresh Air: an experimental comedy from writer/director Neil Marshall and producer Rosemary Gough, has been announced as the first of Five Million Movies. Million 5 Movies is a joint initiative of the Australian Film Commission and SBS Independent in association with Beyond Films, the Premium Movie Partnership and UK Channel 4. Five films will be made under the initiative, each with a budget of $1 million.

Fresh Air, written by Neil Marshall over six years, was supported in the first round of the Australian Film Commission's New Screenwriters Scheme which gives opportunities to new writers, Bill Bennett acted as Neil's mentor under the Scheme and will remain on the production's production line. Fresh Air will commence production in March 1998.

www.queerscreen.net.au

Australia's first and only national online directory for digital screen art on the web has been launched—screeners, developed by the Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT) in association with the Media Resource Centre and Sydney Intermedia Network. screeners provides a central point of access to the digital art which Australians are producing online, screeners takes the web talk to host a list of important exhibitions; such as Linda Walker's survey of Australian interactive art, alien.eyes, presented at Video Positive in the UK earlier this year, Lloyd Shaw's eye ping pong for With Flash and the ever expanding online overview of new media, object. Providing an insight into the innovative applications of the web for Australian digital screen artists, screeners is both easy to use and flexible in the hands of even the most inexperienced user. This first stage of the directory links to Australian online exhibitions, sites for a dynamic range of digital art, experimental film and video. As screeners continues to evolve, the site will archive exhibitions no longer online, allowing the directory to become a more complete and functional resource of history as well as current Australian digital screen art on the web.

Western Australian Screen Awards

The 12th annual Western Australian Screen Awards will be held at Perth's Television and Film Institute from February 27 until March 2. The awards will feature a three day festival component, exhibiting all works produced in the state during 1997. Prizes will be issued in a diverse range of categories from animation to documentary and drama genres. For further information contact Peter Kastelich on Richard Szweda on 08 9355 1055 or a-mail to info@walfa.com.au.

Global TV decision-makers come to the West

Western Australia will host some of television's most influential program buyers and makers from around the world at the Third Annual Big Picture TV Conference. The conference will investigate topics from youth to new sources of finance, making co-productions work, multimedia success stories, and the potential of Pay TV. As well, $500,000 worth of development money will go to the winner of the Big Pitch, a public contest for documentary makers to impress producers and distributors with an idea for a potential Australian/Canadian co-production. For more information contact Rebecca Reid at Greenlight on 08 9382 2500.

Australian films at Clermont

Five Australian films screened at the Clermont Ferrand Short Film Festival, held in France from January 23-31. The films were SKID directed by Bruce Young, 100% BITT directed by Kim Stevens, Shared Affair, directed by Cameron Ray, and The Two-Wheeled Time Machine directed by David Lowe.

Cafe Provincial Comedy Film Festival

The fourth annual Cafe Provincial Comedy Film Festival will be held in Fitzroy on Sunday April 5. Films must be no longer than 10 minutes and stand to win cash and in-kind prizes to the value of $2000. For more information contact Danielle Johnston on 08 9416 0122. Deadline for entries March 6.

Quer Screen

Quer Screen presents the 1998 Mardi Gras Film Festival, showcasing the newest body of film production from around the world. The festival program includes a features section, as well as the My Queer Career competition and will screen at the Roxys Parramatta as well as the City Pitt Centre, February 11-22. For more information contact Marline Williams on 02 9391 3165. For program see above.

Nothing moral about moral rights

Legislation There is continuing outrage amongst screeners over the proposed moral rights legislation, which they say will serve only the commercial interests of producers, and argue that such legislation will mean that Australian stories will ultimately rest in the hands of foreign distributors, for more information contact Virginia Gordon at the Australian Writers Guild on 02 9899 5515.

SINvention: Constructing the Amorphous: artist's talk by Horst Kiechle

Kiechle is a computer artist whose "...decayed web diagrams...can, despite appearances, be built." (Architectural-Australian Architects' April 1997) Complementing his installation at the Darren Knight Gallery in Waterloo (ends February 21), Sydney Intermedia Network and Powerhouse Museum are pleased to present this opportunity to further explore Kiechle's remarkable virtual and actual environmental geometries. Based on projects realized during the past three years, the artist will present an overview of what is possible in the area of CAD (Computer Aided Design), computer animation, Virtual Reality display options, and Automated Manufacturing. The main focus, however, will be on VRML, the 3D equivalent to text and image browsing through the World Wide Web. Constructing the Amorphous, Sunday February 22, 2pm, Target Theatre, Powerhouse Museum, 500 Harris St, Ultimo. Further information phone SBS (02) 9264 7225, email: info@srn.com.au.

Real Fluxus: the art of new situations

Nicholas Zurburg interviews Eric Andersen about intermedia performance

The Danish artist Eric Andersen's abbreviated biography reads: "Born 1942, London. Musician, composer and self-taught artist presenting intermedia works since the late '50s. Associated with Fluxus since 1962. Involved in participative multimedia, developing chain letters as a basis for sharing of identity, working with non-objects, random audiences and communication not conditioned by media or accepted technology. Cooperating with private enterprises and public institutions, he has established a vast number of experiments concerning non-interpersonal operations. Has produced close to 100 publications, one of them including a town".

I'd first met Andersen at a sound poetry festival in Bologna earlier this year, where he encouraged spectators to walk about with him performers. This was not exactly 'so und festival in Bologna earlier this year, involving Andersen's giant, 160 x 500cm screen print The Banner, which he'd wanted to suspend from a helicopter above Brisbane's skyline in an aerial performance. The QAG set this up. Brisbane City Council turned it down. Too risky....

NZ: Did Fluxus have a special aesthetic?

EA: No, Fluxus was essentially an international network—an internet long before the internet—linking artists envisaging intermedia art not as a production but as a process. We don't care about art. We just do our work. I think it is a desire to make constant innovation, never to rest, never to find a niche or a style or a consensus about anything. This is the intermedia perspective.

NZ: But weren't Fluxus events characterised by brevity, wit and precise scores?

EA: No, many early pieces in 62 and 63 went on for hours and were extremely boring. And many scores came after the performance and were merely a report about something we did—a way of keeping each other informed about what was going on in our heads and what we were doing, put down in a minimum of words.

NZ: weren't early Fluxus performances predominantly musical?

EA: Not really. We couldn't get into theatres and museums, but sometimes we could get a band on a concert hall. So that was why we employed a lot of musical instruments into it. If other institutions had invited us we would have been happy to do work in museums or art galleries.

NZ: Isn't Fluxus characterised by its choice of ephemeral materials?

EA: No. I can guarantee that if someone had offered us $1,000,000 to do something in marble or iron we would have done it. Intermedia can take any shape and can take any scale. It can last for seconds, or like my piece Idle Walk, it can last for years. In 1982 I invited 165 people to dinner at the Royal Palace in Copenhagen. They could choose what they ate, choose the music, and could veto two other guests, 63 people participated, and after using their collective votoes, minus 21 guests were left. According to the laws of probability this couldn't have happened—yet I had a miracle on my hands! So I asked the Palace to make this day a public holiday. This wasn't granted, so ever since I've celebrated it with an Idle Walk. Sometimes it's in Copenhagen on the right day—29th August. Sometimes on the wrong day, in the wrong city, such as Chicago, where it was presented simultaneously by four TV stations. Sometimes five or six times per year. I hope that it will go on forever.

NZ: Did you anticipate working on this cosmopolitan scale?

EA: Yes, I was convinced of that. I was based in Copenhagen but I was sure that most of my work would take place outside Denmark. It's part of being a nomad and opening up new situations. This is what is most important to me—to open up new situations.

NZ: So intermedia art is an art of new situations?

EA: Yes. Intermedia's point was to make a social circumstance, to be a social thing, where the performer and the audience interact with each other, and form this special social sphere where other rules apply than normal rules and normal social conventions. It's not a technique to produce an object or to pinpoint a situation.

NZ: Isn't Robert Wilson's intermedia art very precise in focus?

EA: I don't think that Robert Wilson is intermedia, I think that he's multimedia. Multimedia is where you take existing media—you where you take theatre or dance or visual elements or music—and fuse them together, but the elements still remain themselves. Music is still music, and dance is still dance, and theatre is still theatre. It's just people pretending something, building a fiction.

NZ: And intermedia?

EA: If you indulge yourself when you perform you lose the aspect of intermedia, and you go into a more conventional position of a poet or an actor. So you have to be very self-detached. In intermedia when you have sounds they are not music, they are sounds. And when you have visual elements they are visual elements, but they are not painting or graphics. And when you have a person acting, he is not pretending to be somebody else, he is himself or herself. So intermedia is dealing with what is actually, factually going on. It exists on the same level as daily life—it is not daily life of course, because other rules apply—but it doesn't exist outside of itself, it doesn't belong to any other kind of higher abstraction.

Nicholas Zurburg co-curated the Queensland Art Gallery's exhibition Francesco Conz and the Intermedia Avant-Garde with Anne Kirker. He is Professor of English and Cultural Studies at De Montfort University, Leicester, England.
The patron of the
seriously ephemeral

Douglas Kahn reports from Francesco Conz and the Intermedia 
Avant-garde at the Queensland Art Gallery

Francesco Conz is an artist who was born in a rich person's body and raised to do his bit to increase his family's considerable wealth. He dutifully internationalised this mission, yet there were still these other, indescribable urgings. He eventually reached the point where he could no longer hide his true feelings. It was not as though he needed to rent a garret and dance around in a beret, but he knew he could no longer hide his true feelings. He tried running a gallery but his relations with artists were still too much on a commercial footing. He wanted a factory more like Warhol's, one that would hum with artistic activity on-site, greased with wine-sodden conversation. He had started too late to be an artist in his own right (even though art history is peppered with late-starters) so he concentrated on being something of a participatory patron. He wanted a factory where he could sweep the floors.

He was not interested in being a collector who becomes wealthier through his associations with artists. Instead, he reversed his family's fortunes and directed them to a generation of artists who also became an extended family of sorts, although he talks of them in terms of, literally, being sainthood: the experimental and intermedia artists who had arrived in the late 1950s and 1960s, including those associated with Fluxus, Happenings, Concrete Poetry, Viennese Actionism, and Lettrisme. How it works is that he invites artists to place in his northern Italy, where they produce museum-quality multiples, take in the alpine air and live the life. He also takes hundreds of photographs to document the performances and other activities while they are in residence.

No matter what you may think about the life decisions of rich people, his style of patronage is definitely not patronising, and his choice of patronage has been an especially fortuitous one, for these were artists whose performances, objects and quasi-objects, with very few exceptions, could not be missed in their historical importance. Other artists in whose wake used their ideas and became bankable while they continued to live close to the bone. Make no mistake, no one is interested in this enterprise but at least some of the pressure is relieved. One of the important things Conz has done is to take some of the early works which were either ephemeral or their facts conducive to display and reproduce them with archival techniques, acid-free paper, fine craftsmanship, and in a form suited for exhibition and collection. While this provides the key attraction he also publishes the more recent works, many of which are quite remarkable and show the staying power of some of these artists. I'm thinking in particular of Dick Higgins' Africa (1988). Besides providing a source of income for the artists, Conz's publication of these multiples has the added effect of raising their profile and of advocating this generation of artists as a whole.

A large selection of these works which Conz donated to the Queensland Art Gallery forms the basis for the present exhibition Francesco Conz and the Intermedia Avant-garde. The exhibition continues to February 22 but because the works are in the permanent collection, Brisbane will now become an unlikely mecca for those interested in experimental art in the same way that people flock to Canberra to see Jackson Pollock's Blue Poles. Yet it is not merely an attraction for devotees, much of the show is very accessible, not because it fulfills the received Conditions of Art, you know, the ones that MacDonald and Auren are lost without, but because it directs itself to matters of everyday life. The intermedia avant-garde was 'multicultural' before its time (although this could be said of Paris 50 years before) and international in scope and this scope is well represented, although I wish there had been a work or two by Takehisa Koguri, one of the main players in Fluxus and more recently the musical director for the Merce Cunningham company. It was also the time when women (with the possible exception of the Russian avant-garde) became a true force within the avant-garde, a fact still lost on too many art historians, and they are well represented here with works by Alison Knowles, Yoko Ono, Carollee Schnemann, Charlotte Moorman and others. While we can question the lack of self-effacement involved whereby so many artists are flown under the flag of one individual, it is nevertheless an excellent collection bursting out with poetics, politics, refreshingly stooped humour and dry dry wit.

In keeping with the original concerns of the intermedia avant-garde, the events of the opening night and the forum on the following day consisted primarily of performances by invited artists Alison Knowles, Ben Patterson and Eric Andersen. Knowles presented an early work Newspaper Music (1961) and a more recent one Loose Pages; Andersen presented an early work Piano Piece (1961), while Patterson performed two new works, World Weather and A Simple Opera, the latter written the night before its performance during the Saturday forum. The forum also included an interview of Conz by Nicholas Zurbrugg in which Conz's infectious personality was everywhere in evidence, and a talk by myself on Pollock's influence upon Fluxus and Happenings artists in terms of noise and chance, aspects usually attributed to John Cage.

The strength of the performances ironically emphasised one of the shortcomings of the exhibition, Conz's publishing practice and, indeed, exhibition practices of galleries in general. Much of the intermedia avant-garde and experimental arts were and are performative and time-based. For instance, Fluxus was rife with musical performances and sound art pieces, many of the artists had formal musical training and most were directly influenced by Cage. The gryting choreography of Pollock and action painting in general unleashed corporeal and environmental events across a range of performative and theatrical modes. Yet the Conz's publications, his photodocumentation of the artists' activities at his property, the exhibition itself, and galleries and museums in general are predominantly silent and static affairs, which precipitate from the upper reaches of the traffic in material culture. I would suggest that the acceptance of this collection by the Queensland Art Gallery also comes with the responsibility to become a presenting institution of an expanded type, one where performances and screenings are not relegated to the opening events alone but become as permanent a feature, within reason, as the objects themselves.

Douglas Kahn is Associate Professor of Media Arts at University of Technology Sydney and author of Noise, Water, Meat: Sound, Voice and Aurality in the Arts, forthcoming, MIT Press.
Dumbing down or building bridges?

Jacqueline Millner reports on the National Art Publishing Forum: Audiences, Markets and Distribution held in Brisbane last November

A long time in the making under the stewardship of a Brisbane-based steering committee funded principally by the VACF, this forum eventually brought together some leading figures in arts publishing to discuss issues currently of concern to small arts publishers. The agenda centred around distribution, marketing, and audience development, issues which according to the organisers have to date received insufficient consideration. In two days of exchanges between some 50 or so arts publishers and small-time commercial book publishers to small funded specialist journals, old dilemmas resurfaced: do you expand the audience for the arts without dumbing down? How do you improve the sales and distribution of quality art journals which are suffering up to 35 per cent returns even on very small print runs? How do you internationalise without compromising unique local attributes? Few new issues were canvassed, although it was useful to interrogate the cyber-dichot that electronic publishing will kill the book. As is the nature of such forums, of course, no issues were resolved, and given the broad spectrum of speakers, not much common ground emerged. However, what the forum did provide was a useful insight into how ‘the other half’ lives, an opportunity to explore new strategies based on others’ experiences.

Sessions ranged from the motivational—easy to pick Maggie Hamilton’s marketing background (head of publicity, Transworld Publishing)—to the low-key, such as Ian Chanc’s step-by-step explanation of how he got to a small specialist journal, Indigenous Arts Australia, off the ground. Indeed, this schizoid swing from studious, almost reticent demeanour, to savvy selling pitch, characterised the event, with ideological differences sometimes betrayed in impatient sighs and tight smiles. While many arts publishers are able to simultaneously embrace both high-brow content and slick marketing—how, as Paul Foss from Artext put it, negotiate the transition from a culture of theory to a culture of the bigger mainstream—many divide still rules in some quarters.

Melbourne commercial gallery director Anna Schwartz and Art Monthly editor Peter Timms remain wary of the danger of dumbing down to meet bottom line imperatives. On the other hand, Maggie Hamilton and her argument that we need to build bridges through merchandising (and other techniques which might seem tacky to a purist) in order to develop audiences for the arts, met with a great deal of approval. Teenager Kevin of Bankstown, her fictional example of the type of audience the arts should be developing, had followed his dream to become a curator upon the purchase of a Monet mug, after all! Inspirational stuff! Davina Jackson (editor, Architecture Australia) is unabashedly into ‘bridge building’, vaunting the power of a gossip column to boost sales, while decrying long reviews and articles: ‘Why have chunks of text when you can have a sexy image?’...If you have a dud designer, then all your efforts are a waste of time.

Along with talk of audience development, there was much tut-tutting about the standard of arts writing in general, and in particular about the poor grasp of English grammar among emerging writers. Jackson bemoaned the deliberate obfuscation of content in tortured prose, underlining the need to write “from the grass roots up”, and urged editors to consult more closely with writers. Robert Schubert from Globe-e internet journal expressed frustration at the time and energy expended on editing new writers, while Juliana Engberg (curator MOMA, Helsinki) lamented the paucity of quality text, “some almost sub-literate”, she receives for her catalogue publications. Later, this was picked up as the need to find resources for the professional development of emerging arts writers, such as for instance providing research time and royalties for catalogue writers, a suggestion made by Michael Brand (Queensland Art Gallery). Engberg also raised the related issue of low minimum rates for arts writers, which the forum resolved to lobby against, while considering also expanded about the new policy of universities to discount writing published in non-refereed arts journals when appraising prospective job applicants.

The other dominant issue was distribution, with some small journals complaining about how poorly they were, and independent distributors countering with the suggestion that indeed more effort was needed to be made rather at the point of sale. Timms’ idea that the money skimmed from the funding of art journals to attend world fairs be put towards an independent distributor to help Australian art magazines met with the response that a better use of such funds would be to sponsor an Australian art magazine section at point of sale, say at newsagents. Some fresh marketing plays were proffered by Janet Mansfield of Ceramics: Art and Perception, a glossy which boasts American and Japanese distributors and sale in 40 countries; these included ensuring the magazine is listed in international library lists and indexes and negotiating pre-sale deals. Mansfield reiterated that selling, not distribution, is the main game, with most issues of Art and Perception sold before publication. Foss also illustrated this point with the longstanding example of the Australian art forum which has not paid the journal in 20 years. Mansfield’s presentation reflected another trend in international publishing, although this was not the case for everyone. Timms emphasised the vital importance of local infiltration, while Foss suggested that international marketing would not suit everyone, hedging his bets by arguing for the protection of the ‘democratic’ publishing scene in Australia. The need for arts publishers to engage internationally was forcefully put by Brisbane gallery David Pastorius. Offering one of the most practical suggestions on the topic of catalogues, Pastorius called for the publication of recent monographs on Australian contemporary artists, given that these are essential for recognition in major international exhibitions; without them, artists present as unprofessional beside their European counterparts; “35 millimetre slices are not enough”. Pastorius’ view was endorsed by Leon Paroissien (editor, Visual Arts and Culture Australia, London), who highlighted the Australian attachment to a sense of ‘national identity’, a style of nationalism, with European repercussions, which still vacillates between deep suspicion. For Paroissien, given the mobility of artists today, it is impossible to think of them within national boundaries, and arts publishing must follow accordingly.

Not many grand claims were made on behalf of Australian arts publishing, nationally and internationally. While many arts publishers are able to embrace both high-brow content and slick marketing—how, as Paul Foss from Artext put it, negotiate the transition from a culture of theory to a culture of the bigger mainstream—many divide still rules in some quarters.

In the Velvet Darkness, a photographic installation by the Sydney-based artist Virginia Ross, highlights the way in which visual experience is often clouded by her abiding preoccupation with themes of darkness and light. Darkness as the absence of light is simultaneously, in photographic terms, also the trace of light’s almost presence—total absence. Through a series of three separate works, Ross explores the way in which her abiding preoccupation with themes of darkness and light is ultimately dwarfed by them. Similarly the wall works accentuate each other and mirror common concerns. Yet maintain a discreteness that is slightly jarring.

Ross’s exhibition is a series of 36 seemingly identical images of a ‘1yl)ically Australian’ bush scene photographed at night. The photographs are all of a soft velvety blackness and the nature of the central gestalt normally rendered in the expense of the predictable representation of ‘page’...the wall...glows through the ·nature’ of the central gestalt normally rendered in the process. The viewer is illuminated by the ‘hidden agenda’ of Psychology’s ‘hidden agenda’ of Psychology’s “deadening down co meet bottom line imperatives (a cultivated by government policy through it funding bodies), as well as an acknowledgement of the need to look beyond both niche audiences and national borders. It is to be hoped that some of the interesting suggestions made in the session up are taken a little further, including the professional development of emerging writers, new strategies to move journals at the point of sale, and the exploration of the potential of electronic publishing.

The most beautiful exhibition in Melbourne in 1997 was *Lightness and Gravity* at the Museum of Modern Art at Heide. Not a very cool thing to say perhaps, but nonetheless true. The exhibition was exhilarating because of its unrepentant exploration of the aesthetically lovely and deeply poetic. This is not a fashionable stance—especially in installation work today, but here was beauty manifest, in an exhibition that caused more than a single flutter in the breast, especially for the unconstructed.

It was Juliana Engberg's idea to bring together the artists who appear in the show, and Ewen McDonald who guest curated it with her. The artists Aleks Danko, Robert McPherson, Pieter Lauren Mol and Richard Wentworth rose to the occasion and produced some of the most interesting installations seen for a long time. And as usual, the exhibition had the kind of grace and coherence we have come to expect from the work done by Juliana Engberg at the museum.

Aleks Danko's Aleksander Danko *Seniors*, Adelaide 1991 was a little house on a column surrounded by elm leaves. A simple and poetic image, captured and still, frozen for the present, in a room of blue light. The work was unashamedly theatrical and allusive, evoking a range of emotional responses about life, dying, home and time—big humanist issues explored through metaphors that embraced the everyday, while suggesting the inherent poetry of experience. All done through an emblematic little house on a perfect plinth. The image is a child's construction of 'house'—a central door, windows on either side and a chimney. But is it an image of pain or of joy? Of loneliness perhaps? The house on top of an unlimbable column, perfect and serene, a little threatening perhaps, containing the pain of the impossible.

The work evokes a mixture of feelings but the viewer is guided by the text that accompanies it, *As you know we are pensioners, day in day out, twenty four hours closer to death* (RUSSIAN HUMOUR). Pretty black humour, perhaps typical, in a country of long northern nights and short days. This is the kind of grim wit that locates us and our foibles, aspirations and dreams within the real—the inevitability of impending death and in the end, nothingness. The artist provides us with a way of approaching some very important issues here and he does it by the evocation of a simple but poetically significant image—one that in some way belongs to each of us, no matter how fractured or ambiguous our own notions of 'house' and 'home' might be.

Ewen McDonald writes that the artists in *Lightness and Gravity* "play between literal and figurative readings—determined to bring art down to earth at the same time as they imaginatively metaphysically let it soar". ("Lightness & Gravity", *Lightness and Gravity* catalogue) Danko provides us with an immediately recognisable image—the doll like house but it is imbued as well with metaphysical possibilities of consciousness and intellectual play.

Aleks Danko, "As you know, we are pensioners, day in day out, twenty four hours closer to death" RUSSIAN HUMOUR ALEKSANDER DANKO SENIOR. 1991

Richard Wentworth investigates the "culturally poetic investment". (Ian Hunt, "The Half-Rhymes", *Lightness and Gravity* catalogue) in the found object. In *Brae*, the artist reassembled a large number of broken dinner plates on the floor of the gallery. This became at once an image of the mundane but precious and full of meanings. The work occupied the available space like a small domestic constellation.

More threatening and ambiguous was *Load*, a stack of galvanised steel, like an industrial shelf system, roughly put together but complete with light globes. This work evoked a range of responses, horror at its seeming impregnability and hardness and amusement at its absurdity—it looks as if it should be somehow usable yet it is clearly functionless. What kind of load could it possibly bear?

In Robert McPherson's work we are faced with the dilemma of words and signs. Both are seen as equivocal and open to interpretation, not fixed and certainly not always serious. Modernist notions of art and its sometimes pompous investigations, are mocked and questioned by a process that illuminates a different world—of working class histories (the gingham tablecloths of Red Raddle: 18 Frog Poems for Mary Lake + Connie Sparrow, and reference to the silver screen and its pin ups, *Sources of Marlene Dietrich: Hand Rituals (13 Simple Gestures) A project for a book and sculptures*). These are not what we would expect as fit subjects for modernist discourse, but are celebrated here (and ironically heroised) in McPherson's work—proclaimed indeed as historically resonant. Words and signs in McPherson's work evoke the world of the everyday, while performing within a refined and complex art practice.

The allusive and poetic are examined in *Lightness and Gravity* by each of the artists represented in an exhibition of deeply resonant works. It was a joy to experience such poetry, so cooly presented.

Lightness and Gravity Melbourne Festival of the Arts 1997, Museum of Modern Art at Heide, October 7-November 23

Simeon Kronenberg is the National Director of Museums Australia, the professional organisation for the museum and gallery industry. He has worked as a freelance curator for numerous contemporary art venues, both metropolitan and regional and as a regular contributor to art journals.


Stephen White

Pieter Lauren Mol's *Ascension Dream* Sculpture is a collection of photographs placed high up on the gallery wall. They depict the artist seemingly wrestling with a feather filled pillow. In 24 photographs, mounted together, the artist holds the pillow up to his face. In the 25th photograph the artist is standing on the pillow as it ascends. He has finally recognised its power. In this funny and whimsical piece, Mol has proclaimed the poetry of magic and has risen to heaven on an artist's feathers of flight.

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A haunting

Linda Maria Walket contemplates Maria Ghost at the EAF

"I want to be possessed" is already a possessed statement, or a statement possessed from the inside, by language itself. It says: "I want to possess", I want to possess being possessed (it want to master/occupy being mastered/occupied). Saying 'it' is like haunting or ghosting what was, until then, unseen. Photography is a ghosting, showing later, after (all is said and done), the 'it' that was, and was even then unseen. The photograph of one haunting one forever, calls the ghost of oneself, from the past, clarifies the present as a trace. Your eyes see this played out, somewhat, in the film Titanic, with a drawing (Rick Martin's solo exhibition in 1995 was titled Breathbreaking: a passage on the Titanic).

The calling, in this exhibition, of "Maria" is (like) a second-calling. A calling which is named "Maria", but is another word perhaps, and not a lingering proper name; or is a sentence, or a conversation, unannounced, and toward which all language flows, as if a place jumbled with myriad sounds: fear, for instance: Oh, you thought I Maria Walket was named Maria? Maria is called by Martin with images: Maria, a ship, wrecked in 1840.

That's really the only thing. That's the call, not a direct call to or for Maria, but a simple question, whispered, to the land and sea, and when it is answered, it starts speaking, again; that brings images into being; that prompts more ways of seeing and saying something. And this 'something' will not, and is not expected to satisfy, just as a photograph can't, except momentarily. A photograph, a ghost, has a ghost-of-a-chance to speak: let that 'tell'! Let alone tell how the ship was wrecked, how the passengers and crew got to shore, how the Ngarrindjeri people assisted. Memory though is coaxed, and willingly enters, and adds to, the space of the archive that might or might not be true.

Martin gathers together photographs of a particular place, and arranges them around a central object. Several of the images are lift from behind. One large photograph print, composed of several separate strips is pinned to the wall; nearly a long black and white print of a fragment of a 'found' photograph. There are interruptions, or intervals, throughout the work: the narrow white gaps between the composite work, and two black images. Nothing is quite intact, although everything seems to be. The intervals hold the story, like the boxes do in Christian Boltanski's Detective works: "... but you can't open the boxes. If you opened [them] you wouldn't understand anything because the stories and the faces are mixed up". The aim of his Childhood work was "... not to represent his autobiography, but to explore and evoke familiar cultural types, archetypal gestures, to create an archive of 'model images' of generic 'normal' or collective life". (Gregory Ulmer, "The Heuristics of Deconstruction, in Deconstruction And The Visual Arts, Art, Media, Architecture) Martin's photographic intention is similarly gestural. There is no sure passage, no correct source; that's the thing, he's saying, 'this' traveller's tale.

If you've seen the invitation to the opening of Maria Ghost, you'll know it's beautiful. A traveller's trunk, glowing golden, hovers to one side, above a scene of the Coorong, that calm inland sea south of Adelaide. A distinct and flat landscape, often described as bored by those who pass it on their way elsewhere. It appears to be waiting, patient, perhaps alluring, enticing.

It might possess one, like the open sea behind it possessed (took) Maria; was she looking and wondering, lost-track—not actually seeing the Coorong, but the dunes, yet sensing it anyway—incentive to the wild water beneath her (to where she really was, and from where she never returned). Some facts: the Maria, a brigantine, sank in June, near Kingston; she was built in Dublin, as was the Titanic; she was sailing between Adelaide and Hobart; all passengers and crew survived the wreck; all were killed before reaching Adelaide; the circumstances surrounding the whole event are unclear; the story of Maria is unresolved, mysterious, and violent. The exhibition contains the deathly presence of photographs and the dark horror of (a) history. Neither will 'let-one-in', and together they pose the impossible: the idea of 'travelling', of being a 'traveller': between here and there, heaven and hell, this culture and that, fact and fiction; of being in the heart of things, inside the thing of thought (the immediate heart, across Jean-Luc Nancy's interval). The piece weaves photographs brought back from the site of the story. And as a metaphor, a glimpse, of the story, 'a history', we see the trunk (the central object: a body, an embodied passivity); the possessed object for possessions. The trunk is closed, packed, full of treasures never to be sorted, worn, loved, again. There is 'something' between this two layers (photography/history), an order of exchange perhaps, which functions as 'infinite' (Blanchot's 'infinite conversation' which although interrupted will go on and on, the interruption being part of the 'infinite': "You know, then, that when you speak of these interruptions during which speech would be interrupted, you do speak of them, immediately and even in advance returning to the interrupted piece (the piece of discourse")). Photographs are infinite, history is infinite. We never get to the bottom of the stories, and we never see the end of the white gaps and black pictures. How does one know the unknown, or does one keep-talk, close to the heart, as the loved keep-sake (the trunk); or, more likely, in what shape does the unknown return, and 'give' speech. This is then, Maria-talk, the talk of the lost, of the vanished, and all their complex, intricate, unrealized dreams. It is talk that keeps (seeks out, starts at) the very beginning. Maria: Maria Ghost/saying her peace/piece.

Photographs, stories, do not repeat 'what really happened'. There are phases of being-in-the-know, and of passing-on the possessed knowledge: the illusion of finitude, the space of the archive, projecting her calling, returning to the space of no-return, and instead of arming himself With The Story, returned to the idea of 'reck', to the rack and ruin of another idea: the archive as possessed, the archive as Ghost.

Rick Martin, Ghosted Trunk, detail from Maria Ghost

The yellow bird from the title provides a 'natural' connection between the inner world of the artist and her external environment. Perched in its auricular enclosure, Weavers's yellow bird is a friendly, boisterous, harlinger and informant. It sings stories of migrations across the disparate zones and conditions of the contemporary world, stories which have her personal and professional migratory patterns and excursions. Weaver follows the trajectory of his watchful yellow beak, his watchful yellow eye, his watchful yellow ear for intellectually and emotionally, not physically—absorbing diverse aethetics and accumulation of material culture along the way: Japanese slippers, the lost limbs of trees, cottons, silks and woods, the hoopoe bird, a crystalline field of handblown glass snowflakes. I have an image of her sitting in concentration and quiet for long periods of time, with her eyes closed in different positions in the rooms of her house, methodically translating the lamentations and tales of her songbird note by note, crochet to crochet, stitch by stitch. Weaver by name, weave by nature. Combining technical virtuosity with a highly refined sense of color, Louise Weaver's recent work offers an enriching and provocative challenge to our perception of what is "natural". Louise Weaver's yellow bird has a soul and an eye on the panic-stricken late 20th century impulse to preserve.

Louise Weaver, I Have a Little Yellow Bird in my Ear that Sings, 200 Conteweird Street gallery, Fitzroy, November 8-29, 1997.

Jason Smith is curator, Contemporary Art, at the National Gallery of Victoria. His current projects include a survey of Rosalyn Piggott's object and installation based works, and a major exhibition of contemporary Korean craft.

I Have a Little Yellow Bird in my Ear that Sings, Louise Weaver's exhibition at Gertrude Street Gallery

I Have a Little Yellow Bird in my Ear that Sings, Louise Weaver's exhibition at Gertrude Street Gallery, expands on the ideas she explored in Still Falling, her installation in Natural Selection, Melbourne's 1996-97 Contemporary Art's contribution to Australian Perspectives 97. Her primary interest is the physical and psychological fragility of ecological systems; convergence between human and other nature(s); perceived distinctions between natural and artificial, ephemeral and imperishable, real and virtual experience.

Thread and water metaphorically connect the sixteen individual works in this installation. The first piece encountered upon entering the large gallery at Gertrude Street is titled Head of a drowned man (imagined 7th state) 1933 Meret Oppenheim. The reference painting is one of Oppenheim's first objects: Head of a drowned man, 3rd state, 1933 (now lost). It is a face-like shaped piece of wood painted cobalt blue and white, that have been filled with white sugared almonds.

There is nothing in the seemingly random configuration of objects that almost resembles the features of a face. Rather, their appearance as cavities infer the dissolution of the body, the annihilation of mental matter, in this case. Weaver's piece comprises two rectangular lengths of midnight-blue silk organza pinned to the wall, with seven embroidered white almond-like shapes joining the fabric lengths. The resulting moire effect, and movement of the fabric, with the contours of combination of organic and synthetic materials Weaver demands of viewers an inquisition into what these alluring, almost natural forms might be, and opens relations between them to numerous classifications and possible meanings.

Playing with the traditionally female practices of sewing, crochet and appliqué, and drawing on a range of sources from art history, science, haute couture and the aesthetics of other cultures, Weaver's opulent and finely crafted objects oscillate between the poetic and the pros, the environmental, and the personal and the public. Despite her seductive, almost irresistible tactility, her works have a deeply disturbing edge that warns of the terrors associated with the imposition of Culture on Nature—human conceptions and ideals of beauty contrasting 'natural' states and elements. This is especially evident in the macabre Invisible bird, where Weaver has straitjacketed a taxidermied hoopoe (Upupa epops) in a sheet of sequins leaving only its beak and erect crest free of the suffocating restraint.

The seductive, insidious and ephemeral world of haute couture is evoked in Waterfall, a vitrine in which Weaver has strung beads and crocheted a black web heavy with dew. Referring to Duchamp and a Chanel evening gown from the autumn/winter collection of 1994/95, Waterfall exemplifies the multiple formal and conceptual levels with which Weaver's work is engaged.

The yellow bird from the title provides a 'natural' connection between the inner world of the artist and her external environment. Perched in its auricular enclosure, Weaver's yellow bird is a friendly, boisterous, harlinger and informant. It sings stories of migrations across the disparate zones and conditions of the contemporary world, stories which have her personal and professional migratory patterns and excursions. Weaver follows the trajectory of his watchful yellow beak, his watchful yellow eye, his watchful yellow ear for intellectually and emotionally, not physically—absorbing diverse aesthetics and accumulation of material culture along the way: Japanese slippers, the lost limbs of trees, cottons, silks and woods, the hoopoe bird, a crystalline field of handblown glass snowflakes. I have an image of her sitting in concentration and quiet for long periods of time, with her eyes closed in different positions in the rooms of her house, methodically translating the lamentations and tales of her songbird note by note, crochet to crochet, stitch by stitch. Weaver by name, weave by nature. Combining technical virtuosity with a highly refined sense of color, Louise Weaver's recent work offers an enriching and provocative challenge to our perception of what is "natural". Louise Weaver's yellow bird has a soul and an eye on the panic-stricken late 20th century impulse to preserve.

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Taking comfort

Jacqueline Millner reviews the last show of 1997 (and the end of funding) at Firstdraft Gallery, Sydney

Take comfort: fondle your chains, breast your obstacles, love your disease. This exhibition invites us to do all this, with strong installation and object-based works responding to the notion of comfort. Perhaps these injunctions might also be appropriate for the incoming Firstdraft gallery directors for 1998-2000. As the current committee winds up its stint, Firstdraft has just discovered that its public funding has been completely withdrawn. Considering the vital role the gallery has played over the last 11 years to nurture a wide spectrum of emerging contemporary artists, this is very bad news for Sydney’s visual arts community. The new directors are determined to keep operating; no doubt deleterious compromises will be necessary, most likely from prospective exhibitors, in higher rent charges and less access to support services such as publicity and networking. Of course the gallery as a whole will suffer if compelled to subvert curatorial to fundraising priorities.

Firstdraft, with its notoriously broad brief and biennial change of the guard, is necessarily a little hit and miss, although it is this very tolerance for mistakes which creates a climate for genuine experimentation. It is often in the second year of a directorship that the program hits its stride and becomes more consistent. 1997 was no exception. The concluding show provided an opportunity for curator and outgoing director Philippa Veitch to bring together some of the best contributors to the year’s schedule, under the aegis of Bronia Iwanczak.

On arriving at the gallery, we are confronted with a solid wall of water-filled green balloons, which we have to penetrate to enter the space. It is a clever ruse by artist Helen Hyatt-Johnston to invade our comfort zone, like an overripe bosom pinning us to the wall.

Intimidating on one hand, the other on the work evokes the desire for a buffer to protect our inner sanctum from intrusion. This soft armour keeps the world at a safe distance, resembling with its flippant and frivolous appearance. It cedes to our pressure, presses against our bodies, only to spring back into shape to hide any trace of our contact.

The comfort we seek in the tactile, including the comic touch, is also integral to Bronia Iwanczak’s Cuddleguts. Crafted from the tacky fake fur now familiar to contemporary art—think Kathy Tema—their cute renditions of human organs sit on the wall, flayed as for a forensic examination. Heart, liver, intestines, kidneys and lungs in flesh tones are deprived of their visceral abjection and invested with the benignity of soft toys. The contrast between the fear we feel about the exposure of our internal organs and the somewhat innate strategy of warding off danger by clutching a soft toy is thus succinctly evinced. Perhaps Iwanczak is also reminding us of the essential familiarity of our bodies, of the possibility of overcoming the sense of dissociation we feel about those parts of ourselves which we cannot see save through the mediating distance of medical imaging.

Comfort and touch are again linked in Olga Cirion’s velvet-swathed chains, which spout elegantly from the wall like a fine stream of water, pooling in a coil on the floor. Cirion has long used this technique of softening metal with velvet, but here the sublety of the gesture is particularly effective. The chains are rendered seductive and sensual not in a gaudy, loud way, but with restraint. They speak of discipline and economy of emotion, evoking a sensuality of nuance and quiet intensity, of small movements and tight clutches. The security of the close embrace, the safety of a small margin of choice, these are the comforts of enjambment, less than the sexual pleasure of bondage.

For far more flamboyant is Kevin Sheehan’s hybrid machine, which alarmed the opening night audience with unpredictable hissing and bubbling, only to dissipate the suspense with anti-climax. When not in the process of setting to explode, this strange object constructed from a vintage sink and various gas and pressure valves looks spiky and hostile, an interesting counterpart to the ‘soft sculptures’, all by female artists, which surround it. Sheehan’s may amount to another response to comfort, a comfort derived from a more aggressive form of protection from intrusion, that is, from repulsion, the very opposite of touch.

Interestingly, this notion of repulsion as intrinsic to comfort is also evident in Caolán Mitchell’s The Wait, a table setting with red-hot cutlery. Warning signs and an aura of heat keep us at a distance; implements intended for handling become potential wielders of pain. Like Sheehan’s, Mitchell’s work relies on suspense; it harbours potential danger, in the tradition of kinetic sculpture such as Yves Tanguy’s. This suspense dramatically increases its sense of presence, in contradistinction to the very quiet use of video by Stephen Birch which, rather, evokes absence: of emotion, of thought, of agency. Instead of putting us in such a distance; implements intended for handling become potential wielders of pain. Like Sheehan’s, Mitchell’s work relies on suspense; it harbours potential danger, in the tradition of kinetic sculpture such as Yves Tanguy’s. This suspense dramatically increases its sense of presence, in contradistinction to the very quiet use of video by Stephen Birch which, rather, evokes absence: of emotion, of thought, of agency. Instead of putting us in such a distance; implements intended for handling become potential wielders of pain. Like Sheehan’s, Mitchell’s work relies on suspense; it harbours potential danger, in the tradition of kinetic sculpture such as Yves Tanguy’s. This suspense dramatically increases its sense of presence, in contradistinction to the very quiet use of video by Stephen Birch which, rather, evokes absence: of emotion, of thought, of agency. Instead of putting us in such a
Gaining ground
Diana Klaoesn interviews Sean Kelly, the new director of CAST (Contemporary Art Services Tasmania)

Last year, Sean Kelly, artist, administrator, Fine Arts Masters graduate and former teacher, was appointed Director of CAST, the state's multi-faceted visual arts promotion and development organisation. In the 15 year history of CAST and its antecedent Chameleon, Kelly is the first new director chosen from within Tasmania, though his predecessor, David O'Halloran, who resigned one year into his term, was widely acknowledged as quasi-director that imported is automatically better'. Through his involvements in contemporary art, Kelly has built a solid reputation and a formidable number of friends and contacts.

CAST has had some particular challenges in the recent past, including being without its own gallery since losing its original premises in the former Blandstone shoe factory, some five years ago. While CAST's revenue, considerably more than exhibitions, this was an obvious anomaly. I spoke to Sean Kelly on a January day when, on the one hand, CAST is in a strong position with an innovative program of touring exhibitions, grants and assistance schemes for artists and curators, and, on the other, paradoxically, following the recent sale of the building, CAST with its new gallery, occupies the search for a new base has had to be resumed.

DK For people who may not be familiar with CAST and its functions, perhaps I should first ask you to describe them.

SK CAST is not predicated on the idea that the primary, or sole, role is to provide exhibitions. CAST is much broader than that, covering a wider range of activities, including professional development. Take the art spaces that evolved in the 80s, much as CAST did, out of artist-run co-operatives, gradually assuming a more professional edge, with triennial funding and formal management. Those are now quite professional and incorporate a touring agency. Initially, CAST touring program. With minimal involvement of other organisations, we have managed to achieve high-level outcomes. The exhibition Episodes [exploring attitudes to mental health/illness] is a good example. We linked up with Mental Health Services and there were artists of the calibre of Mike Parr and Graeme Harwood rubbing shoulders with people from mental health programs working in the gallery. It's also vital to make sure that more good Tasmanian art is toured outside the state. Plus more professional development and more regional activity. Though you do reach a critical mass on how much you can deliver.

DK And what other ways are members involved?

SK Well, there's some concern these days amongst arts organizations about how relevant it is to be member-based, that having members can cost more money than it generates. But it's one of the statistics that funding is based on. We try and give people real value; our newsletter contains a lot of helpful information [on grants, awards, shows, openings, internships], but there's some debate about whether having memberships is the way to go.

DK How do you see the effect on the arts of Tasmania's isolation?

SK There's no reason to assume that isolation—physical or psychological—has to lead to bad art-making. Travel is an issue, but even a struggling artist can afford to go interstate once a year. And people say, "Oh, but there's the internet now and we can all tap into that..." More important for artists is face-to-face human contact—and that's happening all the time—in bars, at openings, in work situations, everywhere. Sure, there are shows that don't travel here, and so on. But the flip-side is that agencies like the Australian Council have a clear government directive to prioritise regional activity. Though we always say that the reason that Tasmanian artists get such a high proportion of grants is that there's a high proportion of good artists here!

DK So how do you see the future for CAST, especially with the bombshell about the sale of the building? The difficulty of finding and keeping non-commercial gallery space seems to be an on-going saga in Hobart.

SK When I came into the job, I said that I was the first director to walk in and find the organization in very good shape, with a full and varied program, good staff, financially secure and so on. So I obviously brought down the wrath of the gods, because the government building we occupy has been sold and we're looking for another home. We have to be out of here by mid-'98. So it is going to be a snakes-and-ladders situation for CAST? We hope not. But we don't yet know what level of compensation we'll be offered.

DK But you're anticipating that there will be some? Particularly as you've been in these new premises for such a short time.

SK Exactly! Given the degree of government encouragement we were given to move in here, we would hope that their moral obligation would translate into a financial commitment. We're trying to be positive. This could be the chance to find even better new premises and really get established long-term. We hope to be able to re-locate speedily—and hit the ground running.

Hobart-based Jane Eisemann's first solo exhibition, Random Groove, was held in September at Contemporary Art Services Tasmania, on Hobart's waterfront, continuing CAST's series of solo shows by emerging Tasmanian artists. Eisemann completed Honours in Photography in 1983 and is well known in Tasmanian art circles. Rapidly gaining wider recognition, she featured in Perspecta '95, Perspecta '96 in Germany and last year won the Missouri Purchase Prize at the 1996 Australian-wide City of Hobart Art Prize. At the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in 1995, her large, digitally altered chromogenic prints depicted surreal tableaux of draped-leg and full-front nude women, genial "computer-airbrushed", into non-existence. Though unsettling, the works were probably not as subtle as the curator suggested in his essay: "class's crimes or violations, teasing, questioning and entrap[ing]." But there was no ambiguity about Hobart's conservative daily paper's glib description of viewers' reactions, particularly the shock of one "concerned mother" after "unimaginably" taking her children to see the show. Whilst Random Groove continues Eisemann's investigation of the body and of stylized poses and digital manipulation, some works seem more grounded in objective reality. Others—like the triptych Crapper, a three-legged humanoid cropped at the waist—are unique products of the artist's imagination. All have an insistently satiric presence, even Staggle and Pincro which at first appear to be chronicling domestic violence. The large monochromatic digiprints are mostly "claustrophobic" in tone—not apsa. Shot in medium format (the 5 x 7 negatives are high-resolution scanned onto computer file, with the grey scale converted to colour. As for "meanings", Jane Eisemann declines to speculate what the works 'say' and remains that some of the interest in being a photographer to the works can be zero—they can be things with nothing in them."
Dance as research

Julia Postle experiences The Red Shift at Canberra's Choreographic Centre

Pseudoscience is a kind of halfway house between old religion and new science, mistrusted by both.

—Carl Sagan's words and The Red Shift's story. With this latest work-in-progress, Garry Stewart takes the shared spaces between science fiction and science fact and blows them in different directions with an appropriately cosmic movement vocabulary.

The Red Shift in workshop is a series of seven short scenes, some of them using a complex choreographic tool that has led to the development of new and challenging approaches. Stewart and dancers Bernadette Walong, Richard Allen, Kate Levat and Elizabeth Thompson worked with Giacomo Ohrarzanek for three workshop sessions, exploring movement possibilities through the strategy known as '9 point improvisation. Stewart explained the methodology to us before the showing. Each dancer—working in their own imagined box with nine points in different spatial planes—moves between the points, in different orders and using different kinds of movement.

The result is sometimes awkward-looking, sometimes fluid, and always interesting: the force of the movement heightened by an often frenetic pace. Stewart seems to have an ability to meld movement forms with a kind of organised anarchy—in The Red Shift he has Seidel spinning on the floor in a new type of breaking dance across the space. A radical pas de deux emerges from the breakdancing solo. Sequences spin in and out of each other to maintain the pace, while slides of 'alien spacecraft' and crop circles impose their visual stories on the performance. The dancers are more or less dispassionate—except for the moment straight from Close Encounters when lights beam down upon them and there are a few moments of performance anxiety.

On independents

Dear Editors,

In response to Eleanor Brickhill's very interesting article "The history of our dancing bodies is becoming hot" and Amanda Card's equally fascinating "Heretics and heritage" in RealTime 22, I feel compelled to write and add my own commentary on the use of the word 'independent' when discussing dance.

As an ex-practising American living and working in Australia, I frequently adjust my use of language to my new culture. I usually enjoy doing this, since it gives me the chance to reconsiderating features of my thinking which I had imagined were just part of being human and actually being cultural assumptions. Yet both draw heavily on classical dance training and need to be given a new context for their work. This appears to be genuinely fascinated by his subject, making a strong case for the power of seemingly arcane examples of popular culture to make sense of everyday experience.

JACQUELINE MILLER

Book Review

Michael Carter

Putting a Face on Things: Studies in imaginary materials

Power Publications, Sydney 1997

Michael Carter's collection of essays is a strange and colourful collage of personal reverie and scholarship. An academic in the University of Sydney's Department of Art History and Theory, Carter specialises in analyses of style and dress. These essays, or 'studies' as he calls them, take particular objects and images from his general field and inflect them through critical theory and content analysis to explore Carter's driving theme: namely, how and at what point these objects narrate such a rich imaginary dimension, invested as they are with quasi-human properties? Carter proposes that human making can be thought of as 'a kind of generalised cosmetics', a dream of infinite malleability whereby humans imbue the things they make with a face and delight in their power to change, or 'improve', the world in their own image. Carter justifies these studies as driven by the desire to "explore the ways we attempt to overcome the seeming indiffERENCE of the world to create a place for ourselves."

The range of Carter's 'objects and images' is delightful, swinging from the arcane to the banal. Chapters deal with women's hats, using the hat as the archetype of ornament to track the story of modernity, with ornamental animals, examining the aesthetic function performed by animals and making some interesting comments on the human/nature distinction, with the relationship between the visual representations of dreams and comic strips; futuristic dress and Crancach's nude. In this chapter, which opens the book, Carter does not primarily concern himself with the historical narratives of historians who have unwittingly become erotically engaged with these pictures to propose that this 16th century German 'master' was engaged in "an embryonic form of pornography."

It is an entertaining exercise to examine one of Carter's major concerns which runs through these individual studies, that is, what is necessary for a space to appear to come out around an image? Later chapters, for instance, consider the "deceptively simple question", 'what is male sexual fantasy?' and analyse the pictorial representation of male sexual dreams. Carter perhaps indirectly scrutinises his own open penchant for the erotic dimension of art.

The comic treatment of such examples as the dress reformers known as the "heretics" and the "contemporary heretics" is revealing, but the most intriguing part of Carter's book is his description of how the word independent may also constrain companies to a 'non-independent' range, also companies themselves are let off the hook by the word independent. Why should this be? Carter's answer is that Merce Cunningham runs a multimillion dollar company and has done for many years. He argues that the word independent can give rise to a "non-independent" or "independent" thinking, that the Merce Cunningham Dance Company would not qualify as independent so I understand the use of the word, here.

Independent also does not describe an aesthetic. Merce Cunningham and Bill T Jones, for example, have little common aesthetic, and yet certainly both are independent thinkers. One could say that their independence resides precisely there—in their rebellion, in "investing against the grain", in their creation of dance in their own aesthetic, not in a known and often repeated aesthetic. Yet, both draw heavily on classical dance training and maintaining dancers in movement vocabularies required to express their independent thoughts. Neither would claim 'independence' of their history. Kazuko Hribayashi made an interesting remark about dance being independent of its history when she said, "two arms, two legs, what can you do?"

The use of the word independent in Australia almost seems to set up, support and legitimate some of the most despised traditions in the culture of our land. It creates and reinforces the notion that choreographers working without a fiscal structure are not the same as choreographers who have a fiscal structure. Choreographers running companies need, here, to be more involved in press attention and, by virtue of having fiscal support, worthy of receiving more fiscal support.

Also, companies themselves are left off the hook by the word independent. Why should a struggling fiscal structure extend its meagre and over-stretched resources any further to anyone who has declared themselves independent? When, as artistic directors of Tanzdance my partner Richard Allen and I tried to support the independent community with resources and to focus on them, there were choreographers so mystified by this gesture that they though we were taking the money out of them.

The word independent may also contrict companies to a 'non-independent' stance, reinforcing the notion that they should behave in a dependent manner—relying on their boards (non-artists) to make important decisions, or relying on known and accepted aesthetic parameters for defining their work.

I would love to hear the word independent dropped from the vocabulary of people making and watching dances in Australia. It would, I think, be a gesture towards liberation, towards removing ourselves from an independent ghetto of our own creation wherein we are defined not by what we do as dancers and choreographers, but by the fiscal structure within which we do it.

KAREN PEARLMAN
Praise the lord

Zsusanna Sobolay surveys recent dance events and dialogues in Melbourne: Kennett, Parker, Lasica, Hilton, Guerin, Adams, Crisp et al

- The once and future Premier launches extensions to the Dancehouse (Carlton) space. There is indeed some truth in the glitch the Premier concludes his proceedings: "I am the Lord of the Dance" (sic). If Chunky Move thinks it's autonomous, take note.

- The launch is followed by a showing, seen from the floor on the floor. The once and future Premier gets a sore arse, complains bitterly in the stalls.

- Between the rhetoric and the dream, it is a place of hard work, lonely hauls, less fulfilling. Funding in Victoria has been so dwarfish that over the last six or so years, middle-range companies and spaces have folded, practitioners sat and wept as some of Babydoll's multivarious voices died. In 1996, now directing and perhaps new criteria in order to survive, Danceworks called for expressions of interest to see in which direction they might move. At that time, the Board invited a limitless submission of ideas on the theme of 'propulsion' (into a production facility; towards performances...). It seems they couldn't then decide, asking Helen Herbertson to hang on as caretaker for another two years. With the appointment last month of Sandra Parker as AD, the company now seems intent on consolidating its identity as a group focused on the production and development of dance. Particularly, they'll please the still-incumbent Lord.

Parker, whose work as dancer and choreographer has been seen at Green Mill, PICA, WAAPA, VCA, Ta dance, V re and Lasica, is planning a year focusing on exploration of relationship to time, between the male and female dancers' bodily feeling. Particularly problematic very fine lighting by Ben Cobham and Lasica, in planning a year focusing on choreography perhaps mo k

- Lasica evokes in their short film of a Balinese influence electronic score by Francois Tetaz' Balinese-influenced electronic score likewise develops its own counterparts between the developing forces of texture and structure. Helen Herbertson's Danceworks swansong was to curate the December season at Athenaeum II, recalling perhaps current or previously New York-based Australian dancers to present new works. Each shows a distinctly New York flavour, with the occasional spice of blaneray. The programme is satisfying overall, but intriguingly poses questions to do with immediacy and residue: what impacts, and what holds over after viewing?

I am struck by how much each dance suits one or other of the dancer's (never the choreographer's) bodies better. In each piece, iconic and decorative image, something is sacrificed. The importance of collaboration, of seeing and exploring, sculpting and training in long term partnerships between performers. This is surely one of the principles of ensemble and sustained work in theatre and dance, which Athens is becoming so difficult to maintain.

Rebecca Hilton's House, invigorating and quirky, shows a high sensibility and independent mind with nonetheless a concern parallel to Phillip Adams and Lucy Guerin with dance bodies, bodily bodies, music-box girls and molls. Hilton's choreography perhaps mocks the confines of house, family and home by being rebellious with sharp lines and walzts, shivas and leader-leads, with leaps and jumps that square the stage. Balletic in stance and movement, a siren, a sudden, an unanswerable question of embodiment between the male and female dancers' bodies - a domesticant, a balletic - and a sense of the piece, David Tyndall's dance is infused with muscular bite and personality. The work speaks strength between two characters, unease, a sense of unresolved relationship between personal and abstract, or, alternatively, the potential in future work for explosive choreography

I find similarities between this work and Lasica's Situation Live for two last year in Sydney) works more with characterization than the other two. Initially, this quality makes me like this piece the least, although such a linear narrative tends to make it, initially, the easiest to recall. Ros Warr in particular infuses her characterization of the dancer's craft with the act of faking her own identity with her body - a sullen immaturity, rocking and hugging her hips as if in a moral exclusion of a rich and judging world. Her and Guerin's uniforms are tight and short; they blow bubble-gum in the face of the dancer's role of availability. It is these held images which intensify in memory: rocking against the huge Athenaenum walls, two small figures in huge blusesses. Extracts from the source news story presented onto small suspended screens, whilst not a particularly likeable device, nonetheless amplify the contrast between such concentrated news abbreviation and the vacuum in which daily transmissions are dared.

The ghosts of ballet are traced and prevented within these three works, alternately alternating and grating against the way movement in our culture is coded - such spirits are as potent in their own way as the ghosts in Asian dance traditions which Arthur and Corrine Cantrill evoke in their short film of a Balinese dance. Their Moving Statics programme—on day one in a well-curated and important film component to Dancehouse's bodywork festival—seems concerned with capturing either the body-independent with which a performer ripples into shape from one moment to the next (close-up footage of mime artist Will Spoor); or, ancestral spirits infusing the next (close-up footage of mime artist Will Spoor); or, ancestral spirits infusing the next (close-up footage of mime artist Will Spoor); or, ancestral spirits infusing our new story of...
Cultures dancing

Eleanor Brickhill compares performances by Tharp and Dance Exchange through the years by several generations of dancers since his directorship began.

The idea of comparing Twyla Tharp and her new company Tharp! with Russell Dumas' new work, Cargo Cult, makes sense, firstly in terms of their shared influences—both have continuing and evolving relationships with ballet and the American avant-garde—and then the way those influences have been quite differently deployed.

Dumas' artistic directorship of Dance Exchange began not so long after leaving Twyla Tharp's first company and the rich American environment of the 70s. Since then, he has developed Dance Exchange as an ongoing and expanding network (both national and international) of dancers and other artists. Tharp's focus seems somewhat narrower than it used to be, now firmly in the territory of mainstream American ballet, with her current company of all-new "non-professional" dancers.

It's been said about both of them that, while it's taken people many years to appreciate the kind of work they offered, when it finally happened, it wasn't the work that had changed, but the audience. It was Tharp's early work of the 60s and 70s that made her reputation: the detailed and complex choreographic exploration bringing a provocative sense of combat into a warm-fuzzy new dance environment. But the programs brought to The Sydney Festival, while resting on that reputation, seemed largely to be made of different stuff, and one might wonder whether the audience's youth and tumultuous applause was for the work or the reputation, given that it is unlikely they had seen work made 30 years ago.

Dumas' Cargo Cult, on the other hand, was an attempt from the original—being an accumulation and development of material which has been worked on over

the years by several generations of dancers since his directorship began.

Something else which is often said of seminal artists (including Twyla Tharp and Martha Graham) is that the dances they choreograph are designed to make better dancers. In other words, their dances do not train first in order for the choreographer to come along and use that training to make their dances. Instead, the dancers train by developing and embodying ways of being and thinking about the world directly from the choreographer, and this feeling about movement is the actual 'technique'. That's the theory, anyway.

The title of Dance Exchange's new work, Cargo Cult, is not mere fancy. It says something about culture and its structure, and particularly our cultural history, and how we have often transplanted ideas from the place where they originated into our "foreign" context. Our theatres are built to house international artists, whose 'product' we 'acquire' without understanding the reason it has developed the way it has.

We mimic the aesthetics without understanding the cultural infrastructures which create them, and in our lack of understanding the ideas become cutlith and degraded, being cut off at the roots. Most of Dumas' dancers have been required to study overseas, not just the 'steps' or 'styles' of particular artists, but the cultural contexts in which those artists create their work, to find out how and why the ideas which we might have cherished for generations, have evolved.

The eight dancers in Cargo Cult bring not just their phrases and steps to the work, but individual processes. While material is drawn from a shared choreographic history of Dumas' previous works, and a common physical understanding, the dancers' ages and professional backgrounds vary greatly. Material is worked in such different ways in the three almost simultaneous duets and two solos, that each seems like a separate line of thought expressing distinct individuality, while retaining a deep aesthetic unity.

Cultural embodiment is, in part, what Cargo Cult endeavour to explore. At one point, we see Cath Stewart's soft, poised lips and up-titled, relaxed jaw whispering, and although we can't hear the words, we know it is French because the feel of the language is clearly visible. In fact, Stewart's entire 50 minute solo, including this snatch of speech, was created in France amidst a polyglot group of people in which features of cultural difference and similarity were of great import. Perhaps it's drawing a long bow to say that just as a specific cultural context provides a matrix by which language and feeling is understood, so does the context in which dance is made. But the point is that it is the embodiment of context in which feeling and gesture develop together which goes towards creating more interesting dancing than simply learning imported steps, or laying them on culturally untuned bodies.

The imported artistry of Tharp! could be a case in point. Critical comment was mostly lukewarm: too clean, too balletic, too naive, too commercial, all of that. Not what we have come to expect from Tharp. Unfortunately I was unable to see the second program which featured probably the two more interesting pieces, the oldest work, Fugue, and the newest, Roy's Joys, in which he旧 style was reputedly more in evidence, although 'compromised' somewhat by the dancers' youth.

People said it wasn't the dancers' fault that the works lacked substance—especially the three pieces in the first program, Heroes, Sweet Fields and 66. Must it have been the choreography then? The publicity for Tharp! reminds us constantly that these dancers have "new talent, chosen from schools rather than professional circles, which presumably means they have an as yet unadulterated ballet school training, although young enough not to have developed injuries, affectionations or idiosyncrasies which need to be worked around. They also probably do not have the depth of experience to understand how to play with rhythm or movement so that it comes alive, or to be able to interpret action in any other way than through a foursquare ballet school demeanour, which flattens choreographic nuance, should it exist, into the prescribed patterns for which ballet schools are famous. And if the dances have been designed to make them more interesting dancers, it will take a few more years yet.

Certainly it seemed Heroes was made like a well-crafted demonstration work for graduating dancers, with high legs and multiple tours abounding, of which the drive and execution were impeccable. It may be mere hearsay that Tharp once said you know that you've grown up when you have no more words. In this case, the heroes she gave us were a team of three spotless, epically unmoved young men against whose torso young girls hurled themselves mercilessly. Perhaps it was simply a comment about youth. Sweet Fields and 66 both made what I interpreted as unmistakable references to some particularly American cultural icons. Shaker hymns, and simple vocal chants in open fourths and fifths accompany the short dances in Sweet Fields. To say this work is simple is not just a polite way to say nothing is going on. A pale circular spotlight underpins the symmetry of pairs in processionral patterns and the simple walking steps of a folk tradition. Running, rolling, leaping and rhythmic variations in lines, squares and circles provide the bare structure which seeps through at the bottom of a transparent filmy balletic style and a brief touch of Graham: an aged brown filigree pinned to the preserved bones of tradition.

66 on the other hand, went for the bluster and chintz of popular Americana: Route 66, Buster Keaton, Sunset Strip, Hollywood musicals, Disneyland, the 'coolly' of vibraphone, denim and basketball, too absurd for words.

But then, one might say oneself, this is our Twyla! She, a choreographer capable of being in full control of what we want to see, must be creating something this facile for a reason. But what, if not to point out that these are American traditions born of a very particular cultural climate? This is not Europe, and not Australia, even though we once adopted much of the imagery as our own. Now it all seems faded and tacky, and the dancers' youthful slickness is unpersuasive. Perhaps it's just that Tharp is sick of being a hero, and has opted for the more substantial comforts of fame.

Small miracles: from footwork to footage

Erin Brannigan explores the dynamic of the film-dance relationship in Intersteps’ Videosteps

A boy stays out to sea from a high sand dune, thinking, waiting, ready for action in his commando-style jump suit. This is serious play. He signals with obscure gestures to a figure on the beach (he plays all the roles), arms and limbs flying in an ‘action man’ display of skill. The figure on the beach belts, twisting and spinning as he runs. The camera work in Boy (UK) choreographer Rosemary Lee, director Peter Anderson, takes us into an imaginary life, small hands fluttering out codes, epic slides down the side of a dune. Between close-up and long shot we can piece together gesture, intention, space and terrain in this beautiful depiction of the intensity of child’s play—the choreography remains true to the unthought, incipient actions of childhood, and the direction privileges each moment which actively negotiate the filmic form.

This short film was one of the international dance films that made up Videosteps, curated by Michelle Maher and part of Leisa Shelton’s Intersteps programme at The Performance Space. This event also included the launch of the Microdance films. What people at the screenings saw was a kind of map of the interface between dance and film, two points which, speaking cinematically, could become ‘documentation’ and ‘cinema’. This near binary of mine grew out of a belief that the utilitarian use of film/video for the creation and recording of dance, was a type of primitive practice in relation to recent examples which engage in the technical and historical aspects of film, along with the dance as subject. An example of this ‘primitive’ practice within Videosteps would be Douglas Wright’s One (New Zealand), directed by himself and Chris Graves, a film that for me, marked a point around which the other films could be placed. One is a film of Wright’s solo-film Buried Venus (1996) and if you’re talking documentation, this is a fine example. The virtuosity of this curiously Ninjaskiy dancer is highlighted by some great editing; the intention of the film is clear as you find yourself marvelling, striving to comprehend. (Where’s that pause button?) Ex-Wright dancer Brian Carbee comments that the film cannot compare to the live performance, cannot be more than a mediation which is devoid of the magic of a physical presence. I suggest that this style of dance film must always fall short of a ‘replacement’ in comparison to those films which actively negotiate the filmic form. Then Carbee brings me face to face with my own bias, asking—but how can film be truer to dance than to represent a dance performance to the best of its ability? For a dancer, this may well be the fundamental aim. It is dance, he points out, which is expected to bend towards this monolith of the 20th century art; it is dance which is adapting to film. Meanwhile, I feel myself slipping between two worlds, but decide to stick to my guns and argue that “it’s a two way street”. There is a definite satisfaction in these films which embrace the whole—the dance, the filmic expectations and possibilities, the movement both on the screen and of the frames.

A certain tendency in dance film to patch together dramatic sections and discrete dance sequences performed to the camera became clear after seeing the films Effort Public (Germany), Vertigo Bird (Slovenia) and The Father is Sleeping (Switzerland) in this programme. Effort Public expresses the class struggle with the effort of dance becoming the main physical metaphor. Men throw and catch each other like sides of meat in an industrial, dark space where the dance can never stop, always in frame, moving off, or in the background. Filmic ‘tricks’ such as a play on reflections in a pool of water and the tracing of a chain reaction across objects, sit outside the drama which is located in the movement. The film really only frames and selects the dance, the factory space acting as a ‘set’. Vertigo Bird, choreographer Iztok Kovac, is alarmingly similar, set as it is, in “the labyrinth of mining pits” in the town of Trbovlje (program note). The drama is established through the shots of workers moving around with the dance sequences remaining separate, except for a scene where the workers act as an audience, the aim of the work to seek “a connection between two worlds” becoming clear. Here we slip into a documentation of ‘audience’ response. In The Father Is Sleeping, choreographer Matthew Bergens; director Robert Herbert, everyday gestures between father and son develop into a new and touching movement language but a separate dance sequence by new performers at the height of the action fails to make contact with the central drama.

Then there were cases where The Dance was the sole subject driving the work and we perhaps came close to that balance between the two elements, the film ‘showing’ the dance as only it can—doing the dance created specifically for it. The most remarkable in this regard was Ninie Caudron (Microdance), director-choreographer Trevor Patrick; co-director Paul Hampton, which can be summed up in the word performer Trevor Patrick chose to describe his cinematic encounter—“seductive”. The camera is in the thrall of the moving body—every detail from fabric moving across skin to the twist of an ankle is rendered with an obsessive gaze, the ‘eye’ now dangerously close, now taking in the body, costume, movement and all. The alchemy of the filmic process transforms and reinvents.

In opposition to this harnessing of technology in the service of the choreography is an indulgence in filmic techniques at the expense of choreographic invention. Lodea (Canada), is an uncanny visual fantasy of epic proportions, memorable for the shimmering void of white back to back with a similar void of black. Two figures mirror each others’ movements in these opposing ‘worlds’ but these movements add little to the black/white, life/death oppositions established visually.

Like Boy, Reines D’yมง Joure (Switzerland) takes us into a singular world and acquaints us with it through movement that seems organic to its context. If film has an historical association with narrative fiction both Boy and Reines D’y mong Joure negotiate this history while also accessing the avant-garde possibilities of a non-text based short. The Swiss film is located in the Alps and draws on romantic cinematic imagery, from lush green landscapes to bodies tumbling down a hill to rustic cottages and village feasts. The de store of such scenarios is given free rein in the ecstatic bodies of the dancers who move through the landscape, not as locals, but as visitors responding to the environment. Social dancing is intertwined with other dance; men challenge each other, women lean and support one another, couples tease each other. And all without a trace of irony—completely disarming.

It perhaps confirms Eleanor Brickhill’s concern that “the good will” is gone from audiences (RealTime #24)—in this case Sydney dance audiences—that people didn’t seize an opportunity to see some great international and local dance film/video. An interest in the dance film genre is not imperative. For dance, the most elusive of the performing arts, the opportunity to transport performances from around the world to our own theatres is like a small miracle.

Counter histories, future directions and manly regressions

Vikki Riley reviews recent CD releases

Tabara” is a punchy rendition of onora hermano” (my parmer, my brother).
acrossouth America as a kind of amhem for unity and social harmony addressing
volume about the real LP
Maestra’s arrs evenr calendar.

Tibiri Tahara
Sierra Maestra
WCD1981 through Larrirkv/Festival

Star Rise
Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan & Michael Brook: Remixed
CDDR68 through Larrilkv/Festival

Gye Woami
Adzohu
Independent ADZ101 through Blue Moon Records
mail orders 03 94115137

Home
Bongo Fury
Independent 002 through postprint@internet.com.au.

Audio Forensic
High Pass Filter
HPF 001 through Shock

Mi Media Laranja
LaBradford
BFFP114 through mds

Hate Songs
Sandro centod 04 through mds

This batch of new CD releases finds this reviewer once again grappling with Cubanism: in RealTime 21 I attempted to ‘explain’ the phenomena of Latin salsa as a World Music special event and new easy listening ambient genre—the Ry Cooder mediated Afro Cuban Allstars CD which has flooded the airwaves and speakers of bookshops and loungerooms across Australia, mysteriously marketed as a new pop act ready for mainstream appreciation. But the group’s spectacular non-appearance at the Sydney Festival and Jeff’s Jazz & Film has left many confused about the group’s real identity and reason for being. Fidel saying a big no to North American corporate sponsorship of Cuban culture was the main ingredient of the controversy of the 1997 arts event calendar.

 cambi tunes from the late 19th century, jazz from the 20s and their trademark interpretations of bohemia and montauk penned by Arsenio Rodriguez in the 40s and 50s. And for those interested in santeria and ‘roots’ of black spiritualism, Sierra Maestra get down to some out there descargas (jams), not surprising for a group which went back to Africa—literally, a decade ago.

Lyrically, the material is dynamic, a treasure-trove of syncretic and comic ‘street’ vernacular translated into English in an impressive booklet which shows off the hidden riches in Cuban literature and folk academia. Forger dividing Cuba into exiles and commies, this is all about a diaspora located in the memory banks of music’s latent power to activate and transcend, the potential for an invisible but united republic of storytelling talent to act as counterpoint to history and future romance. And true to the group’s evolving sound as modern musicology project, bassist Eduardo Hymené y and clairaucy Alejandro Suarez are mixing at the desk with new Portuguese pianist Bernardo Sasseti climbing up and down the ivories.

On the back ground, Australian master musicians are beginning to record significant documents of their work. That this country has become home for a wealth of outstanding players and composers of international stature is a fact lost to most festival curators who keep importing Third World stars with Paris agents for megabucks at the expense of showcasing the extraordinary day to day talent happening in some suburban loungeroom. African musicians are some of the mainstays of our live music scene, some of them are self-styled, like Vilanga Khosa, tight tenor sax into the dance floor. It’s difficult to find someone who doesn’t respond to Pakistani qawwalsuperstar Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan’s ecstatic cry, a six centuries old devotional singing style which, no matter what it’s going on in the background, always manages to uplift and move the soul to the heavenly altitudes. Nusrat captured on high fidelity CD has been the result of his collaborations with Canadian avant-garde artist Michael Brook (check out “Night Songs”) which has resulted in mass non-Muslim audiences practically overnight. ‘Soft messages from the Saints’ though is Nusrat’s text and since the early 90s Britains trance dance scene have claimed him as their drug-free master musician and guide, Massive Attack the first to remix his rags back in 99.

Star Rise, completed just before the Nusrat’s untimely death marks the astonishing entry of ‘black’ Asian music into the global pop market, with Nusrat classic cry, a six centuries old devotional singing style which, no matter what it’s going on in the background, always manages to uplift and move the soul to the heavenly altitudes. Nusrat captured on high fidelity CD has been the result of his collaborations with Canadian avant-garde artist Michael Brook (check out “Night Songs”) which has resulted in mass non-Muslim audiences practically overnight. ‘Soft messages from the Saints’ though is Nusrat’s text and since the early 90s Britains trance dance scene have claimed him as their drug-free master musician and guide, Massive Attack the first to remix his rags back in 99.

Sierra Maestra “Tabiri Tahara”

The Allstars themselves are the creation of Juan d’Marcos Gonzales, Sierra Maestra’s tres (guitar) leader. Besides repping in veterans from son’s past (like Celia Cruz’s pianist Raúl Planas, the CD also features another Maestra member, singer Jose Rodriguez. Sierra Maestra’s new and snazzy world for Record Circuit (only LP number in the group’s speaka volumes about the real story of Cuban son as a pollinating vehicle of European and Afro musical and dance styles more across America as a kind of anthem for unity and social harmony, addressing the listener as “mi socio” and “mi bermano” (my parmer, my brother). Elsewhere the group dows covers of artists

More serious archeological work is to be found on Ray Pereira’s second Bongo Fury release. The CD is a total reworking of the world of percussion styles and traditions; West African, Moroccan, Latin, Middle Eastern and Sri Lankan (Pereira’s birthplace) fuse and alternate as ‘pure’ hybrids and continental crossovers with snares of live sounds of market and village cut in. Nii Tettey Tetteh surfaces on this CD too, this time on talking drum, and reinterprets traditional African music, a step forward enough through the inclusion of some pretty mediocre a capella tracks in English, which removes completely the catastrophic effect of re-emitting from the skins. Childless listeners beware, this is an all-ages family CD which can be enjoyed by anyone who can say himself—okay as an intro into Afro beat styles but in the end more inner city tribalism with a hint of a swaying, dark, cracked black male into a feel good zone.

Does all this non-Anglo stuff even break into the Alternative Rock scene? It sure doesn’t get aired on JJJ but at the same time our pub venues prevent the two worlds from being totally mutually exclusive, from the no secret that ‘Infrican’ culture hates the World Music and Techno dance scene (diminished as either elitist, hippie, or, most unnecessarily, intelligible yet there’s a bleeding over of things like instrumentation and rhythm which is changing Rock’s surface textures.

Melbourne group High Pass Filter are one of Australia’s most fascinating groups at present for taking the plunge and trading in some of their baggage for borrowed sound systems from other climes. They may well turn out to be massively massive, appearing at the end of the grunge era with a crazy Lee Scratch Perry via Pere Ubu destructo strategies—like Goldie’s Metallic Slime, pick if you’re feeling adventurous. But for us they’re black, white or green. In fact everything about High Pass Filter is slightly misleading—what we get is their sound, their presentation, like their mysterious street posters, is impeccably cool; recycled grey cardboard stencilled and screened with Constructivist logos that tell you warehouse/ cartoon graphics of babied machine bits of metal appendages which tell you Performance Art project; the fold out plain A4 rollcake of sound correspondences, just out.

There’s something really refreshing about Audio Forensic that you just don’t get with stuff like Tricky, it’s music as an experimental art movement which leaves behind documents and blueprints for future societies. Older groups like Chrome, The Bongos, Soft Machine (singing ‘Reggae Nation’) and Zoviet France come to mind here but HPF sit on the gate of current pulses of urban decay with a bright, hopeful, ‘observational’ melancholia. Dark jungle and haywire, Derek Bailey’s drum ‘n’ bass acts as temple for a nourishment of emotional violations of the self by mass culture broadcasts and invasive machine blasts. Singer Anthony Payne manages to keep the words like Nekrast amongst a backdrop of video natties, TV scenes, excessively scratched and skipped vinyl, machine feedback and found folk music—ie If Rock’s intrinsic capacity to blow out were a script to be torn up and reassembled for a kind of mass culture theatre it would stand on board a political. “On lines” it’s clearer. (I’ll never forget going to see The Clash ‘London Calling’ (where Gary Foley was the support act and master of ceremonies and he had the boiler room filled with drummers wanting to hear reggae). When Paine squalls for “land rights” it’s as if he’s been in a mindless desert, a nine mile rubble, the cry’s muffled, but there. The sweet sounds of resistance is what I hear mostly on this CD, probably the only adequate musical souvenir of Anna Wik to hit the stores.

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Out of the box
Sophea Lerner reflects on sound and computing after ICAD '97

Auditory display? Puzzled faces and a momentary whirring of cogs are not uncommon responses to hearing this phrase for the first time. What it quite broadly refers to is the use of audio in computer systems. But perhaps the spontaneous sense of contradiction thus conjured goes to the heart of what is most interesting in this area: How do you bring together computing and music? And why? As an event the International Conference on Auditory Display, ICAD '97, was highly interdisciplinary, bringing together participants from academia, industry, and the arts, sporting a plethora of technical knowledge and creative applications—people with a core interest in the convergence of music and technology and people from computer music to rocket science, all of whom use sound in some way to communicate information at the interface.

This conjunction of audio and computing is interesting because it requires a bringing together of the discrete symbolic operations of computers with the indiscernible resonant operations of sound. Sounds mix in space and overlap in time. The current interest in audio amongst computing professionals and scientists is connected to major changes in how we think about computer capabilities...No longer the box on the desk! Computing is breaking out as an emerging rash of ubiquitous and diverse and much more special new gadgets and applications. As computing takes place less and more and more in our physical environments, sound has an important role in integrating computer functions into physical space.

The relationship between computing and the visual interface however has a particular history which complicates the adoption of audio as an interface paradigm. The development of the visual display to replace punched cards and text printers as the dominant interface for input to and output from computers came from a scientific culture which sought to represent and manipulate discrete symbolic operations of computers directly through the screen which acted as a window on a world which was quantifiably known. The computer screen carries the baggage of ways of looking and thinking and knowing that are as old as writing.

ICAD '98 was a whole attempt to reconcile the contradictions inherent in the relationships between computing science and sound design by creating a framework for addressing the cultural problems of bringing together such a range of fascinations. So too the work demonstrated and discussed on the whole attempted to bring these paradigmatically divergent modes together.

Sessions included a huge range of approaches. Some used the properties of sound and the singularity of providing background awareness or spatial information as enhancements to existing data zones, such as a presentation by Beth Mynatt and Maribeth Back on work they are doing on Audio Aura: A lightweight audio augmented reality system which used the artificially designed sounds to enhance awareness of workplace activity and interaction. At the other end of the scale were presenters bent on attributing absolute empirically proven meanings to certain kinds of sound events; these tended to make very blunt assumptions about the representational meanings of sounds such as failures to distinguish in a meaningful way between, for example, the sound of a real musical instrument and a badly synthesised midi equivalent. In reproducing sounds, the apparatus of recording reproduction and the space in which the sound occurred, as well as the space in which the sound is replayed, all affect the quality and meaning of the sound.

To balance the sometimes simplistic approaches to the material meanings of sounds, a number of special sessions were organised to introduce a diversity of sound art and design issues to the predominantly technically scientific community. An after-dinner panel comprising Paul deMarinis, Ed Osborn, Tim Perkins and Bill Voila presented a range of perspectives on sounds, silence and listening. Paul deMarcinis discussed a history of the sounds which have signified silence from the soft introductory passages of eighteenth century orchestral music to the fine noise of telephone systems, sounds which indicate an immanent listening space. Tim Perkins gave an interesting talk on different levels of listening attention, proposing a particular mode of not listening, or not listening with conscious attention as an important and valuable listening mode for sound workers to consider. Osborn and Voila discussed their work. On the last night, delegates were treated to Pauline Oliveros' Deep Listening experience in which the audience performed for the first 40 minutes—a strategy which created conditions for a particular kind of open listening for Oliveros' following accordance performance. By contrast, in the closing session of the conference, sound designer Mark Mancini demonstrated sound design techniques from Spielberg blockbusters and Ben Bart's classic work on Star Wars.

It seems inevitable that the convergence of sound and computing will change cultural perceptions of both computing and sound. Perhaps the increased use of audio in computing and the dispersal of computing from the box on the desk will bring different ways of listening and knowing into play in the day to day use of computers.

The sheer diversity of ICAD and the seriousness with which it addresses the complexities of such an interdisciplinary event make it an important contribution to these shifts in the culture of computing.

Counter histories, future directions and manly regressions
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On to the still burgeoning Post Rock, lo-fi scene where American and boredom still rule OK. Groups like USA duo LaBrassBra and some people now think music appreciation is about starring in your own everyday Wim Wenders' movie, that endless blurred car window vista on some lonely expanse behind the twangs and reverb sustain of the score—there's lots of this stuff around and the best at it are Melbourne's own The Dirty Three. Morrison is the big daddy figure of the genre, atmospheric soundscape the only story, players' egos invisible. It's mildly interesting that Indie Rock has reached this non-narrative zone of instrumental and open ended poetry but for me it's positively soporific. Fans of the genre tell me LaBrassBra and Torrance are influenced by German 70s artrockers like Neu, that it's about mantic maelstroms on the first time, though I'm not sure they're right. If Torrance is at all the same mood, Mit Media Laranja—my orange half. Melbourne lo-fi doyens Sandro dish up the same but with vocals, indeed it's the vocals that make them exist. This ensemble manage to pack out grunge bars like Fitzroy's Punters Club with a barely audible sound which rivals their audience's enthusiasm with strings that are faintly plucked, high hats tapped by featherweight sticks, piano keys which are struck like Satie-esque Enon spats and an East Coast singer-songwriter drawl which drones over the top.
Blame REM or The Hunters and Collectors—Sandro are an insipid reminder that post Kurt Cobain, 20 something white boys MUST be heard. Without going into the lyrics too deeply ("She'll suck you off for a bottle of champagne" is a memorable line), it's too hard to sense an authenticity factor at work here. Osborn is an imitation Leonard Cohen for the 90s, where open-book scrutiny of bad masculinity throws up the voice as unforgiving interrogator of the self. Singer Gareth Edwards is yet another anti-hero figure for Rock's dead end journey as mourning music for the wounded and messed up "man" inside the beat. Unfortunately it's time else to do off. Such stern, resigned stuff this "Observational Rock" (as the genre now tainly calls itself) is so curiously strange when Cultural Studies gurus like Ken Wark are busy putting Oz punk and hip hop like Nick Cave into the canon as if the idea of insurgency happened a long time ago, out of the reach of everyone else's experience. Hate Songs is the opposite of what's going on in contemporary dance music—all content, a sole narrator and secondary theatre technician—a whole world of "I surrender"...
Sympathetic magic from Chamber Made Opera

Trevor Hay elucidates the relationship between story and opera in Julian Yu and Glen Perry's Fresh Ghosts.

Chamber Made Opera's Fresh Ghosts is an exciting and ambitious adaptation of the semi-autobiographical Lu Xun short story Medicine, written in April 1919, just before the series of demonstrations against the Qing government which launched China's first cultural revolution—the May fourth movement. The title—"fresh" is more evocative, more carnal than the Chinese word new—also invokes Lu Xun's bitter lament about the execution of five young writers in 1931: "I can but stand by looking on, as friends become new ghosts..."

The story appears in a 1922 anthology entitled Call to Arms and is a striking example of Lu Xun's most enduring achievement, a combination of almost pathological realism, depicting traditional Chinese culture as a state of disease, and that severe, acetic kind of romanticism-subjectivism which has allowed him to maintain his reputation in world literature as a great original artist despite his official status in the PRC as foremost 'revolutionary' writer. The Chamber Made production is ingeniously faithful to the essentials of the original, both in content and in translation of Lu Xun's strange and morbidly powerful aesthetic into operatic form—an interesting irony in view of the fact that the author himself was sarcastic about Peking Opera—and the storyline is only slightly modified in order to simplify a very complex form of narrative, in which the reader's view of events shifts and blurs and re-organises itself like a holographic image.

A teashop proprietor is desperately trying to sell a remedy for his son's consumption (Lu Xun's own father was consumptive and a victim of quack cures) and is convinced by a sinister government official that she need only meet with him at the crossroads in the morning—a site replete, in Chinese folklore, with malevolent spirits and the evil residue of tragic, premature death—and pay him a certain fee for a 'guaranteed cure'. She meets the official, pays the money and is given a mysterious packet containing the cure. Through the device of conversation conducted in the teahouse (using in English, with English and Chinese subtitles, reminiscent of the way the songs of the Chinese opera used to be accompanied by character slides to overcome problems of dialect) we learn that while this transaction has been taking place a young revolutionary has been executed—just as a young woman from Lu Xun's home town was publicly executed in 1907, while he was in Japan studying medicine. It then transpires that the magic cure which the mother has given her son is in fact a piece of steamed bread which has been plunged into the breast of the condemned man. As in other stories in Call to Arms, we are confronted with the spectre of cannibalism, combined with elements of sympathetic magic. The boy has eaten not only bread and blood but the healthy lungs of the executed revolutionary—a form of pre-revolutionary magic which has its vestigial traces in the practice of selling organs extracted from those executed in contemporary China.

The boy dies and two women—the mother of the boy and a friend of the revolutionary—meet as they tend graves in a cemetery for paupers and criminals. A wreath has appeared mysteriously on the revolutionary's grave and the women puzzle over how it came to be there. A crow materialises and the young woman believes for a moment it may be the soul of her martyred friend. She tries to give off a shrill cry to the crow to give her a sign but it does not move. Then, as they rise from the graveyard, the crow flies towards the horizon.

Here is the principal difficulty for Fresh Ghosts as an opera. I suspect only those who had actually read the story were aware how much was riding on the crow's wings in that last scene. A great deal of discussion has taken place in Chinese literary circles about the meaning of this, but it boils down to the notion that while the crow did not respond to the superstitious belief that it was actually a migrating soul, it did fly toward a dauntingly distant, but real destination—revolution. The synopsis for the seventh and final scene tells us, "As they move off there is a thun of wings and they look up to see the crow which circles overhead and flies off into the horizon". Lu Xun, in his final sentence, has the crow flying 'like an arrow for the horizon' and when he leaves that shaft of his diagnostic detachment and ghostly realism takes flight with it, in search of a remote and perhaps hopeless revolutionary idealism. Curiously, while the opera handles the macabre realism extremely well, it is at the point where romanticism enters—the very element which might seem most natural to opera—that the translation falters. Without Lu Xun's pen to guide it the crow has nowhere to go.

Nevertheless, this is an admirably imaginative production, and its chief success is in re-creating the essential story-theatre inherent in Lu Xun's greatest work, in which one feels the presence of the author as a manipulative stage director. As in the Peking Opera, detail is minimal, sets are spare and multi-purpose (as in Chinese traditional theatre, tables are used for both symbolic and realistic purposes), costumes are stylised (call performers appear in usher-like costumes of red and black, with a tie that is at one point cut with scissors to represent rejection of the Qing pig-tail) and Julian Yu's music (with a first libretto by Glenn Perry) is a fascinating blend of western operatic singing with its credibility-straining 'heightened speech' effect, and the accompaniment of a small hybrid orchestra located on stage as in traditional Peking Opera and dominated towards the end by a poignantly melodic erhu reminiscent of the music of Lu Xun's birthplace. I think the author himself might have been agreeably surprised how truly sympathetic the magic of Chinese-Australian inspiration can be.

Chamber Made Opera, Fresh Ghosts, Theatreworks, St Kilda, November 27-29, December 2-6.

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