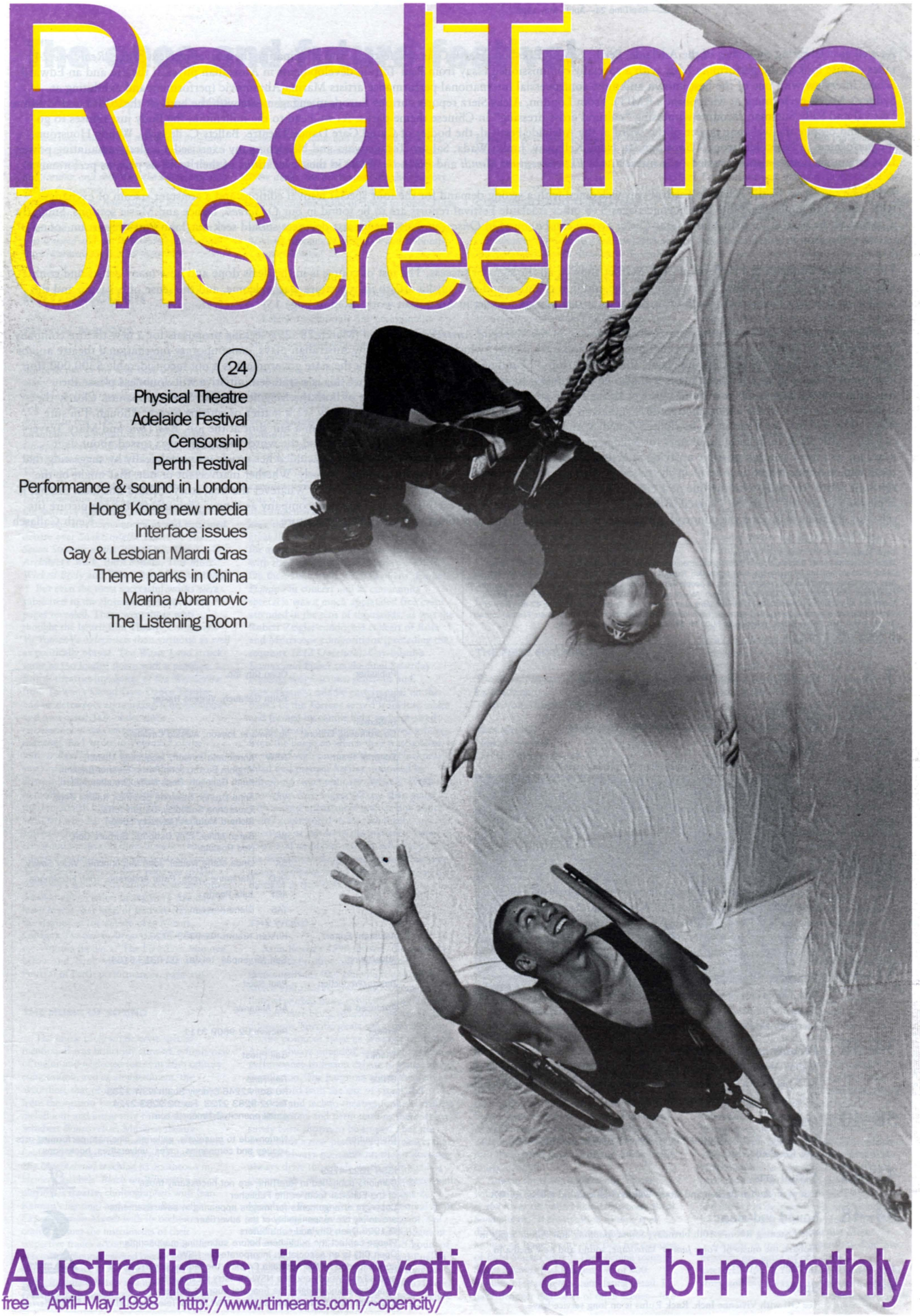
Real Time OnScreen



Australia's innovative arts bi-monthly

free April–May 1998 http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/

As well as celebrating the riches of the Adelaide, Perth, Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras arts festivals and anticipating the arrival of Next Wave, *RealTime* 24 takes a close look at the performing body with a specially commissioned essay from Peta Tait on developments in Australian physical theatre and an Edward Scheer interview with one of the best known and most controversial international performance artists Marina Abramovic (performing and exhibiting at Sydney's MCA, performing at Melbourne's RMIT). From London, Aleks Sierz reports curious European engagements with the body at the 20th London Mime Festival and Sally Sussman recounts witnessing "cultural cross-dressing" in Chinese theme parks. As we head to the millenium, the Body just refuses to go away, and despite the welcome power of the Word at the Adelaide Festival, the bodies of Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, Ballets C. de la B., Wendy Houstoun, the performers in Nikki Heywood's *Burn Sonata*, Nigel Kellaway, Junko Wada, Saburo Teshigawara and Needcompany exercised a collective haunting power. Less strenuous bodies also impressed—the musicians in *Experimentum Mundi* and *Black on White* in their evocations of their work as play, as performance.

RealTime's presence at the Adelaide Festival was welcomed with a strong demand for the four special festival editions and a constant stream of exchanges with artists and audiences. Note that beyond pages 3 -8 other Adelaide Festival reports are to be found in our *OnScreen*, Dance and Music sections. Similarly a review of the Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras *Queer Screen* can be found in *Onscreen*. New media arts devotees should seek out John Pott's report on sound events in London in our Sound and Music section.

The Australia Council's 3rd Performing Arts Market showed all the signs of success. The test of course is in the deals done and how many artists and companies get to tour internationally. In the meantime the addition of music and new media arts to its repertoire was welcome, and the sense of occasion and the invaluable sharing of information and ideas presaged strong market interest in Australian work. (Report page 15)

Finally, an intriguing advertisement from Arts SA appeared in the *Weekend Australian*'s *Review* (March 28 -29), seeking proposals for a new theatre company in Adelaide to "produce an innovative program of contemporary theatre, which may include new Australian plays, contemporary international theatre and/or new interpretations of the existing and classic theatre repertoire". Funding for the first year from the state government is a not inconsiderable $300,000 (for four productions a year) and "Seed funds will also be contributed by the Australia Council". That this is a state led initiative will doubtless please the Australia Council and its Theatre Fund which took the brunt of criticism for the funding demise of both the Magpie and Red Shed companies. Clearly the state's consultancy into the amalgamation of Magpie and Red Shed came up with a nil result, so, wisely, it's a matter of starting afresh. Though, I'm sure many of us feel that for a wrong to be righted Benedict Andrews and his collaborators warrant more than a fair shot at the job. *RealTime* and Mary Travers copped a little flack from certain quarters for Mary's response to the results of the last funding round, and the word "nostalgic" was tossed about. Is it nostalgic to expect the best possible assaying of artists' work across the country? Interestingly, Mary concluded her article un-nostalgically by suggesting that the tough decisions might have to be in the funding of a few companies well at the expense of many poorly. Whether inadvertant or not, that might be the result in South Australia with the one new company working from state funds formerly allocated to two. Whatever the 'real story' behind this local drama, it is pleasing to see the Australia Council committing itself to the principle of the establishment of the new company as it now promulgates the big picture (its series of discussions around the country). Of course, it's in the details that we sometimes see the bigger picture.

Keith Gallasch

cover image: Catherine Chappell & Dancers
Our cover shows two of the seven performers from Catherine Chappell & Dancers, a professional New Zealand dance company who will be performing their production *Touch Compass* for the High Beam Festival in Adelaide in May. High Beam celebrates the creative abilities of people with disabilities and brings together Australian as well as companies from Canada, New Zealand and Sweden. As well as over 60 dance, performance and literary events, there'll be an exhibition (*Reversing the Gaze*) featuring photographic and digital media works by 17 members of DADAA (WA) and a seminar on Art, Self-expression and Identity. For information on the High Beam Festival contact Arts in Action, 101 Halifax Street, Adelaide SA 5000 Ph 08 8232 6391 Fax 08 82240709
photograph: John McDermott

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The once and future festival

RealTime at Robyn Archer's 1998 Adelaide Festival

RealTime *was part of the official program of the 1998 Adelaide Festival responding to performances, concerts, events, festival themes and forums, and recording the discussion and debate that seemed so much a part of this festival. From the four Adelaide Festival editions of* Real Time *here's a selection of responses with a reminder that much more was covered and can be found at our website* http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/

Introduction

FESTIVAL PASSIONS

Robyn Archer's 1998 Adelaide Festival has been one of the very best, a festival of many strange and rich experiences. The mythology (and sometime actuality) of there only ever being one great work per festival was put to rest. There has been near unanimity of admiration for *La Tristeza Complice*, *Songs of the Wanderers*, *Carmen*, *The Waste Land*, *Masterkey*, *Box the Pony*, *Va Yomer.Va Yelech*, *Haunted, Daunted & Flaunted*, *I Was Real—Documents*, *Experimentum Mundi* and, the talk of the the festival's final stage, *Black on White*. There has also been enormous and sustained debate over *Snakesong/Le Pouvoir*, *The Seven Streams of the River Ota*, *The Architect's Walk*, *Burn Sonata*, *This Most Wicked Body* and *Who's Afraid of Anything?*

But even the most successful works were submitted to the closest of scrutiny as our pages revealed. There were those who thought the Israeli Itim Theatre Company's *Va Yomer.Va Yelech* less than virtuosic as well as politically obtuse. *The Waste Land* struck some as too loaded down with a peculiar British theatricality. *Songs of the Wanderers* from Taiwan's Cloud Gate Dance Theatre had its detractors announcing it melodramatic and over-acted.Talk under these circumstances was sometimes anxiety-inducing. As I wrote in Volume 3 of the festival *RealTime*: "The festival bonus of sustained dialogue and debate has its downside when you encounter someone immediately after a performance (or in the third or fourth intervals of *The Seven Streams*) who hates the work you like and you're in no shape to defend it". Nikki Heywood's powerful *Burn Sonata* was admired by several overseas festival directors but crudely dismissed by a reviewer in *The Advertiser* whose arts editor countered with a detailed appreciation of the work five days later. It was that kind of festival. (For some of the flavour of the debate over Robert Lepage's *The Seven Streams of the River Ota*, see Virginia Baxter's "The First Five Minutes" below and Sarah Miller in her review of Festival of Perth performances, page 10)

THE MUSIC OF SOUND

The music program deserves special mention. It was brilliantly curated, a fresh view of major and neglected forces in 20th century composition, and of an instrument, the accordion, that proved itself many times over from the virtuosi Lechner and Klucevsek to its mellifluous and integrative role in the Zender-Schubert *Winterreisse*. Music as theatre manifested itself in too many ways to list here (including a treasurable rarity, Hanns Eisler's *Die Massnahme*) reaching its apotheosis in Heiner Goebbels' *Black on White* (the act of playing as theatre, choreographed with Jean Kalman's lighting) and Giorgio Batistelli's *Experimentum Mundi* with its orchestra of craftsmen and the instruments of their respective trades accompanied by text and percussion. Sound marked out its increasingly significant space in the work of Hans Peter Kuhn for Junko Wada and his much admired *Over the River* installation, the Akio Suzuki concert with stone and paper, and the sound designs by Garry Bradbury for *Burn Sonata* and Paul Charlier for Stalker's *Blood Vessel*. New media arts celebrated both their history and arrival in ANAT's FOLDBACK anticipating the shape of things to come. There were also impressive glimpses of the new technology at work in computer animation in Michael Kantor's *Natural Life* and Deborah Leiser's *Hungry*.

COMMUNALITY, LOAVES AND FISHES

I think I heard only one occasionally repeated complaint (other than those from the few lost souls who hadn't locked onto the one sublime work they needed to announce as the best): that this festival lacked a communal centre as intense as 1996's Red Square. The more intimate Sqeezebox did fill this role for many, again a predominantly young audience (whose attendance at other festival events was only to be guessed at). However, the artists' tent in 1996 was part of Red Square. This year's artists' space, adjoining the piano bar (an extensive, free and relaxing jazz program) was more like a refuge than the hub of artist and audience interaction. Nonetheless, as ever, the Adelaide Festival proved itself the great bi-annual international meeting point for artists—and entrepreneurs—even moreso with the Performing Arts Market overlap. On the public front, Nicholas Lens' *Flamma Flamma* in concert and as community spectacle was a much applauded free event attended in the tens of thousands, as was the Robert Zeigler-conducted concert of Rota and Morricone compositions (preceding the requisite *1812 Overture*). Gay Bilson's *Loaves and Fishes* on the final Saturday evening, was a serene, generous and, appropriately, middle-eastern meal on the banks of the Torrens served from low tables and framed by candle light and urn-sized 'finger bowls'. Sardines were rowed ashore, from the barge on which they were grilled, to be served with preserved lemon, chickpeas, salad and piquant harissa, followed by refreshing sweet mint tea. Writers' Week proved an even bigger success than usual with record attendances and, as one senior writer commented to me, intelligent questions at last from the audience. Issues of space and audibility and the whereabouts of the younger authors were insistently asked, again. We'll report on Artists' Week and the Biennial in *RealTime* 25.

THE WORD

As in Kosky's 1996 festival, the visibility of the artistic director's themes and preoccupations (this time built around the sacred and the profane) was welcome, and they were even more explicitly propounded without ever being reductive, always fuelling discussion. Specific goals were also met: "...the power of spirit as Word is, as Robyn Archer always intended, everywhere, from performance to forum debate to visual art installation. The paranoia about the demise of the word with the rise of visual and physical and techno-theatres (and the endless combinations and permutations thereof) has surely been shown to be empty. That the word finds a new place in performance, that it is not always pre-eminent, that it does not always drive the whole work, that much is certain—the Word co-exists and engages with other languages" (*RealTime*, Volume 2, March 6). Even so, it was not a festival short on words given the verbal intensity of *The Waste Land*, the seven hours of dialogue in *Seven Streams*, the three and a half hours of *Va Yomer.Va Yelech* in Hebrew and English translation, Needcompany's *Snakesong/La Pouvoir* largely performed in English, Daniel Keene's *The Architect's Walk*, dancer Wendy Houstoun's all-talking *Haunted, Daunted & Flaunted*, *Natural Life*, and the performance works *Hungry* and *This Most Wicked Body.*

COMMISSIONING THE FUTURE

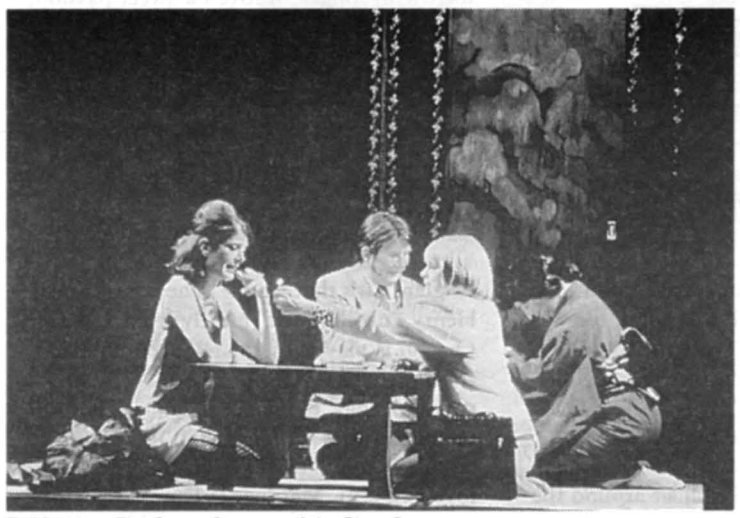
With Kosky and Archer has come a major commitment to Australian work in an international context. Even more is promised for Archer's 2000 Adelaide Festival with numerous works apparently to be premiered. In this festival extant Australian works (*Burn Sonata, This Most Wicked Body, Hungry, Box the Pony*) benefited from earlier incarnations and the confidence borne of development and reflection. The new works (Mary Moore's *Masterkey*, Michael Kantor's *Natural Life*, Doppio Teatro's *Tracking Time*, Meryl Tankard's *Possessed* [see page 33], Daniel Keene's *The Architect's Walk* and Stalker's *Blood Vessel*) all showed varying degrees of fragility and undernourishment, always a cruel state to be in a festival with a substantial international reputation. Presumably, the artists creating the 2000 premieres will be favoured with adequate finance and especially development time in order to realise their visions. In the meantime, there is no shortage of existing Australian works deserving festival programming and a second and long life across the country over the years to come. The Adelaide Festival has become *the* festival to which we look for the future. Robyn Archer plans to make the very structure of the festival itself part of that future in the year 2000.

Keith Gallasch

THE FIRST FIVE MINUTES

The Seven Streams of the River Ota
Ex Machina
Thebarton Theatre, February 27

Burn Sonata
Nikki Heywood,
Odeon Theatre, March 28



Ex Machina, *The Seven Streams of the River Ota*

One of the rules of conventional theatre that has always irritated me is that good theatre should grab you in the first five minutes, which says something about theatrical time in general. Once it has you by the throat, you should have a handle on the conflict and picked your protagonist before your temporary release at interval. After that you should probably expect to endure no longer than around 15 minutes into the second half before the end is pretty much in sight.

Among the many invigorating effects of witnessing Robert Lepage's *The Seven Streams of the River Ota* and Nikki Heywood's *Burn Sonata* is that their attention to time is so different. One is seven hours long, the other is around an hour twenty. The first five minutes of *Burn Sonata* seared. The opening scene of *Seven Streams* trickled, just five of 400 minutes of gradually accumulating detail. I have stronger memories of other scenes—like the one in which a Canadian diplomat and his wife, after attending a performance of a Feydeau farce in Osaka performed by a French-Canadian company, invite one of the actresses to dinner. Over the course of about 20 minutes (or was it 30?) in a tiny room with the shoji screens open for the audience to peek inside, these three indulge in ordinary dinner-table conversation about each other, about the food, about Canada and about theatre while in another room stage right, lit by a table lamp, a laid-back translator dispassionately translates into a microphone. In conventional theatrical terms the scene is too long. Some in the audience, of the Get it? Got it? Good! school, found it irritating. Certainly the tensions in the relationships, the information adding to the narrative, the necessary conflict could have been expressed in much less time. So why not just spit it out?

Days later, John Romeril mentions another scene in which Ada records a Poulenc song in a recording studio. Usually, he says, that scene would begin at some arbitrary point in the song. A few seconds in, someone would wave a hand or enter the studio and cut her off. End of scene. Here the song begins the scene and in the middle of her singing, a man moves silently across the front of the glass, watching her as she sings. He leaves and she completes the song. The song frames the scene. Voila! "Noo theatre" (as Bill Irwin calls it in his *The Regard of Flight* which both parodies and celebrates 'the new theatre').

Much of what was understatedly unfolding in *The Seven Streams* ("98 version") was happening in real time. In the restaurant scene our attention is split between the actors in the scene and the simultaneous translation of the scene going on in the booth. Instead of topping up the essence or filling in the essentials, we experience on the stage something more like the complexity of real life: split concentration; something closer to the precise number of banalities and implied insults it takes for the obtuse wife to get under the skin of the polite actress observed by the besotted diplomat; the degree of tension required to build up over minutes in a small room, to make the actress finally stand up and break the scene open, blurting out "The play was shit! Why don't you just say it?" Speaking of which, the murmurings around *The Seven Streams* have also been accumulating over time. Since I saw it I have heard everything from breathless enthusiasm to snarling hatred of "all that realism, its "superficiality". Someone said: "All North Americans can do is talk about themselves. It's like seven hours of Ray Martin." "7,000 strands of iota." I have heard "orientalism" ground on teeth. (Q: Isn't a play by French-Canadians inspired by Japan and populated by, among others, Japanese characters, substantially different from a play claiming to be authentically Japanese?) I have heard rumours of outrage at the final scene, people who won't go because of its references to the Holocaust and suggestions of "more bloody earth mothers" from someone who said she wished she could have taken her feminist off and left her in the cloakroom, and melodrama-loathers drawling drily at the end of the seven hours, "And that's how Dad met Mom".

Caught in these conversations, I'm torn between my sense of objective interpretation of the ideas contained in the story and my pleasure in the work, which

• *continued page 4*

The once and future festival

• *from page 3*

lies elsewhere. If I simply cut to the narrative, I risk losing an essential quality of the work, ignoring the ideas contained in its careful and detailed scene-making, the non-literariness of its text, its non-declamatory acting. But most of all, the way it deals with time. The way some people talk, you'd think they'd been watching a 90-minute play.

The first five minutes of *Burn Sonata* are almost enough. I could have left the theatre satisfied after watching the opening sequence in which Ben Grieve and Claire Hague, their fine-boned physiques almost identical, awkwardly grope like ghost children materialising in the mirror of each other. She is lolling, leading him her way, self-centred. He is articulated, edgily turning towards the door waiting for the other ghosts to enter. After that I lost the sense of time. I might have been there for days. In *Burn Sonata* a dysfunctional family performs for itself its sad sonata to Garry Bradbury's gothic player-piano score. It's a scenario of threatened violence, passive acceptance, internalised fear all contained within the three walls of an acid green room of what must be asbestos. Not narratively driven like *Seven Streams*, *Burn Sonata* is essentially a physical text of interconnections, a state of being teased into strands for the audience to pull together. Here is a family of frightened and frightening animals. The young boy babbles a tale of dismemberment while his brother fantasises an idealised male body. The girl is mostly silent. When she does speak, she can't be heard. The self-lacerating father exposes himself to her in bits. The mother kneads dough with one hand while feeling the inside of one foot with the other. Her dance of longing leads her daughter into another broken mirror. Fear bounces around the walls, from body to body. At the end, the sacred family unit gathers around the altar of the TV, all watching with different eyes. What horrifies one is hysterically funny to another. No touch passes between them, only the proximity of shared sorrow. The last five minutes, like the first, burns into the body.

Virginia Baxter

IS THERE NO REST/THERE IS NO REST

La Tristeza Complice
Les Ballets C de la B and Het Musiek Lod
Playhouse, February 27

My father played a button-accordion, for 'old-time' dances. And he was good. He was a sought-after musician, everyone could dance to his music. My mother was a good dancer. My parents took me to these dances, once a month, and taught me all of them. Occasionally at Christmas my father brings out his accordion. And we all sit around the lounge-room and eat and drink. I think my father should be in this festival. I grew up, in the country, with accordion music and dancing. I also grew up with dark nights outside the Mt McIntyre Hall where the cars were parked, where the fights started.

I always wondered what anguish or despair, caused the punches, the smashed bottles, and the violent speech. I wanted to be in the carpark and the hall at the same time. To see both, as if layered. I think I've seen this now. The carpark was dangerous, and the dance-hall wasn't. A thin wooden wall separated them. In *La Tristeza Complice* (The Shared Sorrow) no wall separates living and dying, just invisible honour. And this dying is not literal, it's living death. It's sorrow. And the sharing of sorrow forms tenderness that is so terrible, so resisted and resented, that it barely exists as that. Still, it does. There's no denying it, thank god. It's energy that makes each of the 'characters' so full of life that they almost burst. It hurts to watch them play it out. Their bodies take a beating, or, they beat their bodies. It's brutal, and sensual, to watch. There are awful, funny, scenes, yet one can't laugh, one forbids oneself (somehow), and here lies the tenuous border.

The pacing of the work is careful. It swings from menacing calm to harsh chaos. Neither are deadly, yet each carries death like a precious weight which lifts now and then, leaving the person in a state of even greater loss, as if death holds cells together, is a friend. And this manifests when the winged break-dancer arrives with his small magic carpet, a silly Hermes with a silly message, a trickster whose one prop is a clue, too literal to be trusted—and someone covers it with broken glass for him to dance on. He'll dance anywhere, be tortured anywhere. Calm and chaos append each other, one beckons the other. There is no rest, even in sleep. The finely tuned roller-skate segment declares the company's tough poetics; a sustained poetics that keeps 'faith' to the bitter end; faith summoned up by one great indignant sentence: "So, who decided all of that".

Les Ballets C de la B and Het Musiek Lod, *La Tristeza Complice* Laurent Phillipe

The whole work is composed of tiny, fragile, passing events that infect each other, changing the dynamic and dimension of 'life'. You see a dozen young beings, together but totally alone, and sure of their aloneness. And this is perhaps Platel's clearest intention: that despite the goings-on of others nearby, or in real contact, the self insists on its utter difference, its own expression; it cradles its own story like a gift. This is powerfully told when the black girl begins to sing her sorrowful song—"if love's a sweet passion, why does it torment"—and the transvestite crawls all over her, pulls and bites her, drags her this way and that, covers her face, but cannot stop her song.

La Tristeza Complice, as political performance, respects the self whose screams are reduced to single syllables—no, damn, shit, how, bang—and to brief statements—"I'm Belgian, I'm from Belgium, I'm Belgian". It's that simple. The transformed Henry Purcell music (mostly from *The Fairy Queen*) is played by the ten accordionists from the Conservatoire in Antwerp, the soprano sings, the dancers dance. They all might die, they all might kill. It's about (if 'about' is a fair word) circulating desire (for love and sex). Marguerite Duras wrote of this fierce, sly, worn currency. She also wrote of the gaps within desire and body: "Sometimes they look a hundred years old, as if they'd forgotten how to live, how to play, how to laugh…They weep quietly. They don't say what it is they're crying for. Not a word. They say it's nothing, it'll pass". (*Summer Rain*)

I saw *La Tristeza* after the opening of the Adelaide Biennial, *All this and Heaven too* (at the Art Gallery of SA), and before watching the spectacle of *Flamma Flamma* (at Elder Park). That is, I saw the strong epic black and white texts of Robert MacPherson and the quiet domestic solitude of Anne Ooms' chairs, lights, and books, and then listened to a Requiem (Nicholas Lens' *Flamma Flamma*), and watched the hundreds of children carry their glowing lanterns, and embrace the river-lake, and inbetween witnessed people brutalise and comfort each other. It was like being burned by flames of every intensity, and squeezed to life.

Linda Marie Walker

THE KEY TO TELLING

Masterkey
Mary Moore
The Space, March 1

What is it about *Masterkey* that marks it as theatre shaped by a designer? Most obviously the fact that the design elements are not sets as such, not backdrops or frames for something else. More objects in themselves. Constants. So everything happens inside and immediately around the six fantastic rooms—cupboards which open from every side. And within them we see events shift and from different angles as they are moved. And doors open out into screens for projections—sometimes evoking mood, sometimes ways of presenting an action—the frightening spilling of ink, not just across a page, but across the whole room and the unfortunate perpetrator. More angles. The rooms are marvellously detailed worlds, each with a magical element. Objects fly. Sudden transformations. But not like stage tricks. More like effects that parallel states of mind. Like in Kabuki or Bunraku. And corridors of light like hanamichi (the Kabuki walkway) link the shifting rooms.

Each switch in focus shifts the ground of the narrative. No single point of view. Different voices. Voiceovers. Some anonymous, establishing the narrative, some speaking as characters. Here and there the characters speak their thoughts live, here and there they interact through dialogue. But always there's the sense of a telling by multiple means. Some parallels with Lepage's *The Seven Streams of the River Ota* as different as they are. Both draw on a Japanese sense of detail and of theatre. Though *Masterkey* is more clearly a Japanese story, the other about Hiroshima and its consequences. Both are intensely visual. For all its scale *Seven Streams* is a kind of intimate Noh play (the form is referred to, especially with regard to Yukio Mishima's attempt to resurrect it), climaxing in the inevitable eerie exorcism, or, more rightly, expiation in this case. In *Seven Streams* the house contains everything. In *Masterkey* the furniture becomes the house, then the building. (John Romeril was saying that when he saw *Seven Streams* in Japan a few years ago, the settings didn't seem to all come so organically and satisfyingly from the Japanese house that fills the stage as they do now in the "98 Version".) In *Masterkey* everything is contained in a set of permutations. Not diffuse, but organic. Concrete. But ephemeral. Like *Seven Streams*, this house contains many transformations. In *Masterkey* nobody is what they seem. Everyone has a secret, a past, or a criminal present. In *Seven Streams* everyone is related in some way.

Masterkey is based on a novel. Did it show? A few creaks and a loss of focus, especially towards the end. Sometimes it was too literal, for example at the mention of school children their voices flood from the soundtrack; a big projection of a street scene is redundant (and vaguely projected compared with everything else so pristinely and evocatively screened). Sometimes the telling simply becomes over-elaborate, told too often from too many angles. But none of this can deny the beauty and cleverness of the execution and the power of the Japanese actors especially. Bolder in their characterisations somehow than the Australian actors.

Like *Seven Streams*, *Masterkey* begins at the beginning and takes the audience through the careful unfolding of a tale. This is a festival of and about telling. Like *Va Yomer. Va Yelech*'s account of the first five books of the Bible, here's another text being told. As opposed to a play in which a story is simply embodied, enacted by performers. It happens both ways in *Masterkey*, and the set and the projections tell it with the actors. Most importantly, what Robert Lepage and Mary Moore achieve is a contemporary form of theatre which plays with and goes beyond various naturalisms and the other forms invoked. Above all, they encourage audiences to listen and especially to look in quite different ways from the ways we normally experience conventional theatre.

VB, KG

A DIFFERENT KIND OF NAZI

The Architect's Walk
Red Shed Company
Arts Theatre, February 27

How to spend time with Albert Speer? You can't sympathise, it's hard to empathise (as soon as you do, it's a wrong move). Best to keep your distance. Better to refuse a likeness in those moments when you recognise a certain lack of affect, a not-feeling-guilty when you know you should. How do you spend time with an honest man, a naively evil war criminal? Especially when he seems a different kind of Nazi—not at all vulgar. He's the appealing fascist of grand aesthetic dreams, time's conqueror. The chaplain says "Fuck God", his faith worn thin by his experience of Speer. *The Architect's Walk* worries at Speer's morality. It's a thinking theatre, sparely theatrical, its power in the finely crafted language that grasps at understanding the man and in the strength of the images beyond words—a burning bush, an angel-winged Hess, a soprano in red.

These images are not announced, they happen, you make the connections. They happen to a man (mostly) in solitary confinement. Or are they ours—does Speer 'see' the grave story-teller in the cream suit? Speer in prison paces out his sentence, imagining the vast distances he masters across the planet; the man in the suit narrates a possible story of a forester who finds the corpse of a woman ("Marguerite or Shilamuth..?") in a forest and wishes God to resurrect her. In this possible world is the gardener Speer the forester, wishing undone the evil occasioned by (Nazi) murder. Whose fantasy is this? Ours probably. Most likely it's not Speer's—the story entails the kind of feeling we don't 'feel' in Speer. In it a woman says "my eyes were broken on the bodies of my dead children". Speer accepts guilt for his role in managing the war, but not for the dead. It is a technical guilt, abstract, at worst: "guilt at feeling guilty, perhaps", as he puts it to the chaplain. When told he is an intelligent man and asked why an intelligent man didn't know his actions were evil, he retorts: "How can intelligence be a crime?"

In a garish fantasy Speer (accompanied by ghostly soldier musicians) joins a demented Hess in singing a grotesque cabaret song that starts out with shit running down the legs of terrified Jews (the fascist pleasure in the tyranny of his body over another's, and in the collapse of the other's already all too fluid body). Speer is finally repulsed, on the edge of vomiting, deserting the routine. Perhaps it's an abdication on behalf of good taste, not sympathy for Jews. As sympathy it just wouldn't ring true.

This is not a theatre of identification (if it is, it's a testing of the limits) and it's what makes *The Architect's Walk* an emotional and intellectual challenge, not in the moment of its playing (which is powerful here and there), but on reflection. This is not a nice humanist night out, and although it offers no answers, it raises all the right questions, the ones that stay

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with and haunt you. Not that Speer is without feeling—he experiences wild energy, loneliness, the desire to see his son. He survives by mapping out imaginary space with imagined walks across the world—with which to fill the empty time that threatens to undo him. In this we see Speer's love for and embodiment of the super-human. He proudly recalls a speech he made to Hitler about transcending decay through architecture. His Nazism, he declares, was a seizing of time—he's 26 when he meets Hitler, 30 when Hitler "lays the world at (his) feet"—"I met that moment".

The Architect's Walk is a haunting reverie about power, time and guilt, an intensely poetic speculation, and is appropriately and starkly Germanic with its controlled delivery, integral music and spare design—five slender poplar trunks lit and re-lit to rearrange space, and rusting slabs of prison walls (squeezed into the too tiny Arts Theatre proscenium). The deployment of Michael Smetanin's music throughout, bursting through or murmuring dreamily behind the words, confirms the audience's nightmare visit to an alien psyche, a place we might begin to recognise but never know. I can still hear the opening passage, Speer crossing the stage over and over, walking out his fantasy of survival and conquest, driven by music that is martial with almost dissonant but nonetheless triumphal bells.

I don't mind not identifying with Speer—I cringe when sympathy for characters is invoked as a key criterion for approval of a play as if nothing else is possible—but *The Architect's Walk* draws you in and pushes you away, demands reflection, and you have to go with it, even when it's not quite working, when it pushes too hard, or grows too cool. Like *Natural Life* it's an invitation into another psyche, in another time, and its demands are hard. I was lucky enough to be by myself after the show, rare given festival communality, and to be with Speer, with my, our and Keene's fantasies of him. I liked the play better for that. In the swift accumulation of works in a festival, the words and images that stay are the ones that count.

KG

NATURAL LIFE PERVERSELY

Natural Life
State Theatre Company of South Australia
Queen's Theatre, February 26

Intensely, excessively hysterical (as in hysteria—out of the uterus—the neurotic female condition à la Freud), *Natural Life* is the perfect wedding of form and content, no dialectic permitted, none desired, no light to perturb the dark—the idealised painterly landscape on the front drop is almost immediately superimposed with images of wildlife, fire, plague and extinction. This case study appears as neurotic as its subject, a study not of an individual (there are none in this work, possibly one), but the collective hysteria of a nation (cf Erich Fromm, Wilhelm Reich), of a colonial pre-1890s Australia. These are often forgotten, over-mythologised but nonetheless defining years. In *Natural Life* they are rich in trauma. The audience and an Aboriginal child—a girl, downstage—are entertained with...not a story, rather with a show, part British music hall (organ accompaniment), part European cabaret via Melbourne, with a community of white-face, blazered, cricketing fools whose sublime singing and unintentionally appalling lyrics ("all sacred turf is fairyland") yield to discord (a horrible animal out-of-tune cooing for "The White Woman"). She appears, grossly grunting and smiling her way into speech, suffering not constipation but a womb-clutching hysteria, a profound fear of assault. Fragments of events haunt her. Snakes (huge projections), plagues, fire, images of extinction sweep before us.

The world of these people is not the open landscape so familiar to us, but a claustrophobic box, middle-European surreal (designer Tomek Koman), thick, swirling, oily surfaces, hessian-floored, an insect case, a place of nightmares—video monitors rise from the floor displaying rare footage of the 'last' of the Tasmanian tigers. In his program note, adaptor Humphrey Bower cites Joyce: "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awaken"; and Wagner, from *Parsifal*, "Here time becomes a room".

The White Woman is played by a man and sooner or later all the bat-waving clan get to play her and, eventually, almost all at once. But not before their white bats mimic the walking sticks of the blind (do they really see her?), or inflated phallic orange bats beating one of their lot to a bloody pulp (a rare direct reference to the penal culture central to Marcus Clarke's novel). Battered outsize cricket bats finally fill the upper stage turning with a slow determination, not unlike windmills, permanent fixtures on the landscape. The Indigenous child is finally absorbed into the repeated, neurotic narrative, her psyche colonised, the body-wracking fits of the Europeans now horribly hers. She finally sees the audience and...

For all its apparent excess, *Natural Life* is a minimalist act of repetition compulsion, the same small set of words uttered over and over, the same awful images, the same scenario rehearsed over and over only to end in the same empty exclamation. The 'neurosis' inherited from 19th century Australia is still with us. Clarke's novel ignores the Aboriginal. Director Michael Kantor inserts the Aboriginal into a reductio ad absurdum of the novel, but absurdly with painful purpose.

This is a work of sheer virtuosity at many levels and it is theatre that hurts. It's insistent, unremittingly declamatory, a contemporary rendering of a 19th century theatre language. It's a nightmare of painfully sustained images, it's a bold statement, a cheap satire (especially in its final song medley bringing us up to the near present), and a distinctly male fantasy—but one *about* a male fantasy (Marcus Clarke's and the colonial psyche), one which admits the male to the condemned cell of the hysterical. There are times when its cross-dressing, hammed up, screaming hysteria is deeply camp—is this a dialectic...or an oxymoron? This is uncomfortable theatre, not of depth or complexity, but of the reproduction of a condition, an uneasy state of being that is never quite at home in the Australian landscape, destroys what it doesn't like by acts of extinction and absorption. As a comment on Clarke's novel (but never an adaptation of it), yes, but now? The roots of the Wik debate? White, 19th century, neurotic, psychotic? Still? As utterly alien as *Natural Life* looks and sounds, the question stays with you, and the image of The White Woman intoning, "I am the Queen of the Isle".

KG

THE WORD BITES

Va Yomer. Va Yelech
(And He Said. And He Walked)
Itim Theatre Company
Ridley Centre, Adelaide Showgrounds
February 27

Sinuous voice inside my head.
'And he prayed. And he cursed. And he destroyed.'
Sweet tongue; words of fire; obstinate pain.
I am translating a translation of a translation—or is it translating me?

In the beginning is the Word. Rolling out, swimming over me, pulling me in and drowning me. In the beginning is a ghosted space, twelve players and an audience. I sit, I watch, I listen to the familiar stories through the sounds of thrashing syllables. Headset off, on, off, on; I am seeking a path I know through a place that doesn't always welcome me. I am removed, I am detached, I am lulled and lured before I recognise my submission. (Is it?) Resistance flares with jarring notes, desperate measures, the too-try-hard acrobatics of staging in a piece where staging is denied. "This theatre is more real than theatre" trumpets the programme. (Is it?) But, an anonymous voice asks, do the walls come tumbling down? Yes, no, no, yes; I struggle to breathe an answer. Is there one answer? The answer: only the Word.

Which translation am I translating?
How do I read it? How do I say it?
How do I know it?
I hear so many voices now but no one is speaking.
Mouths open and shut in silent screams.

Itim Theatre Company, *Va Yomer. Va Yelech* Gerard Allon

In the beginning is the Word, and then the Word is made flesh. Characters form; they form and re-form. Actors inhabit choreographed versions of themselves. They speak their grandmothers, grandfathers, uncles, aunts, mothers, fathers, the diaspora. Parody the trappings of identity—knives and forks, a fur stole, someone's hat—even as never was identity fought over so bitterly, so keenly. I hear myself say: I am not a Jew but I cannot help being a Jew. In translation: If to be a Jew is to be human, I am a Jew. But the Word is made flesh, and it is not my flesh that singes and sears in the gas ovens of history. I am treading in water without solid ground. (Is it?) There is a woman shouting nearby but I can't hear her. Or rather, her voice comes to me through the water, now an echo, now a murmur, now a trace of the Word, which is all I can hope for. (Is it?) This theatre, however, makes claims for its own translation. Plants the flags between which I can swim. 'This theatre is more real than theatre' but if nothing is more real than the Word, and that always requires translation, how is this theatre any more or less real than any other? I am getting cold feet.

Levinas says speech is the act of listening.
Freud says speech is what is not said.
I am straining to read between the lines,
to avoid lipservice, or unintentional insult,
and to translate with fidelity,
which some say means to be absolutely unfaithful.

I take a fresh plunge, this time of my own volition, into a different view, a wide-eyed view. Here I see a theatre made up of the said and the unsaid of the Word, a theatre which knows and loves its own limitations, a theatre struck dumb because that is the point, isn't it? (Is it?) Bold claims are pushed down; my lungs are filling with water. A theatre of un/settled, un/satisfied, un/comfortable translation—and I, a translator and a translation, also un/settled, un/satisfied and un/comfortable. Nothing is airtight. (Is it?) In this theatre—a juxtaposition of styles, stories and personae—irresolution is sought even as, again and again, the same old story, resolution sneaks up and tries to takes over. In this theatre, actors savagely play with sacred texts in order to show their sanctity. Hurl commandments round like frisbees on a beach. Show no mercy for the weak and the poor, nor the strong and the rich. Show no quarter because in violence lies its opposite, and in and beyond opposites lies the Word. The Word is the Word: this is what I can finally make out through water-logged ears. Va Yomer. Va Yelech...And He Said. And He Walked.

My translation halts.
I cannot find the words.
I take a bite of the apple
and taste this knowledge.

Maryanne Lynch

ADJUSTING THE HEARTSTRINGS

Carmen
La Cuadra de Sevilla
Adelaide Festival Theatre,
March 1

There is something inherently seductive about side-drums muffled for a few seconds by a house curtain and rising to a climax as the drapery is swept aside. Perhaps there is something even more seductive about men in military uniforms ranked on shallow rises blowing bugles in a chorus that would make you weep (or cringe). This is the bare, blatant sensuality of true theatre. "Out of tune"—who said that? (No valves, you understand, just the lungs and the lips!) And voices—"You call this opera?"—which seem to emanate from the pelvic region, voices which wail, declaim and emote in a manner which relegates the blues to some less profound sphere of much more recent cultural history. Those who were shocked by the initial sound fell into a fatal trap and may well have wished themselves elsewhere on such a perfect Sunday afternoon. The rest of us either settled uncomfortably, or were comfortably unsettled by the emerging predominance of the Phrygian mode, the melodic contours of squealing brass, the persistence of snares and rim-shots, the rhythmic complexities and elaborate cascades

La Cuadra de Sevilla, *Carmen* Robert Ramos

from two slightly detuned guitars, and the rich harmonic overtones of the voices. One could only marvel at the perfection of the mix and match. If our expectations were initially pitched in the wrong key, they were soon transposed. We were suddenly forced into focus, our heartstrings adjusted until we were inescapably in tune with another world, another reality.

As for the dance, it is not just the spectacularly breathtaking precision of fancy Flamenco footwork, or the noble nuance of symbolic gestures belonging to the genre, for in this instance both are integrated with stylised choreography and inextricably bound up with the expressive phrasing of the accompanying musicians. Every detail of the story is enacted with passionate commitment, commitment of the kind that demands retribution as surely as night follows day, as completely as one generation follows and nurtures another. Here the psycho-sexual ego is drawn larger than life, the emotions not just amplified but mixed down, the narrative refined and self-perpetuating. At the same time (and almost imperceptibly) the wavering pitch, compelling modal cadences and trembling lower torsos form a three-dimensional echo chamber for our own insecurities, our fantasies, that tiny inner voice which bellows: "If only I could live like this".

Diana Weekes

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The once and future festival

• *from page 5*

TO ENTER AND EXIT

Festival Forum, Design

Songs of the Wanderers
Cloud Gate Dance Company

Le Pouvoir/Snakesong
Needcompany

Faced, as Jan Lauwers put it in the Festival Forum on design, with the empty screen of the computer, dreaming a starting point, how to enter, how to begin testifying to the disturbance and disruption being caused within me and within the company I keep (strong disagreements abound), faced not simply by any one show but by the sheer monstrous Animal of the Festival itself. Knowing that the moment I enter that first word on the screen I will have made my entrance like a performer onto an empty stage. That breathtaking feeling of actually having to begin the irreversible momentum of the show. Wang Rong-yu, waiting for the rice to begin its unstoppable flow as the eternal wanderers emerge and the red drapes rise. Leda, with the uneasy music enveloping us in the dark, poised to fuck herself with her puppet Zeus, thus beginning the unending human saga of the interplay between eros and death. The American soldier, camera in hand, stepping on to the gravel path outside the Japanese house, about to face the horrors of Hiroshima and with one ejaculation to fertilise a 50 year comi-tragedy of East-West relations. Iyar Wolpe, on the brink of the white cloth stage (screen? page?) of the Bible, opening with those words which are at a soul-point of her race and which seem to speak for so many of the (Judeo-Christian) shows I have seen so far: "My heart is sore pained within me..." It's there in the names: *Burn Sonata*, *La Tristeza Complice*, *Snakesong*, *The Waste Land*, *Possessed*. I appreciated the direct concern in Naomi's question to Lauwers in the Forum: "Why is your show so painful?" And equally I understood his response (to paraphrase and shorten): "Because the world is a painful place".

Never was this pain so vivid than when (by chance scheduling) I went, with the wanderers' song still filling me, to hear the snake's lament on the destructiveness of power mixed with erotic desire. The very belief system that *Songs of the Wanderers*, with its final unifying spiral, represented was rent asunder and its loss painfully evident in the disintegrated world of *Snakesong*. But the need for an aesthetics with which to express this rent and this loss gives rise in the work of both Belgian companies seen here this year to a charged and intense theatricality. It is one which, to use the words of Rudi Laermans in describing Meg Stuart, an artist we saw in the 96 Festival, "inhabits the realm of the uncanny" and is thereby sacred in its own perversely relevant way.

The harmonic completeness of the Taiwanese work, its organic rhythm, with scarcely a step or a move or a shift of tone out of place, the sheer lavish, joyous power of the rice-saturated spectacle, the layers of image and sound are all woven into an impressive, comforting, impermeable texture. It is not a cultural purity that creates the strength and impermeability. The touches of Western modernist expressive dance mixed in with the Eastern ritual journey and the sound track of Georgian folk songs are oddly disjunctive elements. But the artistic force, the accomplishment of the work seemed to me to be one of synthesis. Lin Hwai-min's previous work *Nine Songs* is described in the Souvenir Guide as containing "disruptive moment(s)...when the audience is forced to experience a critical estrangement". I felt no such estrangement in *Songs of the Wanderers*, from my position in the dress circle watching the map of the journey written into the rice. Here was an example of what Rudi Laermans, in talking from a different angle about the very different work of Meg Stuart, calls an "essential" (stage) image: "these images are so much 'image' that they never transform into words...(they) do not affect because of their 'meaning' or content, but by their 'being-an-image'". And later: "An image cannot be reduced to the metaphorical addition of a number of qualified poses, movements, or gestures. An image always keeps these elements together, and synthesises them into a particular...image".

Needcompany, *Le Pouvoir/Snakesong* Phile Deprez

The power of a work like *Songs of the Wanderers* is at times overwhelming, undeniable. But it is for me at one with its limitations. I see it, I hear it, I feel it, I am in awe of it but it remains outside me, choreographed to the point of completion. How do I get in there? Despite Lin's professed interculturality, this was also a question of cultural difference, of course. *Wanderers* is at the sacred end of the spectrum. It contains none of the profane late 20th century savvy I witnessed (and recognised) in the Taiwanese work on show at LIFT in London last year. The limitation is not in the work so much as in me—a profane Western voyeur both seduced by and resisting the seduction of Orientalism. I was enormously grateful for the final meditation upon the spiral as time to allow the spell of the work to move through my veins before I re-entered the Adelaide sun to let it sweat out.

Needcompany's *Snakesong/Le Pouvoir* demolished all the tenets of artistic form and sensibility upon which *Wanderers* was based, putting a grenade under the belief in art as a force of synthesis. *Snakesong* had holes in it open enough to breathe through and deep enough to suicide in. In traditional terms it was undramatic, a-theatrical, inconsistently performed (the acting/performing dualism raised by Keith Gallasch in one of the Festival Forums was here the bloody knife edge upon which the very nature of identity rested), scenographically 'ugly', with scant respect for its audience, too loud, too laid back and unresolved thematically. And yet for all this it was liberating, witty, intriguing, confronting, irritating, satisfying, disturbing and with complete respect for its audience's future.

The image seed from which it evidently grew was that fragment of the Lascaux cave paintings in which a man with a bird's head and an erect penis lies prone next to the dead body of a bison. What a starting point! There at the birth of Western art is the eroticism of death, the fatality of sex, the paradoxes which have haunted it ever since. Following the opening darkness, the tortuous music and the twisted images of classical myth, the shocking interrogation scene drives hard into these paradoxes with unflaggingly overt histrionics. Did Leda die in sex (the little death) or was her death violent and meaningless. "Did you die (come) together?" The debate powers on and on through double translation. It really matters to them, these investigators, these actors, it is an issue to engage with fully, one important enough to keep chasing through the pain and the boredom, even though they know it is insoluble. It is rare these days to see such raw commitment to an argument on stage. The issue is still crucial enough to make demands on our passions. The myth is still with us, insoluble. We still suffer from it, as the gathering in the contemporary Antwerp scene makes all too clear. The competing egos, the lack of focus, the ache of betrayal, the lack of motive or certain cause, the inability of the characters to work from the heart when the actions needed are so simple and so necessary. The men and the young women are affectless, disengaged, able only to relate through violence and denial. The 'room', with its plinths and microphones and objects of a civilisation's failed history is an empty mix of classical ruins and postmodern kitsch. This is a wasteland of the Millennium. It is little wonder that the extraordinary central woman, whose determination, courage, indomitability and dry dismissive wit is the only whiff of hope in the entire play, 'dies' out of it, orders the others off and leaves the mess for us to deal with. Her final wry smile at us is horrifying in its implication. Needcompany—even the name is a cry for help. "Help me! I'm Belgian!" as the actress in *La Tristeza* yelled out. 'Belgian' in this late 20th century has, through the power of its theatre companies, come to mean 'human'.

Richard Murphet

EISLER, TOO BRIEFLY

Die Massnahme
Hanns Eisler
Adelaide Town Hall, March 7

For one glorious performance, a sound from heaven, a left wing heaven, a great musical archival moment and much more, because we are hearing music rarely heard (especially in Australia) and a major work that has yet to enjoy its time. *Die Massnahme* worries at the power of the Party, not God ("God is a fascist" the chorus declares in another work in the concert), to take life. Robert Zeigler's conducting is appropriately expert, taut and driving; Tim Maddock's direction spare and epic (big screen projections of the text—sung pretty clearly in English—rather than pokey surtitles), the acting clear, direct, restrained (echoing Party agitprop performance and Soviet realist posturing), all adding up to a surprisingly emotional experience, much of the power emanating from the remarkable music, brass and voices magically melding or one springing out of the other. Eisler's music is resolutely accessible but transcends the ordinary, is symphonic in effect though scored essentially for woodwind, brass and percussion and linked to the everyday in its brass band, church choir resonances. Brecht barred *Die Massnahme* from performance in the early 50s for fear of its misuse in Cold War American propaganda, a tragic act of denial for Eisler's reputation. This concert was a festival highlight, a demand for Eisler to be heard, its execution perfect. I was reminded of another remarkable woodwind, brass and percussion performance, the SSO's not-quite-perfect account of Messiaen's *Et Expecto...*Ziegler and the Adelaide Chamber Orchestra (and the Adelaide Chamber Singers) excelled in the Eisler. This was gloriously and sadly and most likely, a once in a lifetime experience.

KG

IN THE FOLDS OF THOUGHT

Who's Afraid Of Anything?
Junko Wada/Hans Peter Kuhn
Space Theatre, March 5

For a long time I've wanted to compose musical scores from bits of text and coloured paper, and stack them on a shelf as a slowly amassing single work, or sentence (called 'Litter' perhaps), "as if the logic of fiction is one that pertains to the emotions" (Brenda Ludeman, Visual Arts Program); I've wondered what it would sound like, I always wonder what writing sounds like as music, or looks like as dance; and I'd been watching Junko Wada for a while before thinking there was something familiar about her movement, not something I'd seen before, or understood, but something I recognised faintly, or more likely imagined; then it came: she's writing; it was like watching words come-about, pause, float briefly, and join-up like beads; I didn't like this thought, I chastised myself for misreading the contorted hands and the calm feet, and the body separated into many parts, all at once; it seemed that each move interrupted itself (like a minor subversion) in its middle so that it was seen, insisted on being seen, and was isolated from what was otherwise fluid; still it persisted, this thought, the horrible ability (want) I have to align various forms to 'writing'; her body a type of stylus, acute, accurate—each move equivalent to the next—inscribing her dance into me, lightly; the engraving did not occur by harsh cuts, rather by repetitious and concentrated (condensed) strokes; the performance wasn't about grand vistas, it was some other spatial knowledge: a topology of small dove-tailing details: "(s)he is the worker of a single space, the space of measure and transport" (Claire Robinson, in *Folding Architecture*).

Junko Wada is not going anywhere (she's staying put, digging in), there is no journey other than thought (where she was sending me), and this thought is restless and malleable; it is simultaneous thought of here and of that other place so far back there's no known path; she writes: "back to when I was an amoeba-like single cell"; she's showing a confined, restricting space, small white empty, to be intricate (to be an architecture folding and unfolding, to be flesh: "Her architecture would be...a local emergence within a saturated landscape" [Claire Robinson]) and endless; that is, the space is strange—in parched geometry there is the naked written and writing body—and this strangeness is left alone by the soundscape of Hans Peter Kuhn; so, therefore, there are two separate works which throughout the performance remain distant (he's building, she's building, apart), parallel, creating, for me, yet another space (a third) which belongs to neither, which belongs to the audience (a gift, if you want); the soundscape is as minimal as the dance; and I don't remember its shapes, instead I remember single sounds, single events—rain, and to my chagrin the almost too-human ones, his whistling, his voice singing a Marlene Dietrich song, the pouring of the white wine into two glasses, and his footsteps across the floor to where she stood, waiting, and the handing to her of a glass, to toast the idea of 'ending' (I liked the music because it did not mark the dance, it did not drive or state, it was comfortable being there, present, and available at will) and this brought me right back, with a thud, to the 'real' of human display—to humans performing for humans, in diverse and delicate ways—which chronicles and archives the immeasurable and the unchartable, fleeting fragments (have I told you of the three dresses, red, yellow, blue, of how they worked 'against' the body, making its utterance somehow more live, and awkward too?)—and then not so much as 'noise' but as 'objects' or 'positions' in the space where I was, where the watchers were, skirting the dancer's square, leaving her 'room', her work, to her; the third space is a prolonged interval then—where thinking is invited, a thinking between, in this case, movement and sound, or dancing (as it comes from the inside out), and music (as it goes from the outside in); and this making, imagining, of the interval, or plane, by bringing into proximity, but not interweaving, two very considered forms—one that stretches, reaches to the limit, and another that rests, resides with slight tension—collects nowhere else but in oneself (who is saying nothing, while the gathered cells, a universe, are now at the bar taking their first post-show sip, putting themselves in, edging themselves toward, a state of speech [to borrow from Barthes]).

LMW

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WHAT I HAVE WRITTEN

Haunted Daunted and Flaunted
Wendy Houstoun
The Price Theatre, March 10

Jenny Holzer
Artists Week Keynote Address
Adelaide Festival Centre, March 11

One of the problems of writing about performances is the difficulty of notetaking in the dark. The disruptions it causes to other audience members, its potential to distract the performer, not to mention your own thoughts, are all reasons to avoid it. At the beginning of the festival I bought a pen with a light in it but it's March 12 and I haven't used it. Anyway, while you're writing something down, you risk missing something else. The other difficulty is actually deciphering the notes you make afterwards. It's like trying to remember dreams. The only words I wrote at the conclusion of Wendy Houstoun's *Haunted Daunted and Flaunted* were her final ones. Who knows why I felt the need to write them down. I think endings in the theatre are given way too much importance, like nothing else has happened up to that point. I smiled when Hans Peter Kuhn said in the Forum on Tuesday March 10 that he and Junko Wada worked for a set time on *Who's Afraid of Anything?* and when the time ran out, the work was complete. So much for endings.

Anyway the words I thought I scrawled on my program after Wendy Houstoun's performance were "You can hear the human sound we are sitting here speaking" but looking at the scrawl I found "icnsethehunanoisewersittinghermak" or "I can see the human noise we are sitting here making". A friend said she thought she heard something about "cities" which just goes to show how imprecise are the twists and turns of memory—more or less the territory that Wendy Houstoun is probing in this remarkable work.

"I am awake in the place where women die." (Jenny Holzer)

After a festival full of words, my notebook holds a collection of such sentences—impressions, paragraphs scratched over drinks after performances, addresses, snatches of sudden poetry, eavesdroppings, meeting points, restaurants, snippets carried around in my head until I could find a place to write them down, headlines (like the one that appeared the day after the Barbara Hanrahan book was released—"Diary from the Grave" and Friday's mysterious "Drug Dog in Limbo". At this stage of the festival there's an impulse to make connections so today Jenny Holzer and Wendy Houstoun meet on the page.

In note form, Jenny Holzer reads: "Repressed childhood/desire to paint 4th dimension. Art school—attempts reduce daunting reading list distilling books to sentences. Public posters/inflammatory essays/truisms". (I almost broke my rule and stood up at question time to tell her about Ken Campbell who when he was in Sydney a few years ago performing his show *The Furtive Nudist*, spent days at the Museum of Contemporary Art writing a list of questions to which Jenny Holzer's statements might be the answers). "Now installations. Latest work *Lustmord*—installations of words taking in whole body experience (where the eyes go). Words backwards/forwards/ reflected, juxtaposed with human bones to be picked up and read. 'Resorted' to writing, she said, because there are many places it can go but it doesn't come easily." Of the many sentences in her presentation I wrote down this one which came from a friend who was assaulted by a policeman: "When someone beats you with a flashlight, you make light shine in all directions". "Nowadays—romantic inclination—writing text on water—as light—from multiple perspectives." In *Lustmord* she writes as the perpetrator, the victim and the observer.

Wendy Houstoun too is all three. Before she enters, a voice from the speakers announces some random violence has been perpetrated on a woman. The voice appeals for witnesses, tells us that an actor will recreate the incident. The work is inspired by the BBC's *Crimewatch*. True to life and art after this, my memory of the precise order of events is not sharp. Well, I have sharp memories of incidents. How sharp? Very. Particular movements? No. I'm not a dancer but I'd like to be. Details? I don't...wait a minute, I remember a sequence where she took us through her dancing life by decades, going way back to the foetal position in 1969. I remember fragments of movements shaking her body. What kind of movements? Well like I said, I'm not a da...but they were unpredictable, unfamiliar, beautiful, no wait, wait, some were memories of other choreographies. I remember there was a Swedish bell dance she had learned which turned out to be incredibly useful, and I agreed with what she danced, sorry, what she said about jazz ballet and the Celtic dance revival. But that makes it sound satirical which is not what I meant to... What do I mean to say? Well the subtlety of... How? Well I remember she said she spent a year moving in two dimensions and how funny she was. But that makes it sound...There was much more. How much? Like I said, all I have is fragments, commentaries on her own body. She let us into her body and showed us her fear. That's what I said, fear.

Wendy Houstoun is from Manchester, I think. Holzer's crisp monotone is US mid-West. She is dryly witty, measured and fluid in the flesh. The words she exhibits electronically are short, sharp, sometimes savage. When someone asks her to explain what she means by "Protect Me From What I Want" she laughs and says "I don't think I can". Wendy Houstoun's text is continuous, reminding us just what a physical act speech is. Unlike much dance using the spoken word, here it is not segregated in patches, or voiced-over, or used for interruption or pause. Words are inseparable from her body. She doesn't enhance them with movement. They are partners. She does little more than speak them as she dances (no mean feat)—speaking of which, how Wendy Houstoun's bare feet show the shape of a dancing life. And this work could not exist without the words. Without them the wonderful sequence of visual jokes ("Two small movements go into a bar") would fall flat. The argument from people who don't like the idea of dancers speaking is that dance has its own meaning and words get in the way. In Wendy Houstoun's hands, feet and neck, the meanings of both words and movements begin to open up.

On an earlier page of my notebook is one of my first festival experiences, *La Tristeza Complice*, and as I flip the pages, Les Ballets C. de la B. become the bodies of Jenny Holzer's "It takes a while before you can step over inert bodies and go ahead with what you were doing". I wish she had seen those bodies dancing.

VB

A PROFANE BLESSING

The Waste Land
Fiona Shaw, Deborah Warner
Royalty Theatre, March 7

I had a professor at university, a Mr. Thompson, who thought that *The Waste Land* was the greatest poem of the 20th century. When he tutored me in Modern Literature as a second year student at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in the late 1960s, we spent a month on T.S. Eliot, devoting three weeks to a careful reading of *The Waste Land*, reading aloud, parsing each line, and annotating the text with notes alluding to the poem's many classic references.

And so it came to pass that my partner and I returned to my office last Saturday evening in search of the old university text

Fiona Shaw, *The Waste Land*

book so that we might read together both the poem and my 20 year old American emendations before proceeding to the Royalty Theatre to hear Fiona Shaw deliver her version of Eliot's classic poem.

Shaw's *The Waste Land* is clearly not the Waste Land of Mr. Thompson; her audience far removed from that 1960s US university classroom. I had been taught to read the poem as a lament for lost insight brought about by the shallowness of twentieth century life. Mr. Thompson led us through Jesse Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* and Fraser's *The Golden Bough*; through the Bible, Classical, Medieval, French and English literature into the drama of Webster, Middleton and Shakespeare; through the Indian teachings of the Upanishads, Buddha, the prophets and Christ, the quests of the Fisher King and Perceval in a search for meanings foreclosed by the monotony of modern life. Surely an intellectualised approach, it promised that "rain" (rebirth, redemption and salvation) would come again when meaning returned to our lives. Eliot's hope of humanising the times with a return to classical erudition was not what the future had in store, nor what Deborah Warner's direction of *The Waste Land* conveyed to her contemporary audience.

Shaw's performance was physical, tangible, as it unraveled those wasted lives in the desolate theatre. I was in the third row, centre, with nothing but a low table between my seat and the stage to impede my view of the actress in performance. I had her masterful performance as Richard II in my mind; but this was no Richard. Rather, a deceptively fragile looking woman in a simple black dress who transformed the poem from a whisper to the raging of Hieronymo's mad engine, as Eliot saw himself in the last lines of the text. She moved about the stage, drawing long shadows on the curtained backdrop, at one point sitting on the edge, barely an arm's length in front of me, her spittle arching to within inches of my body. Shaw underplays the classical allusions, choosing instead to flawlessly render the contemporary figures and voices of the poem: the aristocratic Marie of the opening lines, the lost lovers in rat's alley, the toothless woman of reduced circumstance in the London pub, Madame Sosostris and Mr Eugenides, the blind Tiresias and the wailing Rhine river nymphs. Her voice rose in a deafening crescendo enlisting the roaring "DA" of the thunder at the outset of the final section of the poem. The performance was spell-binding, captured by Eliot's words but commanded from the inside stage of her compelling, contemporary reading.

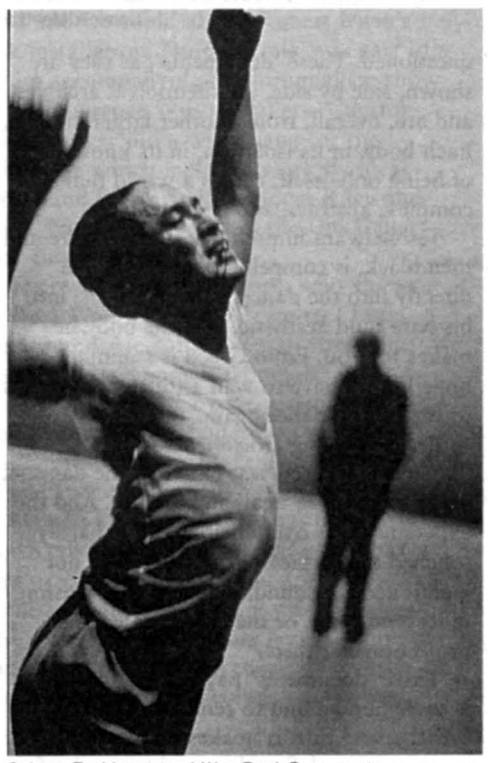
At times Shaw's performance conveyed a nostalgia for a lost past, a longing for a more noble foundation for life and meaning no longer within our reach. But in this instance the longing was muted by the voices of characters caught in the mundane present and capped by hopelessness about the future. As in Baudrillard's simulacrum, the classical allusions of the poem were all but lost on the audience, sidelined by the performance, mirrored but darkly in faint traces from elsewhere: that old Shakespearian rag reduced to a ragtime reminiscent of Lisa Simpson's playing the saxophone; a culture far removed from the classics; the rape of Philomel reduced to the vulgar jug, jug, jug and the lurching of the indifferent, sexualised body, caught in a meaningless act, to be ended quickly. A kind of hopelessness here, caught in a web of modernist excess. The final cries of agony from "What the Thunder Said" reverberated through the theatre; thunderous pain finally surrendering to the Buddha's doctrines of gentleness and the wisdom of the Hindu Upanishad: *Datta* (give); *Dayadhvam* (sympathise); *Damyata* (control). We received Shaw's final bow and blessing, "Shantih, Shantih, Shantih", in a space which paralleled the endings of *Seven Streams* and *Songs of the Wanderers*. Except here there was less of the sacred; more of the profane. A subdued, and I suspect mostly puzzled, audience returned to the night. Mr. Thompson would not have approved. But then times have changed.

Kay Schaffer

SACRED DOCUMENTS

I Was Real–Documents
Saburo Teshigawara & KARAS
Playhouse, March 11

Why do people begin to cough during silences; do they wait for silence. Why do they want to be heard; are they really coughing. No wonder Saburo Teshigawara includes coughing in this work, *I Was Real–Documents*. It does define a space, small and sudden, where others can't be. It marks terrain, which is communal, and yet exclusive, like the "sshh" does.


Saburo Teshigawara, *I Was Real–Documents*
Dominik Mentzas

I was a little anxious about seeing this show. I'd seen it in London and loved it. Here it was even better. I was closer for one thing. But, there was something else, something extra that is difficult to describe: perhaps 'tougher' hints at it. Something that defied exhaustion, or passed borders, or dissolved desires.

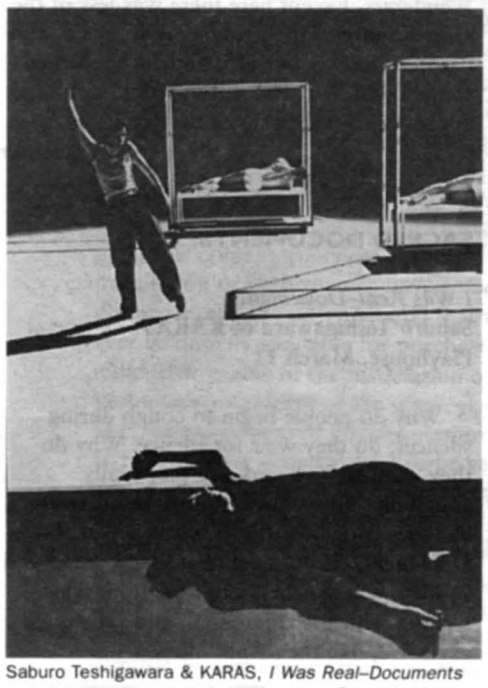
The work is composed of several distinct parts or movements (like music), which flow into one another. These are bracketed by a beginning which is dark and slow, and an ending which is light, brief, and strangely, falsely, idyllic. Teshigawara uses air, air as material, to make space come about for the body, sculpting it with a relentless and often frantic style of dance that is so full of detail and nuance that it saturates the gaze. Looking changes as one understands that 'air' cannot be owned, that it, here translated into 'moving', is free. Space itself dances; breath is the material of the constant present and the tense and tension of this fact, as force, creates the next moment (or gives it

• *continued page 8*

The once and future festival

• *from page 7*

reason to arrive, as 'thing', new and surprising). The bodies of the dancers are distinct and alone on the stage. There is only one time when they touch each other, and then it's as if, in brief closeness, they establish separation by voice, by calling, screaming. In this particular movement or 'document', where the voice is amplified, and at once beautiful and painful, it's clear that every cell of the body holds memory, and as the body pushes its limits, by repetition and commitment to detail—that in some sense is only the extraordinary possibility of every lived second—the idea of air and breath is put into doubt. I mean, the idea of what each is, as space and time, as language, is



Saburo Teshigawara & KARAS, *I Was Real–Documents*
Dominik Mentzas

questioned. These 'documents', as they are shown, side by side, are themselves archives, and are, overall, from another larger archive. Each body, in its isolation, in its knowledge of being only itself, carves a world that is complex, abstract, and delicate.

Teshigawara himself, dressed in white and then black, is compelling; he draws one directly into the dance, to where he is, into his bare fluid aesthetic, into the body he makes for you. Emio Greco is stunning, I hope I don't have to wait another 12 months to watch him dance again.

Perhaps seeing *Documents* in the Playhouse, where I was closer to the dancers, made them more 'real' and intense. And the experience was overwhelming. I've hardly touched the surface of the work, I've not mentioned the sound, which is a dimension in its own right, or the costumes, or the projections, or the...

These 'documents' pay respect to what it is to be human and to remember and to breathe; and this 'is' makes nonsense of wanting to re-define the word 'sacred', of wanting to loosen it a little here and tighten it a little there. It too 'is'.

LMW

PLAYING FOR REAL

This Most Wicked Body
Nigel Kellaway
Odeon Theatre, March 11

The dark. Again. Then the dinner-suited upper body of a man hovers in the distance above a grand piano. Glimpsed through a fine curtain he looks like a ventriloquist's dummy, though an unusually elegant one, in white-face, awkwardly held, voice masked in stilted refinement. Will Leda in blonde wig and Calvin Kleins appear out of the dark, fuck him silly and discard him? It's possible. This seems the same universe of dark deeds, lies and evaporating truths we lived in Needcompany's *Snakesong/La Pouvoir*. This man would have something to say about being wounded and discarded. It's his birthday, he's noticed a patch of dead skin (the long dying has commenced), he speaks as if past his sexual use-by-date, lust preoccupies him (sex has become the imagining of the pornographic camera angle on his own engagements), outbursts suggest betrayal and recrimination, he's suicidal ("My last performance!") in the nicest way (pretty as a picture, en pointe, hanging by one hand from a noose, twirling slowly to the romantic piano) and announces to his captive confidante-audience: "I am totally cold". There's no mistaking it, this queen is a close relative of *Snakesong*'s Queen bewailing her loss of emotion, swinging between authority and panic, peering voyeuristically into a world of sexuality she no longer inhabits. But the audience for *Wicked Body* is implicated in very different ways from *Snakesong*. For every apparent truth demolished, for every lie revised, the real constantly asserts itself, even when the plug is pulled. This man is playing himself, however much he quarrels with Identity (his own, the whole idea of It). He invites one of our number to join him onstage for the whole performance for a very real meal prepared by a leading restaurateur, Gay Bilson (stage left) and served by Joel (who is Joel Markham) and the work magically lit and stage managed by Simon (who is Simon Wise). Wine is drunk, cigarettes smoked and oysters tongued as Nigel ogles and confides in his unsuspecting (but very accommodating) guest—on this night a 30 year old man celebrating his wedding anniversary. Will he ever be the same? Real-er than the rest is concert pianist Gerard Willems, sublime master of Beethoven sonatas. He offers no mere accompaniment (though his playing is sometimes spoken through and his first curtain call shockingly denied), giving us complete works with astonishing focus (remarkable given what is going on about him) and beauty (amidst all that other contested and angst-ed over 'beauty' of the man-woman). As soon as it happens, you recognise the inevitability of the penultimate scene, the Willems-Kellaway piano duet (the latter initially on his way offstage for a piss): a coalescence of beauties, with Kellaway now focused on the partnership, emptied of cynicism and rage, a moment of refuge before the work's final burst of bewilderment and pain and its dying fall. Concert and performance merge as almost equal partners, an astonishing synthesis of performative realities. Although never said, *This Most Wicked Body* is therefore also about music, most blatantly when dinner table intimacies are interrupted by a massive wall of light and a recording of a boy singing Bach. Kellaway screams as the passage repeats, "This is nothing to do with me. We're here to be pure. I wanted it to be secular, now we have Bach and the singing of little boys". In a festival of great synchronicities, *This Most Wicked Body* is no mere companion piece for *Snakesong/La Pouvoir*; it extends that work's dark vision and stands masterfully in its own right.

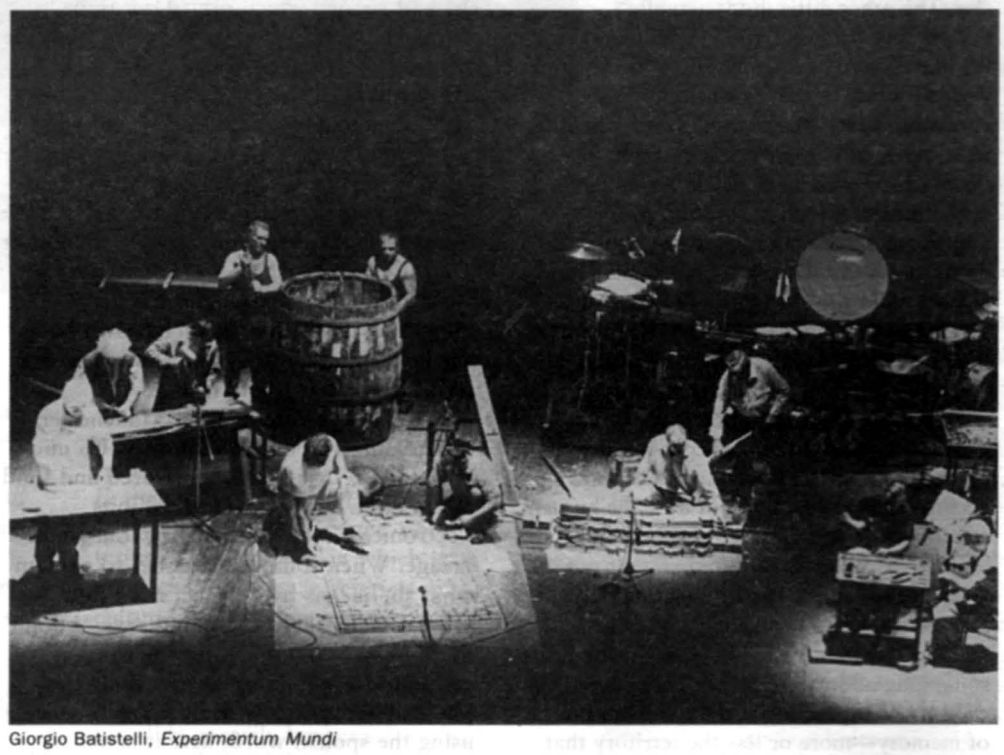
KG

MUSIC AS THEATRE

Black on White
Heiner Goebbels, Ensemble Modern
Festival Theatre, March 12

Experimentum Mundi
Giorgio Batistelli
The Space, March 13

The festival closed with rapturous responses to *Black on White* and *Experimentum Mundi*. With firm hand and sharp eye, Giorgio Batistelli conducts his composition *Experimentum Mundi* with an orchestra of craftsmen from a Roman 'village'—an egg is broken, dough kneaded, marble chipped, there's the fast whisper of female voices (sitting above the orchestra), anvils hammered, leather cut, a male voice (Lyndon Terracini) recites an 18th century appreciation of tools, a path is laid, wood sawn, a wall built, shoes made, the actions escalating percussively (with the accompaniment and thematic 'amplifications' of a percussionist) to the manufacture of a mansized winecask with mighty whacks (one of the coopers is built-around, holding the frame, the other soon installs himself inside to finish the job). A moment of rest and the work starts again, the steady chip of marble setting the beat, the shoemakers adding exquisite tones from leather and metal, the whole sound array building again as path and wall near completion and the hitherto silent father and son knife-sharpeners pedal out sustained shimmering notes against sparking blades and the anvil fires fill The Space with smoke—a furious almost industrial cacophony that would do Glenn Branca or Bang on a Can proud. This is hard work. It's music that sweats. (I'm reminded of the SSO brass players leaning forward, fingers in their ears, as the gongs thundered in Messiaen's mighty *Et exspecto mortuorum* the week before.) It's also music that rejoices. And it's another strange festival experience, to be moved by this but to wonder at exactly why—at this orchestration of found sounds



Giorgio Batistelli, *Experimentum Mundi*

in the hands of working men and whispering women, evoking not just another era but also the working lives they still live now in Rome. It teeters on the edge of nostalgia for unalienated labour, but the music is something else, evocative of the everyday and as harsh as it is beautiful. *Experimentum Mundi* is music theatre, perhaps more incidentally so than by definition, the 'theatre' residing in the experience of watching tradesmen working with their tools but nonetheless organised as an orchestra (though only the conductor, the reader and the percussionist are in the traditional tails and white bow ties, the men are in their working clothes, the women in their black best). It is exhilarating to watch. Now I want a recording.

In *Black on White*, subtitled "a musical play", professional musicians in ordinary dress occasionally form a static ensemble, but often they are on the move, choreographed across a vast space into small and large groups, playing while standing, while walking, sometimes oddly seated (crouched over keyboards or their backs to us), singing, changing instruments, taking turns at conducting and at speaking. This is musical performance as theatre. The music is in large part committed to memory, save moments when the musicians carry small score sheets with them, rest them on the rows of benches that fill the space, stick them on their instruments, leave them behind.

Black on White begins with an almost empty stage. A musician draws a glass across an autoharp, another arranges a pendulum to casually strike the strings of an electric guitar laid across a bench. *Black on White* also begins with the sound of writing, an amplified pen scratching across paper, and the murmur of a voice. Other musicians enter, the playing apparently informal, but fast assuming shape as they also 'play'—a dice game, bat and ball, the throwing of soft balls at amplified gong and bass drum—and then transform into a powerful united ensemble.

Later the sound of pen against paper recurs. A wall of paper receives projections and shadows (echoing the Edgar Allen Poe *Shadow* text) until it crumples later to reveal double the performing space through which almost the entire ensemble will march across the bench tops like a brass band (for this work they all learned to play brass instruments). One 'proscenium arch' midway down the space falls floating as if in slow motion to the floor raising dust and scattering score sheets left on benches. Later another will topple, just past musicians and past benches. The flautist sets fire to the paper that held his tea bag before his Debussyian duet with whistling kettle; as the paper burns it takes off up over him, sparking and disintegrating. Huge washes of light flare up, reframing the music, the space, the play with the acoustic. Many of the instruments are amplified but the play of near and far, especially in the 'brass band' and solo koto exchange, is fully exploited. Fluorescent lights flicker up from beneath every bench, lengthening the space. A light is dragged slowly along the floor by its power cord throwing up travelling shadows of the benches as giant tables. Musicians read Poe (the trumpeter alternating his playing with reading), Eliot, Blanchôt aloud, the recorded voice of the late Heiner Müller fills the space, a violinist screams into the microphone over the bridge to complete a musical line. Different musics compete and coalesce, hard against soft, form against form—a saxophonist wails with be-bop intensity against a wall of elegiac brass, snapping to silence as the first proscenium falls. The world of *Black on White* is of words on paper, notes on score sheets, shadows on a paper screen, musicians against shifting white light. Paper crumples, burns, falls, prosceniums collapse, notes disintegrate. In the final darkness violins creak and twitch and fade. Not a few thought this *the* performance of the festival.

The Ensemble Modern perform unselfconsciously and with an ease that belies their considerable task. In a generous two hour illustrated talk (to be reported in *RealTime* 25), Heiner Goebbels told us that having been commissioned by the Ensemble Modern to create a work for them he went to the first week's workshop without a note in his head and asked them what they couldn't do or hadn't done. By the end of that week he knew what he would create with them.

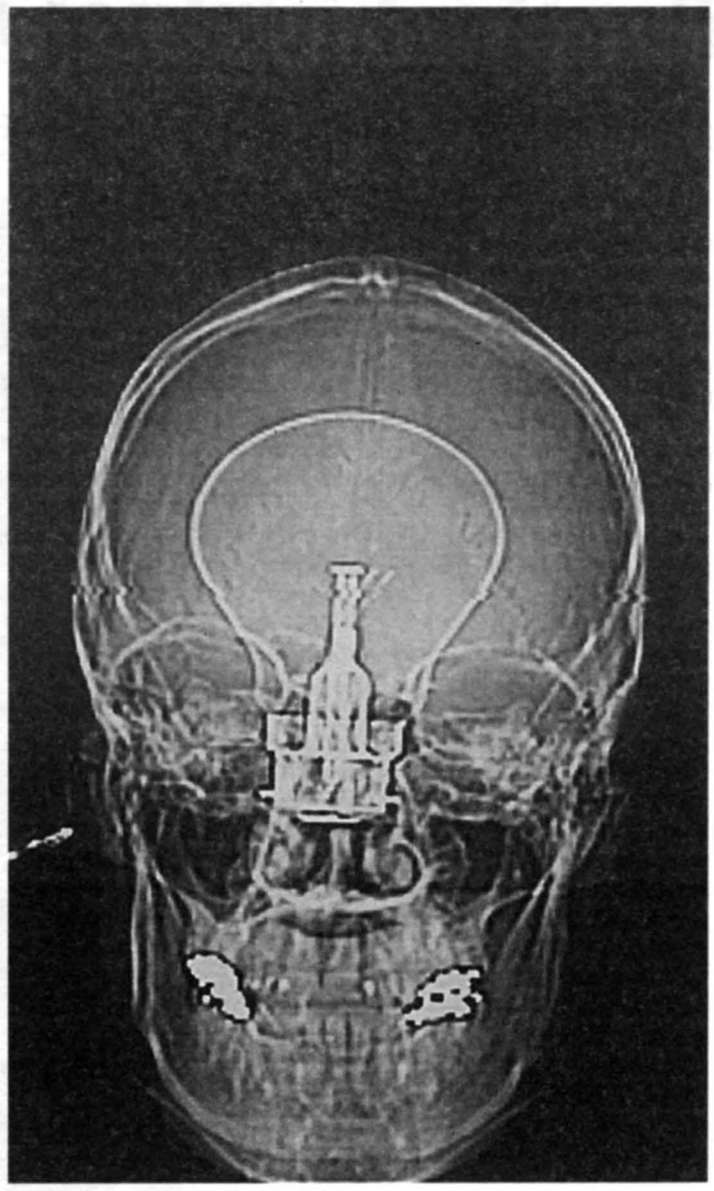
KG

For Meryl Tankard's Possessed *see page 33;* Voice, Jam & Videotape *pages 26 and 46; ANAT's* FOLDBACK, OnScreen *page 27. Festival guest Wendy Houstoun is interviewed on page 38.*

See RealTime 25 *(June-July) for a report on Artists' Week, "Jan Lauwers speaking", an article incorporating an interview with the writer-director of* Snakesong/La Pouvoir, *and a report on the Heiner Goebbels talk about his work.*

Plenty worth talking about

Nikki Miller surveys the visual arts and *ART(iculations)* in the Festival of Perth


Andrew Carter, *X-ray Self Portrait*, 1997

For many years there has been dissatisfaction with the visual arts component of the Festival of Perth. While film and theatre audiences are lavished with imported productions, it seems all the visual arts gets is free advertising of coincident exhibitions in the festival promotional magazine. The deal has been better this year with some shows receiving festival sponsorship. Fortunately the local galleries also arranged some interesting shows for February-March.

The financial extremes

Andrew Carter's exhibition at the Moore's Building used X-rays as prompts for meditation on our hidden interiors. The elaborate, room-sized metal constructions in which the x-rays hung did not lend anything to their interpretation. With digital clocks running, an obligatory stopped clock, a heart-beat soundtrack and halogen lights suspended from the extraordinary frames, this felt like an over-production for something which by its very nature is about subtle, humble observation. Perhaps X-rays work more effectively as reminders of human frailty in their more usual hospital setting.

At the other extreme was the no-budget installation-exhibition by Spiral Studio. Simply titled *Big Picture* the artists (Jeremy Blank, Greg Cowan, Walter Gomes, Sharyn Moore, Laurie Smith, Stephen Smith, Richard Sowada and Michael Stephens) packed up their gear and turned their studio on the third floor of Dunlop House into an exhibition space. Any City of Perth money they received went on signage. Artistic anxieties which percolate in the studio were acutely recorded in the dripping towers of varnish and walls heavy with over-painting. This was one of the most intelligent collaborative installation exhibitions I've seen.

The Blockbuster

An undisputed hit, *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions* at the State Gallery seemed to excite everyone. The Gallery went all the way with this one from extended wall labels to hundreds of guided tours, floor talks and a symposium.

One of my favourite works is Yogyakarta-based artist Heri Dono's army of postmodern Buddhas titled *Ceremony of the Soul*. Despite their flickering light-bulb hands, intravenous ingestion of chemicals and blaring radio-chests, the staring eyes of these stone and fibreglass figures betray a resilient equanimity towards high-tech interventions.

Sponsored by the Festival of Perth and The Darling Foundation, the State Gallery was able to bring to Perth 37 artworks from India, Thailand, the Philippines, South Korea and Indonesia as well as most of the participating artists. This made for an even livelier event. Listening to the artists was as stimulating as viewing their works. Korean artist Soo-Ja Kim, spoke of conceiving her body as a needle; of how when walking, she perceives her vertical body as moving needle-like across the fabric of the planet.

It was at this symposium that a theme which traversed the festival talks emerged with a response by Dadang Christianto to an audience question. He claimed he is not hassled by Indonesian authorities when working as an artist, that it is only when participating in a rally or some other form of demonstration that he is arrested and interrogated. Political indifference towards artists became an impromptu theme throughout the festival.

Two openings and a closing

The John Curtin Art Gallery opened officially with photography by Max Pam and work from Tracey Moffat's series *Something More* and *Up in the Sky*. The photographs are everything one expects from eminent artist-photographers. Looking at images of people worse off than me while dressed in my finest felt somewhat uncomfortable; at the time they seemed an odd choice for a celebratory opening. Everyone appeared to be having fun so I vowed to lighten up. The huge crowd packed the large foyer and spilled onto the patio during the inaudible opening speeches which I was assured were long and boring.

The Craftwest Gallery signalled its intent on revamping its image with a neon and nightclub inspired show in its new King Street premises. *Technics* featured glow-bright paintings and a cerebral installation but it was jeweller Helen Britton who stole the show with miniature universes of fused and adulterated matter.

After the optimistic beginnings it was in a sadder mood that many of us visited the Delaney Gallery for the last time. Having presented some excellent shows over the past 20 years this is one venue which will be missed. Their last show featured Laurie Smith, Colin Madden, Shaun Wake-Mazey and David Edgar, each demonstrating some fine painterly moments.

Talking like Hamlet

The innovative *(ART)iculations* was an extensive program of talks accompanying the exhibitions. The Perth Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA) organised the fabulous brochure and coordinated the event. On several occasions staff had to search for more chairs to satisfy the larger than expected crowds. One of the highlights of the program was Marion Pastor Roces discussing some of the ethical complexities faced as a 'free-lance' curator on projects undertaken in the Philippines. Roces was followed by US-based artist and writer Ronald Jones arguing that artists are politically ineffective on the most vital moral issues. After many probing questions of Jones the audience splintered into small groups and continued the discussion outside. It was a warm evening and the air buzzed with artists discussing the morality of being an artist. Perhaps if the papers had been delivered in reverse order then Pastor Roces' micro view would not have been eclipsed so effectively by Jones' more pessimistic macro view.

Making new histories

The work of local artists was re-contextualised in several talks. I especially enjoyed Gary Dufour's paper discussing the affinities between LA artist Robert Irwin and local art hero Howard Taylor. And while the professional photographers in the audience were heard muttering about the poor quality of the slides, for once it didn't really matter because we were sitting in the midst of the real thing. A slight turn of the head and we could all see Robert Irwin's disk installation. Dufour's talk was part of a forum accompanying the Minimalism show at the Lawrence Wilson Gallery. Curator John Stringer did a witty hang for the exhibition which included work by local artists and Frank Stella, Bridget Riley and Sol le Witt. I've never seen the Uni Gallery look this good.

There was so much more: solo shows by Karl Wiebke, David Tremlett, Tania Ferrier and Alessandra Rossi; fused and slumped glass from Warburton; 3D videographic work by Geoderma; Adrian Jones' installation *Cadaver*; Japanese prints; installations by Louise Monte and Olga Cironis.

Mysteriously, while there has been plenty worth talking about, and *(ART)iculations* kept us all talking, the visual arts component of the festival received scant media coverage...except for Tania Ferrier's leaping Latino femmes fatale on the festival poster, of which the print media couldn't get enough.

Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/ Tensions, *Art Gallery of Western Australia, Feb 5 - March 29; Tracey Moffat, John Curtin Gallery, Feb 20 - March 29*; Socket, *Andrew Carter, The Moores Building, Feb 14 - March 8; Tania Ferrier, Olga Cironis, Louise Monte', Artplace, Feb 12 - March 8*; Contemporary Japanese Prints, *Gallery East, Feb 22 - March 15*; Groundwork: new work/old law, *Fremantle Arts Centre, Feb 14 - March 15*; Cadaver, *Adrian Jones, PICA, Feb 12- March 15*; Geo-derma, *PICA, Feb 12 - March 15; Karl Wiebke, Galerie Dusseldorf, Feb 15 - March 8*; Material Perfection: Minimal Art from the Stokes Collection, *Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, Feb 13 - April 5; David Tremlett, Goddard de Fiddes Contemporary Art, Feb 20 - March 14*; Technics, *Craftwest, Feb 19 - March 22*; South, *Delaney Galleries, Feb 18 - March 7*; Big Picture, *Spiral Studio, Feb 15 - March 8*.

Nikki Miller is a Perth-based freelance writer trying to finish a thesis on fluid visions in the information age.

Festival junkie: immersion and withdrawal

Sarah Miller inhabits performance at the Festival of Perth

One moment you're immersed in festival fever: running projects, racing to shows and exhibitions, talking about stuff in foyers and forums, grabbing inedible food at disgusting hours of the day and night and still getting to work on time in the mornings. Suddenly, the festival(s) recede, leaving you fishlike, stranded and gasping, over-tired and frumpy in a world full of incessant deadlines and all the things that have been left undone that should have been done last week.

I began the Festival of Perth with the light and fluffy *Titanic* and the now hotly debated (over two cities and two festivals) *The Seven Streams of the River Ota* by Robert Lepage's Ex Machina. *Seven Streams* was an interesting work. The seven hours of viewing were not arduous. In fact the no doubt necessary pacing/tempo made it very easy to sit through. Without going into descriptive detail (of which much abounds), I found the first three sections visually exciting, witty and incisive. It seemed, nonetheless, a fragile work, easily thrown off its stride. I started to have misgivings in the fourth section or stream, which represented the legal suicide of one of the key characters who has contracted AIDS; misgivings that turned to irritation in the fifth section, dealing with the Holocaust—lots of tricks with mirrors and the familiar images of a displaced population struggling through a non-specific but clearly European winter landscape.

Given the number of works in both the Adelaide and Perth festivals, that have attempted to deal with humanly inspired catastrophe, including exhibitions such as Jenny Holzer's *Lustmord* (Bosnia) and Adrian Jones' *Cadaver* (the genocide committed against Aboriginal people) at PICA, as well as a range of talks addressing everything from terror and morals in Perth and the sacred and the profane in Adelaide, the questions I am left with have everything to do with the possibility of the appropriate 'staging' and/or 'exhibition' of grief or despair in the face of overwhelming brutality. Finally it is the considered and subtle collaboration between Adrian Jones (WA) and Marian Pastor Roces (Philippines) which has been the most compelling in terms of a thoughtful self reflexivity in relation to these complex terrains.

Ex Machina, *The Seven Streams of the River Ota*

In *Seven Streams*, my initial discomfort turned to dislike in the final three sections. What had previously seemed to be the deft touch of the director carefully avoiding the pitfalls of easy resolution, became simply glib; the politics naive and the visuals clichéd. The relationships articulated across the 20th century between the survivors of the Holocaust and those of Hiroshima seemed contrived and twee and something more (or less) to do with innocent (albeit gauche) America and ravaged Japan—an all too familiar trope.

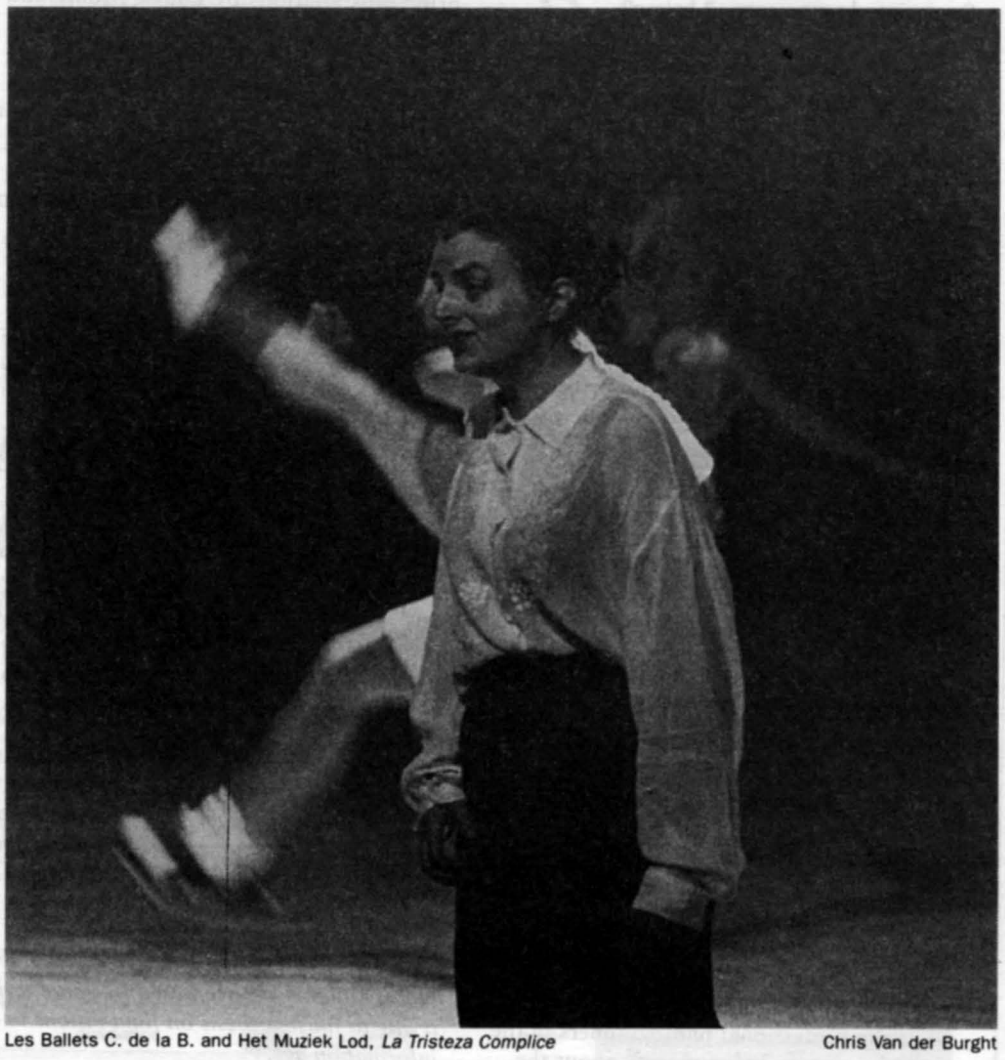
Being the Festival of the long night, I also spent five hours watching *Cloudstreet*, presented by Black Swan Theatre in association with Belvoir's Company B at the Endeavour Boat Shed in Fremantle. A beautiful space with a fabulous cast assembled by Neil Armfield, this was the absolute crowd-stopper of the Festival. Whilst I think it could well do with some judicious editing, particularly in the first and third sections and the little girlie stuff is a bit ham for my taste, this was a work defined by outstanding performances. Having said that, *Cloudstreet* is a relatively easy show, dealing with the familiar and the happily parochial—designed for an enjoyable night in the theatre. My enjoyment was somewhat hampered by the fact that, seated as I was, towards the back of a very large and steep rake, it was very hard to hear this very verbal piece much of the time.

There's not much to be said about Germany's Theatre Titanick. A mildly entertaining bit of fluff which is perhaps more interesting to look at in relation to Stalker's *Blood Vessel* in Adelaide. A more embryonic work, *Blood Vessel* has so much more going for it in terms of a beautiful rig (designed by Andrew Carter), the sound (Paul Charlier) and the substance (Rachael Swain and the company). Whilst *Blood Vessel* has a long way to go in terms of both its content and its choreography, and the relationship between its strong visuals (physical and filmic) and material base, previous experience suggests that it will be a much more exciting work than *Titanic* by the time it reaches Perth audiences in 1999.

My pleasure in *Uttarpriyadarshi* (The Final Beatitude) by the Chorus Repertory Theatre from Imphal (India) came from the fabulous cacophony of image, sound and story telling derived from a rich synthesis between traditional Indian styles in juxtaposition with contemporary techniques. An elephant, richly caparisoned for war, creates a dramatic and fabulous moment surrounded by the shadowy silhouettes suggestive of great armies. Women wail in varying extraordinarily pitched registers or cackle like banshees whilst the fires of Hell burn. Buddhist monks perform something akin to the antics of the Keystone Cops and unlike Lepage's much cooler *Seven Streams*, there is no sense of embarrassment or measure.

I didn't make it through the entire program of the Lyon Opera Ballet. The first offering, *Central Figure* by Susan Marshall, took a quite formal dance vocabulary and made it into something simultaneously dull and sentimental. The second, *Contrastes* by Maguy Marin, relied on parody and caricature and was positively offensive. I was grateful to catch up with Teshigawara's *I Was Real—Documents* in Adelaide and in this much more considered and technically meticulous work, get the artificial taste of saccharine out of my mouth.

The absolute highlight of the Festival of Perth was the Belgian (Flemish really) company Les Ballets C. de la B. and Het Muziek Lod with *La Tristeza Complice* directed by Alain Platel. Interestingly enough, audiences in Adelaide responded with infinitely more enthusiasm than those in Perth. This is a work that took on all my pet theatrical phobias (performers doing 'mad' and/or 'street people' is a particular hate) and hung 'em out to dry. In this landscape, people unfolded and retreated, hung out and persevered, danced into stillness; inhabited the space against the extraordinary sound of ten piano accordionists performing the Baroque music of the English composer, Henry Purcell. This is a work for experiencing not describing but the relationship between the performers (whether professional or inexperienced) was exceptional and their ability to focus on the vulnerable, the imperfect and the ugly, made it a performance of extraordinary beauty and tension.



Les Ballets C. de la B. and Het Muziek Lod, *La Tristeza Complice* Chris Van der Burght

Cloudstreet, *Black Swan Theatre/Company B Belvoir, The Endeavour Boatshed, director Neil Armfield;* Uttarpriyadarshi, *Chorus Repertory Theatre Imphal, written and directed by Ratan Thiyam, Winthrop Hall;* The Seven Streams of the River Ota, *Ex Machina Company, directed by Robert Lepage, Challenge Stadium;* Titanic, *Theater Titanick, The Esplanade;* Central Figure, *Lyon Opera Ballet, director Yorgos Loukos, choreographer, Susan Marshall,* Contrastes, *choreographer, Maguy Marin, His Majesty's Theatre;* La Tristeza Complice, *Les Ballet C. de la B., director Alain Platel, music by Het Muziek Lod, Regal Theatre;* Cadaver, *Adrian Jones, PICA. All events part of the Festival of Perth, February 13 - March 8*

The price of expectations

Josephine Wilson forks out for the Festival of Perth

It is considered bad form to discuss the cost of things, unless you are a real estate agent, and even then there are conventions. Nor is it the done thing to talk about art as a commodity, or to suggest that critical response might be influenced (in not so predictable ways) by the hip pocket.

Nonetheless, I feel compelled to report that I paid concession price for all 10 or so of my tickets to selected festival shows this year, except Cassandra Wilson's performance, for which I paid full price and which was *worth every cent*.

The Festival of Perth always reminds me of money. Having it. Not having it. This year I bet big, but I have not always been a player. For years the Festival Films were the only venture in which I was able to sink my petty capital. Films were blue chip—safe, not too many surprises. Me and my friends would pore mournfully over the rest of the program, talk about *what we would have liked to have seen*...the future imperfect was our festival tense. Occasionally we would lash out on contemporary dance or jazz. For weeks before the concert or performance we went kind of clucky, like geese squatting nervously on nest eggs. If our tickets were for late in the season, we would turn with trepidation to the reviews, rather like a buyer locked into a shaky deal. When the curtains finally dropped on our night out we often feigned communal enjoyment, in spite of nagging doubts. None of us could afford public disappointment. We did our seething in private.

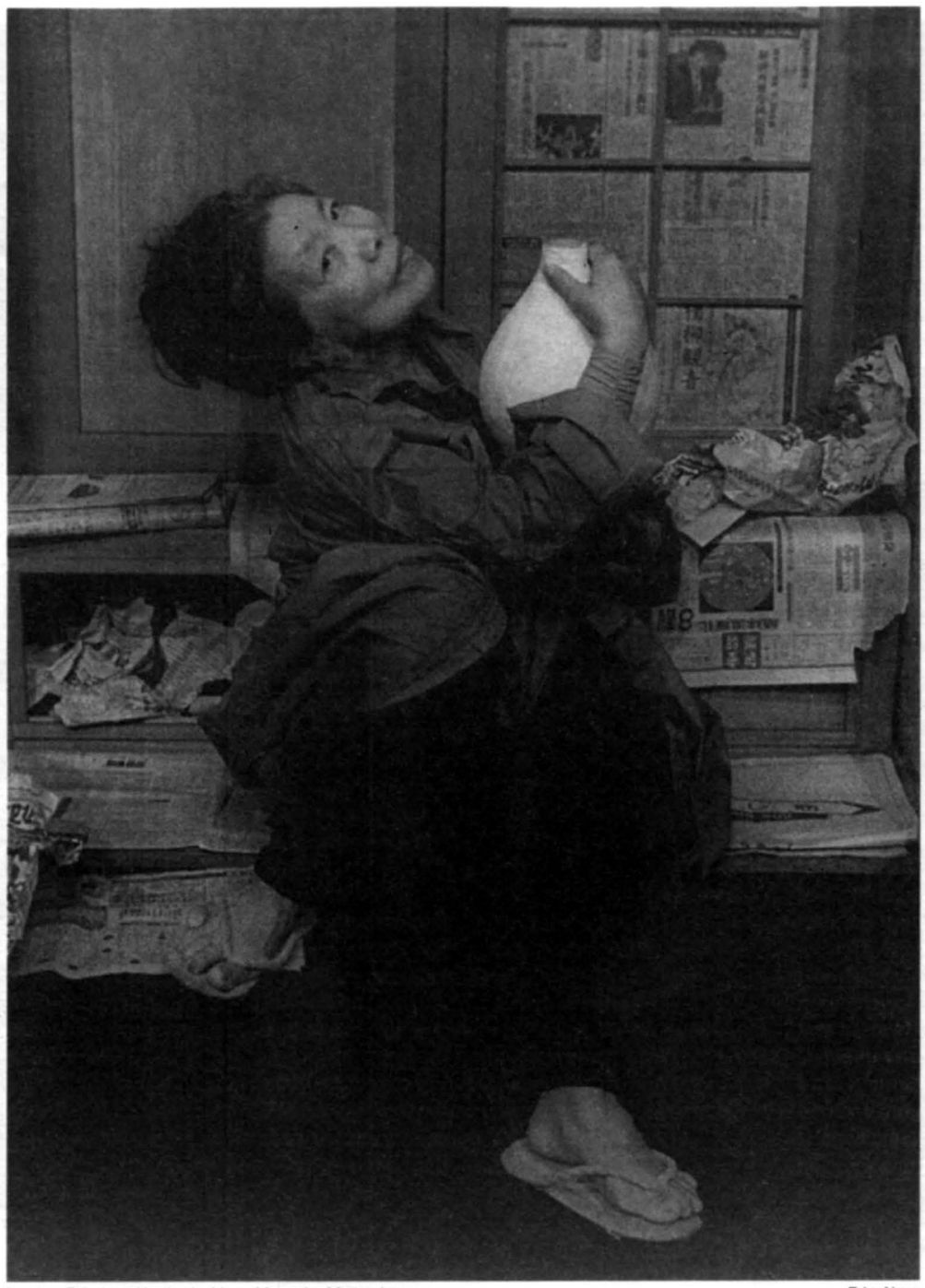
Some of us had friends with connections, who democratically extended the odd free ticket. How different it was not to have to worry about whether you had chosen well, or sunk your savings on an all-time dud. I can only describe the effect as 'lightheadedness'. A kind of graceful beneficence descended as you settled into a seat that money couldn't buy. As the curtain went up you unhinged the critical barometer. It was such a relief, not to have to care so much.

1998. I spent my money on a fist full of the festival's finest. Old friends have since suggested that buying so many tickets at once had to be pushing your luck. Most don't attempt to hide their pleasure as my disappointed reports trickle in. "Oh good", they say, "So I didn't miss anything".

So what did they miss? Well, the group Fiction Factory is described as "something of an icon in 20th century Welsh Drama". Their *House of America* is billed as regional theatre, which I think means that we in Perth are expected to like it. *House of America* tells the story of a miserable Welsh family—Mam, and her adult kids—Boyo, Gwenny and Sid—who ought to know better. The 'kids' fall under the influence of Jack Kerouac and all things narrowly American, while Mam struggles with Secrets That Cannot be Spoken Of (which involve the absent father who the 'kids' think ran off to America, but who didn't really, 'cos Mam's killed and buried him). Never mind that the 'Secret' is obvious from very early on, or that the numbing inevitability of this revelation is meshed inexplicably with an incest subplot and is topped off neatly by the predictable spectre of Mad Mam on the Rampage. A tragic finale ensues. Never mind that this attempt at "maverick" (sic) theatre is about as original as a clover leaf on St. Patrick's day. Never mind that this is not the most appropriate or original analogy, but there you have it. That's life. A cliché in search of apology. I should have left at half-time, but I didn't want to waste my ticket.

My initial problems with *Masterkey* began with my seat. Upstairs, extreme right, surrounded by Year 10s. There is no group more able to form a quick response to theatre. They were intrigued, then bored in the space of minutes. Since I was intrigued for longer than they were, an internal struggle ensued. I wanted to like this production. I was getting desperate.

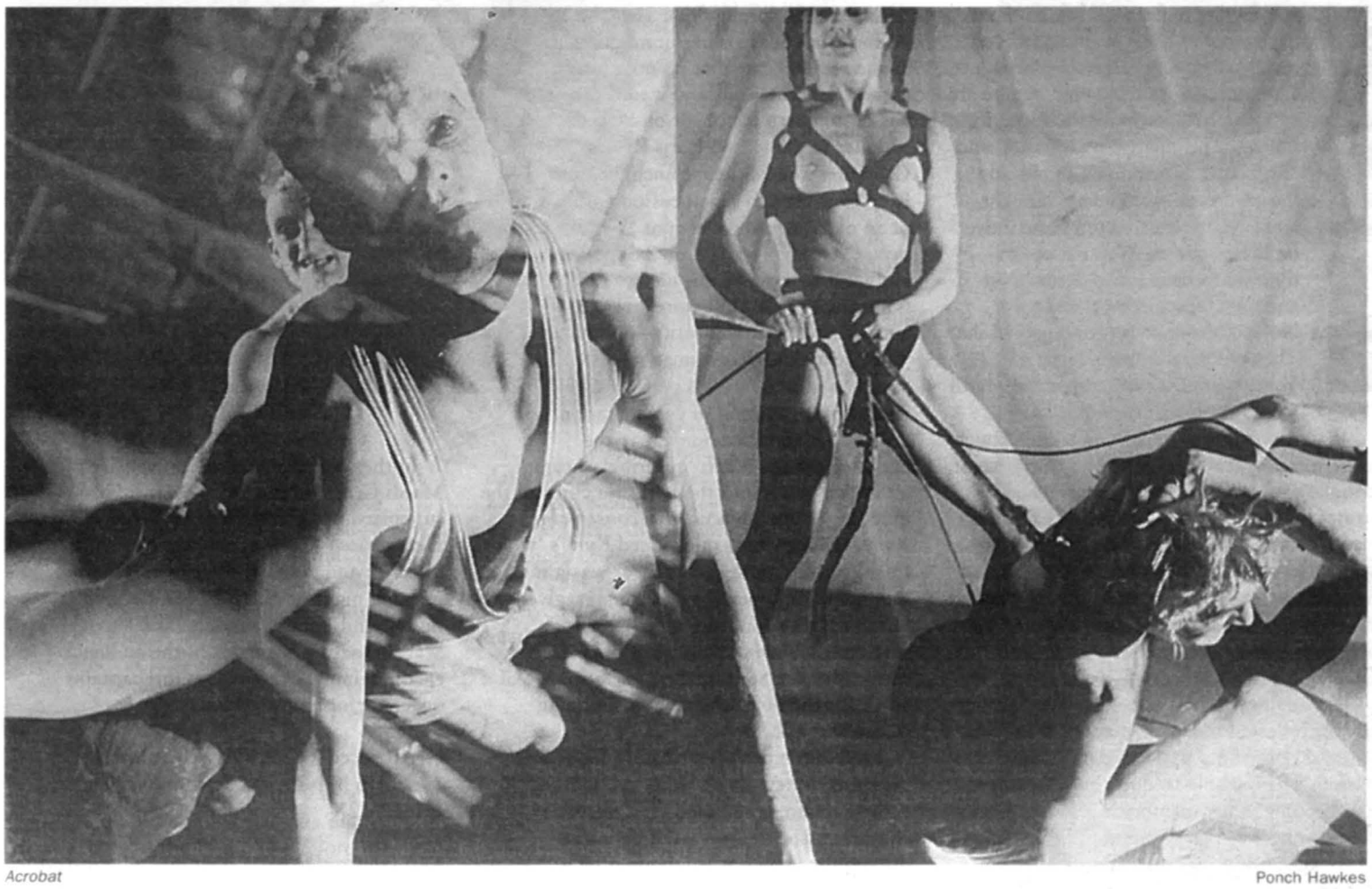
Masterkey is an Australian-Japanese collaboration, with participating performers from both countries. Australian designer Mary Moore directed the piece, adapted from a Japanese novel that owes much to the detective genre. The story involves a group of women who have things to hide—obsessions, losses, dreams and even murder. *Masterkey* looks beautiful. The principle components of set design are a series of wooden wardrobes (I heard Mary Moore on the ABC describe the wardrobes as the shells that contain the flesh of the story). These individual 'robes function on many levels, standing in for rooms in an apartment block, acting as memory screens on which evocative traces are projected, representing the internal spaces which 'open up' for characters to act out their solitary obsessions. Unfortunately, *Masterkey* opts for a domesticating voice-over in English to bear the burden of storytelling. The effect is that the central narrative of obsession—which has been signalled by the title, by the secreted spaces of the wardrobe, and by the characters' obsession with possessing the master key to all rooms/characters—is sacrificed. And unlike Robert Lepage's *The Seven Streams of the River Ota*, the whole question of translation, of Japanese/English/Australian, is elided, and a curious flattening of the performance ensues. Not even the strength of the Japanese performers can make up for the frustration of seeing actors largely left to act out the narration.



Tomiko Takai as Noriko in Mary Moore's *Masterkey* Eric Algra

"You can see the wires", giggled children as on stage the dreams and aspirations of the apartment dwellers turned to paper and drifted out of reach. I couldn't help wishing this production could reach its potential as drama, and move beyond being a beautiful, flawed, static object.

Acrobat is a group of performers raised (quote) on "attention deficit culture*". With a collective CV that includes Circus OZ, Desoxy, Primary Source and Legs on the Wall, you could expect talent, humour, and gorgeous bodies at the peak of their physical etceteras, and you would be right. Before I am accused of fetishizing the group, I must point out that they fetishize themselves, and I am just doing what they want me to do, which is fine by me. I submit. *Acrobat* is one hell of an action-packed hour, with a live band thrashing it out on stage. The casual improvisational style of the performance masks dead-eye skills. My favourites—the slackwire walker, the Chinese pole. Value for money? (I am so crass...) YES. Me and the kids loved it.



Acrobat Ponch Hawkes

Festival Of Perth 1998, *Feb 13 - Mar 8:* House of America, *Fiction Factory, written and directed by Ed Thomas, Octagon Theatre;* Masterkey, *adapted from Masako Togawa's novel* Oi Naru Genei *(The Masterkey) by Mary Moore and Miriel Lenore, devised, directed and designed by Mary Moore, associate directors—Yoshio Wada and Julie Holledge, Playhouse Theatre;* Acrobat, *Simon Yates, Jo-Anne Lancaster, Scott Grayland, Tim Freeman, Simon Mitchell, Lee Wilson, Regal Theatre*

Josephine Wilson is a Perth writer. She wrote the performance work The Geography of Haunted Places *(1996-97) and most recently* * water always writes in * plural, *an online interactive project with Linda Carroli (see Kirsten Krauth article on page 18).*

Michael Fahd, Sargon Joseph, Paul Sciberras, Charlie Villas, Natasha Hill and Veronique Maury (centre) in *Heterosoced Youth* Michael Bates

Possible Princess

Keri Glastonbury at the 1998 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras' *Heterosoced Youth* and *cLUB bENT*

Entering PACT's *Heterosoced Youth* (gay bashed?), to a David Bowie soundtrack, "rebel rebel your face is a mess", everyone went all marshmallow—aww they picked my favourite teenage anthem.

And that's the last point at which this cast of 12 culturally diverse *youths* will let you pick favourites. At least until the final line-up where they all vie for your voyeurism, consciously declaring that a seduction process has of course been operating all along.

Mamie, cLUB bENT Amanda James

This last scene in *Heterosoced Youth* is almost like a *cLUB bENT* audition, a mock graduation from PACT to The Performance Space in the generic tradition of co-directors Victoria Spence and Chris Ryan's respective *cLUB bENT* work over previous years. Each cast member in succession takes a fragment of a song (sometimes invoking a nostalgia for lyrics that they are too young to own, such as The Kinks' *Lola*) and lip syncs to it in a way synonymous with queer performance as opposed to conventional drag.

The show had previously progressed through an accumulation of vignettes written by the performers. There is no pretence that Victoria Spence and Chris Ryan's performance-making skills are indelible inscriptions, their clear direction providing a playful structure of inversion and mimicry for the polyphonic voices of the cast.

Heterosoced Youth (officially: heterosexually socialised) refused the standard 'coming out' clichés, by also investigating the type of policing that goes on *within* the gay/lesbian community (reflecting back on the experience of being *homosexually* as much as heterosexually socialised). The conservative regimes of culture are exposed, irrespective of their identity politics. The binary between rural and city, between the nuclear family and the gay/lesbian community, straight and gay are rendered too prescriptive on both sides—the inclinations of these performers are to deconstruct and own their diverse trajectories. None of this 'free, gay and happy' shit. The reverberations of *Heterosoced Youth* were felt throughout the Mardi Gras Festival, it was cultural development for its audience as much as performers. And yet, while this narrative of critique was addictive, as a performance strategy it was strangely precarious. There is also a danger in becoming reducible to our sexualities in the deconstruction of them, and my favourite moments in *Heterosoced Youth* were times when the references exceeded the litany of debates captured in other Mardi Gras and media forums.

Perhaps my ambivalence towards familiar terrain reflected more my preconceived ideas about *cLUB bENT*'s use by date being passed. The formula of queer performance had become in my memory a repeated heady collision between grunge and old pop songs. This expectation was instantly diffused on opening night by the political satire of Pauline Pantsdown (Simon Hunt) and the resilient appeal of wit. Ever irrepressible, this year's lyrical underbelly was decimated even further. It was enough to hear a few notes of *Summertime* played on Trash Vaudeville's three-fingered guitar as he sat like some kind of yahoo serious young insect. Protracted adolescence was again sexy for all ages.

The *piece de resistance* of the night belonged to Frumpus, who proved that the cloning of women in red tracksuits is already a practised scientific technique. They parody the retro B-grade heroics of the filmic cultures of sci-fi, kung fu and Linda Carter while wearing size 18 underpants.

Jeremy Robbins' raunchy acrobatics in a bath tub just fill me with anxiety as water spills onto the sprung floor. The Performance Space is in slut mode, as if anyone should care that it's not always a queer cabaret venue and it sometimes has postmodern dance seasons.

Later in the season Chris Ryan's *Candy* reinvented the melancholic Lou Reed tune used to signal custodianship of an older record collection. "Candy says, I've grown to hate my body, and all that it requires in this life." Candy is a tranny of the era before 'gay' was a marketable sexual identity—she is a 'homosexual' and a 'woman trapped in a man's body'. Ryan's performance fended off the notion of gay liberation, it was an unglorified homage to the pre-78er era and a deft 'queering' of camp.

Taking icons into the bars and clubs of the nineties, Groovii Biscuit's *Deconstructing Kylie*, unforgivingly questioned Kylie's 'white trash' status among gay men. It was almost a redundant argument in this context, given *cLUB bENT*'s queering of suburbia far surpasses *Neighbours* or an Albury drag show. (Try the Soul Bitches' performance of a work for the dole scheme in a shopping centre carpark.)

Melbourne performer Moira Finucane presented a new work *Faith*, a booming actorly monologue based on a fairytale character. The piece created definite discomfort, which was laboured by a perspiring body possessed by narrative delivery. Her second piece *Milk Maid* was a return to the style of last year's *Cappuccino* performance—expanding on the visceral things this woman can do with dairy fluids.

Mamie from the Kyoto-based *DUMB TYPE* and *OK GIRLS*, in the words of closing night MC Vanessa Wagner, "pulled off one of the best trifectas of gratuitous costume change ever seen". Her parody of universal love, to cocktail muzak and the *Hair* soundtrack was underscored by her incredibly nimble movement. This lightness of touch was a fine example of female camp/drag—100 per cent Japanese Mambo. Vanessa Wagner followed with the Byron Bayesque *Dance of the Cheap Sarong*, to offer some kind of cultural exchange element.

Frumpus, cLUB bENT Amanda James

In the year of the 20th anniversary of Mardi Gras and the 78ers, Mardi Gras supported projects such as *cLUB bENT* and *Heterosoced Youth* are spawning proud histories and debts of their own. On the opening night of *cLUB bENT* Groovii Biscuit and Tobin Saunders (aka Vanessa Wagner) sat up the front of the audience encouragingly, like boy and girl captains of queer performance personas.

Heterosoced Youth, *PACT Theatre, Feb 4 - 14*; cLUB bENT, *The Performance Space, Feb 17 - 27*

Keri Glastonbury is a poet and administrator at Playworks.

Aesthetic crimes

Barbara Karpinski sees US solo performers Nao Bustamante and Holly Hughes at the 1998 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras

With a cigarette hanging from her mouth she totters on the edge of a ladder, thick tape wound tightly around her voluptuous Latino form. The tape acts like a corset from which her flesh oozes out, trying to escape its bondage. She is dressed in nothing but a trashy, ill-fitting, blonde wig, parodying the svelte supermodel sex kitten stereotype.

America, The Beautiful is a physically strenuous performance with allusions to carnival and sideshow entertainment. It is grotesque, beautiful and absurd. Bustamante's fabulous fat flesh is like a moving sculpture—wobbling and pulsing in time with her tacky circus tricks. She creates a sublime send-up of both femininity and striptease, drawing a clown face with red lipstick and blue eyeshadow.

The starlet does her tricks, desperately desiring her audience's love and applause. She lives for the stage and the stage is her life. *America* is made up of a collection of intimate moments where private interludes of dressing and undressing are transformed into public spectacle. It reminds us of the way the media thrives on the cult of the celebrity, delving into the star's secret innermost places, wanting snapshots, cruel exposés for mass consumption.

Bustamante says: "*America, The Beautiful* began as a series of improvisations—a sculptural piece with interesting textures. It moved into a tale and a character emerged. She's an embittered player. She goes somewhat beyond the call of femininity. She's grotesque. A circus star without any talent but she has a sort of daring to do these acts".

Nao Bustamante, *America, The Beautiful* Corrie Anconé

And where does the American dream fit in? "I'm from a Mexican family in the Central Valley of California. The show is not just about feminine representations but a condensed principle in the States—the way America pushes itself on the world to love it. A bigger goal. A bigger dream".

Clit Notes is another solo chick show, this time by Holly Hughes. It is composed of a series of dark secrets and candid confessions from her life. A femme lesbian with a dyke boy lover, Hughes got into theatre to meet other lesbians at a time in the 70s when baseball was in and lipstick was out. As a femme lesbian she began to explore her obscure desire for masculinity in the body of a woman. Her current butch lover is always getting booted out of ladies' loos because she looks like a bloke.

In trademark black comic style, Hughes jokes that in her teen years the only youth organisation she could find in America's Bible belt was the North American Man/Boy Love Association. It contained "American FBI agents and a few defrocked Catholic priests". She adds that her mother's idea of day care was dropping her off at Richard Nixon's Republican Party headquarters to help with the mail out.

Hughes reveals details of her early erotic education courtesy of Dr Ruben's *All You Wanted to know About Sex But Were Afraid to Ask*. According to the learned doctor, homosexual men have a compulsive relationship to household appliances whereas dykes are just a footnote under "prostitution".

Holly Hughes takes a long drag on an imaginary cigarette, rearranges her taut, muscular legs, neurotically picks imaginary dust from her chic red dress and confesses: "Silence had always been my father's first language. Father didn't say anything when he found out I was a dyke. At 20 I kissed a woman and she kissed me back". Her voice goes into slow motion mode while speaking about a period of depression: "Our worst fears are always the most patient...My doctor promised me Prozac if I can get him tickets to the Mardi Gras party".

Hughes once played "the lead vagina" in a lesbian play. "I was a lesbian separatist artist-cum-waitress. I was fast and I was mean. A plus in both jobs...Like Andrea Dworkin set to the music of Randy Newman's 'Short People'".

Holly Hughes drew on her own experience of love and desire to create *Clit Notes*. Although the show is sexually tame by Sydney standards, she has managed to offend many people in the States—from pro-censorship boiler suit clad feminists to the fanatical god fearing right. She has even been accused by a US Senate sub-committee of child pornography. Hughes has been reviled by everybody from the NEA to gun toting crazy Christians. Her lascivious performances and intimate revelations of lesbian life have brought a string of hate mail. In *Clit Notes*, Hughes reads out one such letter: "Me and my wife are coming to New York and we have two children. I have a gun and P.S. Jesus loves you".

In the land where private lives and the dysfunctional family drama have become the daily bread of popular TV, Holly Hughes has created controversy by making her private perversities public in her own uniquely offensive way. But she lives and creates art by her own rules. She imagines a prison "where the only crimes are aesthetic ones".

America, The Beautiful *by Nao Bustamante, Feb 5 - 8 and* Clit Notes *by Holly Hughes, Feb 10 - 14 in* Solo at the Space, *The Performance Space, Feb 5 - 14, 1998 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras*

From the sublime to the scrofulous

Jacqueline Millner takes a look at several shows in the 1998 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras visual arts program

"We are never more true to ourselves than when we are inconsistent", quipped Oscar Wilde, with uncanny prescience about the politics of identity and difference. Artmaking that gravitates around the terms gay, lesbian, queer or even camp has often been concerned precisely with notions of identity, and related terrain such as social visibility and community-building. However, these issues have also loomed large in contemporary art practice in general, interacting with the broader intellectual preoccupation with questions of subjectivity. Working through these broad concerns has undoubtedly positioned gay and lesbian art practice somewhere nearer the centre than the margins of the institutions of contemporary art.

Mainstreaming is always a prickly issue, often with the pejorative associations of 'loss of cutting edge' and 'dumbing down'. The broadening appeal of Mardi Gras is reflected by booming box office returns, a stupefying range of events and participants—in terms of volume, diversity and bravado, Mardi Gras easily outdoes the Festival of Sydney which immediately precedes it—and the extension of the festival beyond the traditional pink districts of Darlinghurst/Paddington and Newtown (this year, for example, the community art event *Really Out Art* took over the cafes and shopfronts in Glebe). Arguably, these developments need not endanger Mardi Gras' ability to innovate. Perhaps the festival's saving grace is inconsistency, evading coherence and holistic characterisation, showcasing the worst indulgences and most lucid meditations in gay and lesbian contemporary practice.

Cuban-born Felix Gonzales-Torres was an artist whose lucid meditations highlighted the way that subtlety often deals so much better with loud subject matter. Working with both street posters and gallery installations, Gonzales-Torres was as much concerned with personal issues of loss as with the political and social dimensions of being gay *and* an artist, addressing the institutional boundaries of art as much as sexuality. His (reconstructed) installation at Yuill Crowley Gallery comprised a wall of windows dressed in sky blue organza drapes, shimmering and undulating in the city breeze. By a simple and elegant gesture, the gallery becomes a room, an empty room with fluttering, unstable edges which contend with the natural and human forces beyond, a room resonating with the cadences of silence and mourning but also full of light and the promise of change.

This idea of the veil, in particular partial vision and its promises, is also taken up by the British team Art 2 Go. Their installation at the Australian Centre for Photography consisted of three elements, including folded paper sculptures pinned in a grid from floor to ceiling. The origami took two forms, the water-bomb evocative of boys' aggressive playground pranks, and the colour-changer (or salt-cellar), reminiscent of girls' games of guessing, chance and fantasy. These were made not from craft paper, but from the pages of beefcake soft-core magazines, so that the explicit imagery became hardly discernible, just melding into teasing warm tones. Around the room's other walls were corny beefcake faces, gazing out with mock desire, half obscured/revealed by scratched surface emulsion, whose shavings rested on bathroom-style glass shelves underneath. In a separate darkened annexe, one could whirl to the rhythms of a mirror ball reflecting a tiny peek of hairy chest or ear or bellybutton spinning disembodied about the room on the wings of thumping techno. Perhaps these three components together were a little too much like overkill, since separately their statements are so strong and assured. The most successful for me was the most poetic, the very beautiful walls of hand-held scale folded paper sculptures. The dynamic between visibility and desire, and the inherent problematics of identity politics—the politics of visibility, the dilemma of coming out loud and proud or risking capture by another's discourse—are here eloquently, and amusingly, presented.

Christopher Dean, *Oscar Wilde Obstacle Course*, 1998

Humour of course has always held a privileged place as a counter to social marginalisation. Indeed, laughter was the very topic for a lecture by visiting luminary Alphonso Lingis, sponsored by Queerzone (forum, seminars and exhibitions resulting from a collaboration between Mardi Gras, University of Western Sydney, Nepean, Artspace and Casula Powerhouse). Lingis' entertaining lecture focused on laughter's unique ability to connect us with the other, its (dubious) power to redeem ostracism: "if only the little boy in the playground in the geeky clothes and bad haircut would experience the comedy of his appearance rather than its pain, he would be at one with his tormentors". Laughter according to Lingis has a distancing effect, with the potential to take us immediately out of a moment of disaster: how often are we already looking back at our predicament in terms of the way we're going to relate it to 'gross out' our friends?

The lasting effect of laughter as deployed by Wilde is not lost on the artists in *The Oscar Wilde Reading Group is Rampant*, at the Mardi Gras' Raw Nerve Gallery. In what may amount to a rearguard re-introduction of 'camp' to challenge 'queer', many of the artists here are equally into dressing up and grossing out. Take Trevor Fry, renowned as one of the gay art scene's 'back room boys', whose scatological concerns persist here in his conjunction of shit-smeared underpants splayed on a laundry rack with a super-aestheticised portrait of the artist as matinee idol. Helen Hyatt-Johnston and Jane Polkinghorne wildly mix their metaphors with Oscar dressed as Salome, Dorian queering into Doris Gray, and the obvious pun on another gay icon continuing the associations. Through digital manipulation, the artists delight in adorning Doris/Salome with all the scabs, wrinkles and festering sores which betray her scrofulous existence, treating these abject markers as so much precious jewellery. Christopher Dean's work brings together two types of humour, the dry, intellectual wit of the early conceptualists, here Allan Kaprow, with the lush, often raucous irony of Wilde. Dean has stencilled some of Wilde's epithets—"Bad art is a great deal worse than no art at all", "A really well made button hole is the only link between art and nature"—on a number of tyres, and laid them out on the gallery floor to form the *Oscar Wilde Obstacle Course* which the viewer has to physically negotiate. Dean apparently 'borrowed' the tyres from a local garage, returning them later with the writing blacked out, expecting that with time, these epithets may well mysteriously reappear, rolling along Sydney streets.

Another member of the reading group, Lachlan Warner, also coordinated a project at First Draft Gallery, a collaboration with a gay and lesbian anti-violence group. This was an interactive piece which entailed old-style technology in the form of a photocopier (somewhat of a relief after the often less than scintillating computer mouse/trackball interfaces of so much 'interactive' art). Viewers were encouraged to tip whatever personal belongings they happened to be carrying onto the copier, make a copy, then bag it and pin it to the wall for display, as a means of getting an inkling of the intersection between policing and being gay in Sydney. This more overt address of gay and lesbian political concerns was of interest, even if the documentation was remarkable for its uniformity—keys, coins and more keys.

Given so much contemporary art substantially addresses traditional gay and lesbian community concerns about identity, visibility and marginalisation, what perhaps distinguishes the art exhibited under the auspices of Mardi Gras is precisely that: its institutional umbrella, its concurrent showing, its clear community-identification. These, nonetheless, make for a fertile field of contextualisation which cannot help but inflect the works in certain, at times very enriching, ways.

Really Out Art, *cafes and shopfronts in Glebe, Feb 6 - 21; Felix Gonzales-Torres, Yuill Crowley Gallery, Feb; Art 2 Go, (Robin Forster and James Barrett),* Vertigo 2, *Australian Centre for Photography, Feb 20 - Mar 21; Alphonso Lingis, sponsored by Queerzone at Artspace, Feb 21;* The Oscar Wilde Reading Group is Rampant, *Lachlan Warner, Christopher Dean, Joe Psegiannakis, Damon Brooks, Jane Polkinghorne, Helen Hyatt-Johnston, Raw Nerve Gallery, Feb 6 - 21; Lachlan Warner and the Anti-violence Project,* Evidence, *First Draft Gallery, Feb 11 - 26*

Risk-taking in art-making

Rachel Kent previews the *1998 Next Wave Festival*

The Next Wave Festival, Australia's biennial festival of emerging artists and artforms, takes place between May 15 - 31 at venues across Melbourne and regional Victoria. In an unprecedented move, the festival also incorporates events in other Australian cities including Sydney, Launceston and Perth as well as a selection of international projects.

Comprising some 100 projects at over 65 venues, the *1998 Next Wave Festival* takes as its cue the notion of 'distance'. This theme is embraced by the festival as a whole and will be interpreted in various ways across artforms to raise questions about origins and identity, location and place. What does it mean today, for example, to be an artist working in Australia and how are artistic ideas disseminated to an increasingly global audience?

Incorporating four key areas of activity—visual art, text, performance, and music—this year's festival seeks to break boundaries between forms and encourage dialogue between them. Director Wendy Lasica notes of the festival's brief, "it encourages an examination of the relative spaces between methodologies of work, artforms, geographical location, cultural and gender difference. A particular emphasis is placed on sound, an area that is critical to much art and technology, performance and text-based work".

Visual artists working with sound and text, dancers working with new technology, and writers experimenting with text-based performance, are just some examples of the cross-pollination supported by the festival. Collaborations between diverse individuals and companies will also be featured in some festival events. In one exhibition at Grey Area Art Space, an artist-run initiative in Melbourne's central business district, established and emerging artists will be paired to produce new works; and in a collaborative performance between Stompin Youth Dance Company and Danceworks, 20 young dancers from Tasmania and Victoria will work with artistic directors from both companies and composer Steve Law.

Several new sites will be utilised for the forthcoming festival. They include the South Melbourne Town Hall, which will house a series of contemporary musical performances and workshops. Sixteen of Australia's top young musicians will be in residence with international guests Cathy Milliken and Dietmar Wiesner from Germany's Ensemble Modern and composer Curtis Roads from the US. Performances at the Town Hall include the *Contemporary Music Concert 2—Mantra*. Supported by the Australian National Academy of Music and the City of Port Phillip, the concert features Karlheinz Stockhausen's powerful 70 minute work *Mantra* (1969-70) for two amplified pianos, played by Michael Kieran Harvey and Liam Viney, and electronics.

The Public Office, located in West Melbourne and operated by architectural firm 6 Degrees, will be the site of eight night-time performance events and the *Next Wave Festival Forum Series*. Taking place on the weekend of May 23 - 24, the forum series promotes discussion and debate across artforms in relation to festival themes. Speakers will include Zane Trow of The Performance Space, Sydney, composer and sound designer Garth Paine and *Gangland* author Mark Davis. Topics range from the institutionalisation of culture to ideas about the contemporary archive, from mappings of space and culture to the ambiguous place inhabited by hybrid artforms. The Public Office will also house *exstatic*, a performance of new electroacoustic works and digital soundscapes over two nights, curated by Terry McDermott. *The Next Wave Context Writers Day*, in which emerging writers are given a platform for readings and discussion, will take place at the Lower Melbourne Town Hall.

Boaz Shacher and Mike Metzner, *Rear Vision*, digital image

International events within this year's festival include a multiscreen installation by four New York spoken-word artists (Emily XYZ, Dael Orlandersmith, Edwin Torres and Paul Skiff) at The Public Office; and an exhibition curated by Hiram To of Australian and Hong Kong-based artists at SPAN Galleries in Flinders Lane. Titled *Bad Rice...fooling the Gods*, the exhibition seeks to explore issues of cultural/sexual identity and complexity in both places. Other international collaborative events include the touring exhibition *Return to Sender: Ireland-Australia 1998/99* at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art on Dallas Brooks Drive and *Transaction* at West Space, an artist-run initiative in Footscray. Queer events at The Builders Arms Hotel in Fitzroy include *Rapid Fire*, a series of short readings by emerging and established Australian writers; and *Sex/Lit Queer/Straight* an afternoon of readings about sexual desire.

Since its inception in 1985, the *Next Wave Festival* has proven an important biennial platform for the expression of artistic ideas and the nurturing of emerging talents. This year, over 500 Australian artists will participate in over100 performances, concerts, exhibitions, forums and workshop events comprising *Next Wave*.Wendy Lasica says, "The festival is committed to risk-taking in art-making, and we look for every opportunity to encourage and nourish it".

Next Wave Festival, *Australia's biennial festival of emerging artists and artforms, May 15-31 at venues across Melbourne and regional Victoria.*

The performing market

Keith Gallasch visits the 3rd Australian Performing Arts Market in Adelaide and listens to the word on the 4th

While setting up for the Adelaide Festival *RealTime* editions I had my first opportunity to visit a Performing Arts Market. I was impressed. I've got no idea how much money the market will ultimately generate (there are both short term and long term outcomes) and, a few strong rumours aside, which artists and companies will be snapped up for the international market. What is evident is the healthy intensity of the event as promoters, presenters, entrepreneurs and arts festival directors prowl the exhibition stalls, going back for a second and third look over the days, quizzing managers and artists, going into huddles, leaping to attention at the call of their mobiles, dispersing business cards and brochures with abandon (they too have a lot to promote), and weighing themselves down with countless videos and CDs. As the days pass, this intensity (exacerbated by a sometimes too tight timetable) yields a sense of community, the frank exchange of ideas, information and, you bet, gossip. These secondary outcomes are as valuable as the promoting and selling.

Like the Adelaide Festival, the market is a manageable, intimate and exhilarating event, located in a single flexible well-catered venue (the Adelaide Festival Centre, mostly in the Playhouse and Space complex) within walking distance of accommodation. It's a live-in event from early business breakfasts through a day of stall-prowling, half-hour Spotlight performances, forums (one on each of the major region markets), receptions and full length night time performances (only a short walk away), thanks to the invaluable overlap of market, festival and fringe, followed by late night jazz and new music performances in the Festival Centre's Fezbah

The standard of stalls ranged from flash (no visible content) to folksy (a good natter), with most more than adequately prepared for the demands of the event; between and even during performances few ever seemed short of visitors. Some stall holders spruiked with verve. A few lone wolf non-stall holders boldly distributed their wares with aplomb, targeting presenters identified by photographs and biogs in the market guide.

Performances ranged enormously in preparedness and quality. There's no doubt about it, a half hour slice of a major work can make it seem pretty minor. Alternatively, it can make the whole seem better than it actually is. Tricky terrain is the introduction to the work, often by the artistic director of the company, the director of the work or the key artist or sometimes their manager. The length of these intros is critical. Too long and you kill the anticipation. Too short and too general and you think why bother. Unprepared is disastrous. Worse, and commented on by several of the American presenters, who pay attention to these kinds of things, was the endemic apologising. Setting the context is one thing, listing the woes of the half hour show, the absence of the 'actual' set and the limited version of the technology, is another. Believing in your own work and showing that you do is critical. Good old bumbling Australian humility has its limits. Not that we have to get into self-congratulation at all, but a prelude that doesn't deal in negatives is the way to go. Where's that *Zen and the Art of Market Performance Intro* we all need?

The presence, for the first time, of music as part of the market was welcomed with the Australian Music Centre and Sydney's New Music Network prominent on the stall front. New Media Arts also made its stylish first venture into the market. We'll assess how music and new media fared in *RealTime* 25. Music theatre also made its mark (Chamber Made, The opera Project, Paul Capsis), most impressively in Chamber Made Opera's *Fresh Ghosts* (one of the best presentations across the board—along with, by all accounts, dancer-choreographer Lucy Guerin's performance. In the night-time Spotlight program Legs on the Wall's *Under the Influence* and Nikki Heywood's *Burn Sonata* attracted considerable interest).

Also notable was a sizeable American contingent whose visit was supported by the Australia Council's ADA (Audience Development and Advocacy). As in previous markets this kind of gesture inevitably means that a significant number of these visitors will return of their own accord and at their own cost for future markets. The Americans were a refreshing presence, offering generous insights about the American economy, the on-going arts funding crisis (there's plenty of money, but it's all going to presentation, not to artists for the creative process), the range of arts events (the festival doesn't play as significant a role there as here) and venues, and the kinds of work they're in search of. Behind the scenes, physical theatre seemed a particular interest to the Americans. Apparently they have little of it. Interest in innovation seemed paramount despite the current conservatism of American culture.

There was the inevitable talk about where the next Performing Arts Market would be held, with Melbourne apparently bidding strongly. Talking to international visitors who know both cities and both festivals, Adelaide was without reservation the preferred site, one of the major reasons being the kind of arts festival Adelaide hosts, providing not only the leading international festival acts but also a significant representation of Australian work.

Given the Adelaide Festival's almost singular commitment on any scale amongst festivals in this country to Australian artists (since the demise of the National Theatre Festival in Canberra) and the parallel presence of the Fringe Festival, Adelaide at festival time would seem to be the uncontestable ideal for future markets, unless things change elsewhere, and there's little indication that they will. Jonathan Mills of the Melbourne Festival for 2000-2001 has declared a steady as she goes policy (in the face of Robyn Archer's projected re-working of the Adelaide festival)—doubtless though he can be relied on to increase Australian content; like Kosky and Archer he's a practising artist with a commitment to contemporary Australian culture. Tony Gould's Brisbane Festival still counts contemporary performance, for example, as a community event. The Perth Festival has offered some space for the new in a fundamentally conservative program, however in 2000 Sean Doran, programmer for the Belfast Festival takes over from David Blenkinsop, and he's more in the Kosky-Archer league. As for Leo...

The 3rd Performing Arts Market was effectively produced by an Adelaide company, Arts Projects Australia, another reason for running with Adelaide. Continuity of site and event, as in the case of other international arts markets, was also suggested by visitors as an argument for using Adelaide again. Finally, the promise of so much new Australian work in Robyn Archer's 2000 festival should make it the perfect site for the 4th Australian Performing Arts Market.

The Australia Council's 3rd Performing Arts Market, presented with the support of the SA Government through Arts SA, the Department of Industry and Trade and the South Australian Tourism Commission. Produced by Arts Projects Australia, Adelaide, February 22 - 27

Addressing the dress

Suzanne Spunner finds The Melbourne Fashion Festival bursting at the seams

Sometimes I wonder why I persist with all this creating—it's very demanding adorning the body.

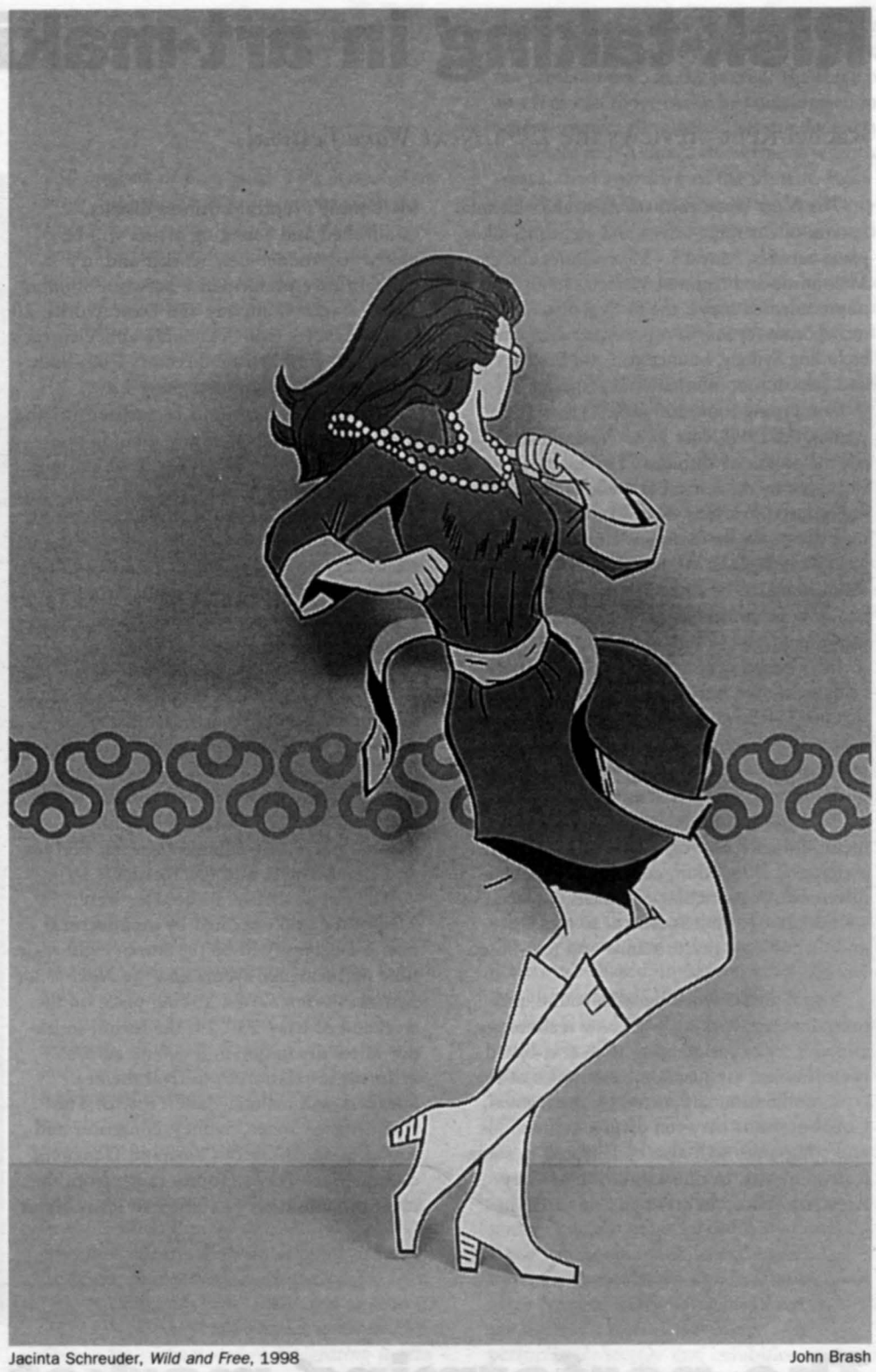
Jenny Bannister

"Fashion Art and Advertising" was the subtitle of *Hype* one of the many exhibitions associated with the Woolmark Melbourne Fashion Festival and it encapsulates the pitch of this now major event. To find the Art, approach the triple sewn French seam with a Qik-Unpick and start ripping; on the surface you see the hype, underneath the advertising, behind that the fashion and at the raw edge the art.

The quest for the quintessential frock is an endless pursuit of perfection; I began with an attempt to pay homage to Givenchy and Audrey Hepburn in that first LBD in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* only to find that was the hype, the reality was an exercise in selling the *le grand homme*'s successor, Alexander McQueen and an awful lot of scent, because today as *tout le monde* knows, the couturiers survive on their marketing chutzpah as parfumiers. The frocks I was in search of were not in the David Jones "Gallery" but in the window on Bourke Street to lure me inside and up for the hard sell. But there they were in all their revolutionary simplicity; the cocktail version in a bubbly boucle with a flat fabric bow at the waist and the evening version on a long satin one with a surprising thigh-high side split.

If Hubert G is High Fashion/Art then Melbourne's own Jenny Bannister in retrospect 1978-85 at Span Gallery, is low trash. Bannister is the closest we've come to a Vivienne Westwood, all Pop, plasticky and fetishy imbued with that same outrageousness and lurid wit. She makes frocks that are easier to look at than wear. Clear plastic full circle skirts embroidered with naked legless plastic baby dolls and curls of black electrical flex, shiny metal conical bras and corsets Xena style, fetish hats made of pigskin—bags over the heads with eye holes. Bannister mixes plastic leather and real fur with equal abandon—nothing is sacred. Even now these frocks are not nice, they still reek of the forbidden.

Jewellery as fashion hype et al was also on show despite the truism that art jewellery necessarily denies the dress, demanding bare skin or BB to show it off. At Makers Mark, which sells extremely expensive handmade decorative objects in precious metals and stones, the most compelling pieces were the ones made from found objects—Tracey Glasser's bracelets and neck pieces made from old plastic belt buckles backed with pieces of mirror, and brooches made from dismantled stainless steel tools. Rowena Gough's long rope necklaces called "Chanel Tryst" were made from 1920s mother-of-pearl buttons double strung in overlapping layers with silver wire; she also had a fetching ensemble of nose studs in yellow gold, pink gold and blue carbon steel, a snap at $2,800. At Anna Schwartz, Susan Cohn's show *Catch Me*, upped the ante in the value-added stakes by showing great ropes of chains made from jewellers' bolt rings in silver and gold joined together. Cohn pointed out that "she attaches them herself", all 30,000 of them and that she liked the potential for the owners of the chains to decide how many to wear at once "creating the work themselves".



Jacinta Schreuder, *Wild and Free*, 1998 John Brash

A series of exhibitions variously addressed the dress at meta level. Pam Gaunt at Distelfink in *Nothing to Wear* made assemblages of sewing notions arranged in mosaics on cut-out dress pattern shapes, and Dorothy Herel at Smyrionos in *Fragmented Threads* displayed her mysterious dresses of paper hanging free. Gaunt's collages were overly neat and too crafty to be evocative but at Span Gallery the Australian Textile Design Association staged an exhibition on the craft of the fabric maker which was highly pedagogic in intent and extremely artfully executed. Seventeen Italian glass kitchen jars contained the Textile Designer's palette including gas mask, stained rubbed gloves, and an empty one labelled "breathing space". On the wall beside it, cardboard dress pattern templates set at right angles like the peeling bark of a gum tree; in another room a vast mountain of dyed yarn, because "without fabric, fashion does not exist".

The rebirth of Georges the quintessential Melbourne store was timed to be a centrepiece of the festival, and at The Old Treasury Building an exhibition from the store archives traced its history. The motto of the store was *Quod Facimus, Valde Facimus* (What we do, we do well) and its original charter promised "to activate good taste in the community we serve", and specifically mentioned "presentation" amongst its goals. In its new guise it doesn't need such a modern mission statement; it has Stephen Bennett from Country Road and Terence Conran to guide it exquisitely. Georges was always a special treat and it still is; a store full of divinely tasteful things where nobody idiotically importunes you offering to help, and then when you do want help, doesn't and can't anyway...in Georges when you do enquire, somebody who knows about the product is available, interested. Superb service, nothing is left to chance, no Muzak—Frank Sinatra croons in Hats and Accessories.

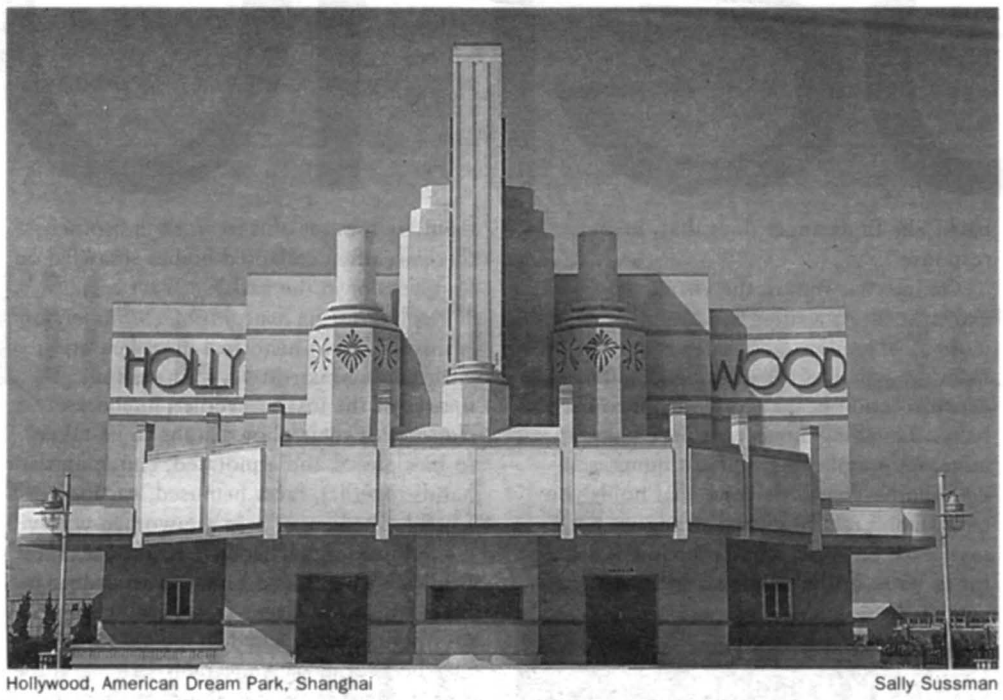
But presentation on display (is it fashion or art or advertising?) was the highlight and a happy form of public art for those just looking thanks. Display art in Georges is Surrealism goes shopping: a stainless steel table with two long Chinese bitter melons like exclamation points, floating screens made of dozens of white plastic forks, a row of chairs patterned with oranges arranged in front of an exhibition of fashion photography and sitting on each chair a Polaroid camera (I think the chairs were for sale), a table set with elegant modernist china resting on place-mats that were Matzo biscuits, and wine glasses with large glossy green leaves folded inside them. Having exquisite coffee, I saw Mr Country Road himself break off from an intense conversation with a display artist to assist a woman with a pusher up the stairs, startled toddler notwithstanding—that's real service and actual style. Forget the hype.

HYPE: Fashion, Art and Advertising Exhibition, at the ultra smart RMIT Gallery curated by the Creative Director of the festival, Robert Buckingham, had the resources, the venue and the purchase on the best brief to be the defining exhibition but was disappointing in the extreme. Failing to grapple at all with the issues—and content to present representative examples of all three without teasing out any critical distinctions or disjunctions. The catalogue and the opening were more exciting and revealing than the show, but perhaps I misread the narrative and that was it—the hype!

Suzanne Spunner once dreamed of being a dress designer and wrote Running up a Dress *(McPhee Gribble, 1988), a play about mothers and daughters and sewing.*

Cultural cross-dressing

Sally Sussman sees the cut and paste of Chinese theme parks as indicative of change



Hollywood, American Dream Park, Shanghai Sally Sussman

As consumerism becomes the latest ideology for the masses in China, theme parks have rapidly sprung up throughout the country to meet the need for a different cultural outlet. They range from the World Amusement Parks (Shijie Huanleyuan) featuring miniaturised Sydney Opera Houses and Parisian Eiffel Towers which are sought-after locations to shoot commercials, to the more disturbing All China Ethnic Minorities Park (Zhonghua Minzuyuan), The Dream of Red Mansions Park (Da Guan Yuan) and the American Dream Park (Meiguo Meng Huanleyuan).

The consumption of cultural 'product' through such parks is nothing new in the West—Disneyland has been doing it for years. The Chinese state seems to have embraced the concept with gusto, perhaps to promote a sense of continuity with a tradition becoming rapidly redundant, and to represent a culturally and politically unified state which is here no more than a copy, a fake and an illusion. While the Chinese consumer is seeking out the latest thrill, nation and statehood can be re-invented, re-imagined and re-presented in this newest propaganda park. The performances of ethnicity, nationalism and 'the other' presented as entertainment in these theme parks is revealing.

The All China Ethnic Minorities Park, built with the Olympics 2000 in mind, is the most telling. Banished to beyond the third ring road, adjacent to the Asian Games Village on the north-western outskirts of Beijing, it contains recreations of villages, temples and abodes of China's so-called National Minorities. Like the 19th century ethnographic shows which toured the world, this park is designed to enable both local and foreign tourists to experience exotic and colourful ethnic cultures all in one location without the expense, time and inconvenience of travelling to the original culture. Here also is a concrete example of how Han China objectifies and exoticises the non-Han races within her borders and this park clearly expresses her containment of them. The park features over 16 'ethnic areas' with entertainments such as "Exhibition of typical Tibetan family life", "Showing of hunting activities (the Olunquns)" and "Show of the religious activities of Hinayana Buddhism, the Monastery and the Monk's bedroom". Prominently placed at the entrance is a miniaturised Potala complete with real live Tibetans cringing in corners like caged animals. With its authentic thatched hut construction, temples, bridges and even waterways, the design of the park invites participation. So, for example, you are led from this Yunnan ethnic village to that strikingly different Mongolian compound, and you are invited to really play in these exotic scapes, to climb up that quaint ladder over that picturesque bamboo bridge and up that extraordinary eight-sided tower. Merry, folksy jingles emerging from hidden speakers anaesthetise you to any disturbing features and heighten the playschool resonances. It is a self-contained imaginary world—an ethnic zoo where you are the performing seal.

Normally peopled with 'ethnic' performers trained at the Minzu Xueyuan (The Ethnic Minorities Institute) who provide scheduled folkloric dance and music displays every two hours, on Chinese New Year's day the park was completely empty. Normally, there are plenty of 'I was there' photo opportunities in mock villages amid fake ethnics. Never had the fake and the copy been so concretely expressed for me and so politically charged.

At the milder Dream of Red Mansions Park, the different environs depicted in the famous 19th century novel of the same name are recreated. Here is a different process. Instead of a real environment becoming fake through reproduction, an imaginary environment is made real. You can literally wander through the scenes in the book. Again, active participation is the nature of the experience, reinforced by the inclusion of recreated sideshow stalls of old Beijing. You can also experience riding in the bridal carriage that carried the Red Mansions lovers. In one pavilion, wax figures of characters from the novel are tawdrily displayed in bad light. More copies, more fakes.

The most curious prism on cultural representation comes at the expensive yet sterile American Dream Park in Shanghai. One of a world wide chain designed in America, it features the Hollywood version of the USA as well as a jumble of exotic bits of Europe thrown in for extra spice. Performances include a Medieval Joust, a Wild West Show, street performances featuring imitation Disneyland characters and a Barn Dancing 'Saloon' show preceded by a Chinese Magic Show. Ghost trains, haunted houses complete with holograms, photo booths, waterslides and ferris wheels and the latest rides complete the park. Examples of cultural cross-dressing abound. You can have your picture taken dressed in a Chinese version of generic Medieval garb in a photo booth. The Medieval Jousting show consists of a duel for the princess choreographed by copying film versions of medieval times. Foreigners are performed by martial artists, stunt performers, acrobats and actors, riding to battle on horseback in front of cut-out castle battlements, with skilful spear-work, tumbling and plenty of heroic posturing in the grand filmic style. The show concludes with a ceremony and 'medieval' dance executed with serious attention, in true Chinese style, to the correctness of the steps. Like the recreation of the Model Revolutionary Operas by young actors copying from films of the 1960s in Beijing, these theme park performances are another example of copying across genres and this case cultures and historical periods.

Some of the same actors appear later in the Wild West show. In front of a film set facade of a western street, they perform acrobatic stunts diving out of second storey balconies to haystacks below, create mock shoot-outs and execute standard Chinese routines in the straight guy and stupid guy duo format. The performers seem to use the Wild West context to create new and spectacular kung-fu and acrobatic feats, perhaps in this case, taking their inspiration from both Westerns and Hong Kong action films. The climax is an ingenious collapse of the entire western street facade as a mock explosion in a well blows a performer sky high. The sparse dialogue uses clichéd tough talk peppered with crude local references to how, in the end, it's the meiyuan ($US) which wins over the girl's heart.

The playing of foreignness in this context naturally dealt with stereotype and cliché accessed from the already imaginary realm of film. The choice of stereotypes selected to appeal to Chinese Occidentalism and how they are exaggerated and distorted through Chinese eyes is an interesting example of cross-cultural copying kept firmly in the realm of fiction. On the one hand, the swaggering Hollywoodism of 'Western' behaviour was lauded in both the Wild West, Medieval and Barn Dance scenarios, on the other, there was a subtle sneering—through grotesquerie—at such excess. The real relationship to this 'American Dream' in fact is economic—it costs 120 yuan to enter the park (the equivalent of a week's wage for some or an expensive meal for others) and since the 80s, the US dollar has offered purchase of foreign goods, privilege and status and the promise of the ultimate American Dream—the currency to pursue 'freedom' by leaving China. Thus this theme park's name contains little irony—the aspirations of a generation are now concretely reproduced.


Photo booth, American Dream Park, Shanghai Sally Sussman

Another manifestation of this cultural cross-dressing appears in special dress-up bridal shops featured prominently in the fashionable streets of Shanghai. In a concept apparently borrowed from the Koreans, a luxurious display of copied European ball gowns circa 19th century, framed by gilt mirrors and rows of delicate tables, tempt young brides. For different fees you can borrow a dress and be completely made-over to resemble an aristocratic European women from an indeterminate period and against a selection of backdrops you can be photographed with your groom—a fantasy touch also available in Sydney's Chinatown.

The proliferation of theme parks in China seems to suggest an attempt to create a phoney 'tradition' in the midst of rapid economic progress, and as Geremie Barme suggests, to provide "a renovation of identity and cultural grounding in the face of 'modernity'". Cultural cross-dressing and flirting with the ethnic and occidental 'other' in the theme parks and bridal shops of China allow various identities to be performed within the context of play and entertainment before being paraded outside in the Chinese state of flux.

Sally Sussman is a Sydney-based director and presently Programmer for the 1999 National Performance Conference. Her visit to China was funded by The Rex Cramphorn Scholarship. She is presently working on Season to Taste *by Julie Janson for performance at The Darling Mills, Glebe in May.*

Saloon show, American Dream Park, Shanghai Sally Sussman

The waiting game

Kirsten Krauth ventures into hypertext fiction

Remember that game you used to play at school camps, in the obligatory circle—what is it about cycles?—when you wrote a sentence on a piece of paper, folding it over with just the last word in view for the next person to add a sentence of their own. The original writer would read the text out loud at the end. The beauty of that game was its hit-and-miss nature, the unexpected links between divergent ideas and creative minds that became raucous and incongruous at the same time. Writing on the net can work the same way.

The advantage of hypertext is that the reader is active in helping to construct the text by clicking on hot spots which carry them elsewhere. Cruisers, creative users (a term coined by Kathy Mueller) do not need a linear sequence to enjoy the hypertext narrative. They make their own meanings from a series of encounters. A return to the site can mean a different story, or variation, a change of focus, a layering of texture. Dirk De Bruyn likens hypertext to experimental film, "The strategy of such work is often to fragment and diverge the linearity of the viewing experience, of an engagement with multiple layers of narrative" and notes its similarity to memory where "images from one source are linked to others in a continuing variety: they are used and re-used and constantly transformed in the process". (D. De Bruyn, "Homing in on the Hypertextual Documentary", *Metro* 112, 1997)

a woman stands on a street corner waiting for a stranger

Where does this sentence take you? Do you imagine a prostitute, a woman from the wrong side of the tracks, a stereotype, the stranger a menace or looking to rescue. Hypertext means you can enter this sentence, this narrative anywhere—there is no beginning, only cycles that return to this point, this sentence, this beginning or middle or end, and each time you return your focus has shifted, you have taken turns. I like feeling lost. I hate it too. Negotiating this site is like learning to ride a bike, that first wobbly turn of the wheels; it's a trust thing. When you're given a gentle push, you hope the momentum will keep you going and you'll be going slow enough to be in reach if you start to fall, that you'll keep moving forward. This site heads you downstream, in a flow. I develop rules as I go: that I don't print any words out; that I don't touch the back button. I want to be pushed over waterfalls and out to sea. I try hard not to go back.

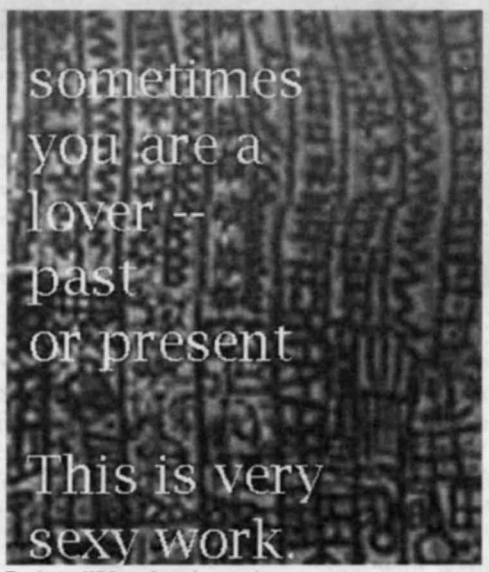
**water always writes in *plural* is an ambitious project, integrating fiction, legend and critical theory to produce a dynamic and sophisticated web work. The design and structure are key components: Josephine Wilson and Linda Carroli know and love the intricacies of the internet, they understand the frustrations of surfing on a slow modem, they seduce you in the end.

water plays with the notion of metafiction, of who exactly is telling this story of a woman waiting, or is it really a story at all or a documenting of internet time, a theory about fiction about theory about fiction. Use of other texts, an Emily Dickinson poem, are witty and playful. The narrator's a tease, she withholds information, seducing me and making me wait…is this the feminine, bound up (yes!) in waiting? Myths, fairy tales, they often invoke waiting, for the k/night to come. Sitting by the phone, pretending not to care. Sleeping Beauty waited one hundred years to be kissed! The word as confining, the woman waiting, is she (are we) the "reluctant prisoner of words"?

The scene of writing: the woman waiting and the writer—both are alone before the encounter and so am I, the writer about writing and the reader about writing and waiting. The writer's fictional characters are strangers to me and I am used to waiting, modem going at the speed of mud, for words to appear, and hopefully images, before Java makes my computer crash and I am stranded on the corner, checking in the (re)boot, waiting for the arrival or the worst case scenario—that the stranger never comes and the woman waits forever. What if you get no hits? Lost in cyberspace. Anticipation grows with the woman's, still there on the corner. My heart beats faster with hers. Will I even find out who it is? Will she? How will they recognise each other in this landscape? Does anyone recognise anything in strangers, see their potential. Lovers? Friends? Enemies?

A woman searching for a husband, long distance, would like to get married; a man who sent her a postcard from Berlin who hardly knew her. She has to know why: "She tells him not to call. And no more postcards, please. Slams down the phone…Afterwards she waits for him to call back. She finds anger does that, invites response".

Online chat rooms, the virtual embodiment of waiting for strangers. We worry, feel anxious about new meetings. Does my type look ok? Dialogue, a feminist deconstruction of the words. Do it to me baby…Laughing alone, that little voice at large, self-monitoring, self-critiquing, self-disciplining, that little voice that holds you back. Don't talk to virtual strangers: linda says, even having a woman's name is asking for it, baby, at the online street corner.



Terri-ann White, *deep immersion*

gamma: gamma gently takes linda in his arms and embraces her
linda: sorry love—not today
gamma: you fucking bitch. scum slut bitch

As *water* explores, historically, waiting in public has been seen as suspicious behaviour, especially for women, associated with criminality, prostitution, drugs, teenagers loitering at the mall. Who waits in public spaces? Everyone *must* have somewhere to go. Even online public space is not hers. The woman waiting "symbolises disorder and therefore a problem, an interruption and an ambiguity".

Terri-ann White's *deep immersion* also uses water as metaphor, as a means of transport and explores the waiting game—are we all so passive—tracing a family history, scattered, blurring fiction and history in the hunt for White's Fremantle relatives and in particular her great-great-grandparents, pieced together from handwritten letters, death, marriage and lunatic certificates.

White too waits. In *deep immersion* strangers are gradually revealed, ghosts of history arriving slowly at her street corner: "I'm trying to fill in traces, outlines of other people's lives, most of them strangers to me". She plays truth against fiction, imagining what her great-great-grandmother Brina Israel looked like, how she managed with her husband imprisoned, a prisoner of words too, in an asylum for the insane. She constructs Brina out of words: "I have figured Brina in my head as a stereotype. I explain this to myself as the best way to manage such a task. Probably the only way".

Brina and her sister emigrated to Australia, Esther pregnant and 16. Where did they go that first night, White wonders. Did they become women waiting for strangers on corners? Late 20th century Perth is distrustful of women waiting too: "It changes the way we women walk the streets: not that it is in any way more dangerous, but just that we are all mistaken for working girls whenever we are on foot…Because many of them are too out of it to work in brothels, there are often collapsed bodies sprawled on footpaths or in the park".

An interesting aspect of *deep immersion* is the collage of historical documentation with fictional narrative: 19th century images of the insane, women in checks *waiting* for their photographs to be taken, to be claimed and annotated, clutching their hands together, faces bemused, vacant, fearful, obedient. These are women who've waited too long. Theodore Krakouer, Brina's husband, is a Lunatic, according to his certificate: "Other factors indicating insanity communicated to me by other/s: Has been drinking since he left the Asylum and is in a state of delusional excitement". White imagines how it feels to be locked in the asylum, a Voice in the Underbelly. She gives Theodore a tone, a hoarse and coarse blend of memory and history, "transforming yearnings into fictional shapes. Attempting to make stories from remnants of real lives; no more no less."

I want links. I want both texts to merge and move outwards like a whirlpool reversed, a driftnet as wide as an ocean catching and connecting words.

Both sites explore the notion of *you*—as stranger, as friend, as confidante—along with a variety of readings, what the reader expects, divergent endings, genre-play and reader assumptions. Did you automatically think the stranger was male? The web appears to make the cruiser seem closer, more tangible. White likes the idea of the reader being a lover: a constant, a phantom, moving but always there:

the you, to whom
I am address-
ing
this narrative, is
a changeable
entity.
But there is always
a you

I want to be the stranger, with the comfort of knowing someone is there. I have arrived and am looking for you. Do you recognise me? I know the boundaries, what is safe. I will approach you and confound expectations. I like the idea that I can be the stranger approaching, that I can have access to you, the woman/writer waiting. I can approach, email, introduce myself and ask questions. No longer a stranger. Will you ever reply?

Now I become the woman who is waiting…

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*water always writes in *plural
http://va.com.au/ensemble/water/index.html *is a joint initiative between ANAT and the Adelaide Electronic Writing and Research Ensemble with support from the Australia Council's New Media Arts Fund. Perth-based writer Josephine Wilson and Brisbane writer Linda Carroli had 'virtual' residencies simultaneously between August and November last year.*

deep immersion
www.ntu.ac.uk/deep/preface.html *is a project of fiction, a writing residency for eight weeks undertaken by Terri-ann White, hosted by trAce (International Writing Community at the University of Nottingham) in conjunction with ANAT and the Australia Council. Like* *water, *it is a work in progress. For further discussion of hypertext fiction, see Darren Tofts article, page 22.*

OnScreen
film, media and techno-arts

Feature

Watching the detectives

Jane Mills finds the *Conference on Violence, Crime and the Entertainment Media* symptomatic of problems in the censorship debate

Last month, as a couple of hundred military personnel were dispatched to a war which the United Nations proved unnecessary, a virulently anti-war film was banned. The protests about both events were underwhelming.

The brief media release informing us of the Classification Review Board's decision to refuse classification to Pasolini's film *Salo* stated that its decision was reached "in accordance with guidelines which aim at reflecting current community standards", and that a detailed statement of its reasons would be issued in due course.

When the first moves towards the banning *Salo* began last winter, a slew of articles appeared in the press. This time there was little more than a couple of sentences from Watch on Censorship, the nation's freedom of speech watchdog committee. It does not feel as if communities have been involved or informed by any discussion.

The resounding silence may reflect a high degree of disbelief that Australia can have stepped backwards so willingly into a wowser class of its own among industrialised nations. It may also reflect a confusion resulting from a realisation that reliance upon logic and scientific proof is not going to work if the anti-censorship argument is to win.

In censorship debates of the 'media-crime-causes-real-crime' variety, both sides have traditionally attempted to resort to the use of crime statistics and search for empirical evidence to support their arguments. The search has proved fruitless with both sides scoring no more than the occasional hollow victory.

Both sides, while purporting to engage in the same discourse, rely upon gut instinct based upon different belief systems. The pro-censors don't know for sure—there is no hard evidence—if the representation of violence causes societal violence, but they think it might. Anti-censors have no hard evidence that freedom of speech is good for society, but they think it might be.

The absence of a single discourse and the empirical emptiness of the pro-censorship argument was apparent at the *Conference on Violence, Crime and the Entertainment Media* held jointly by the Australian Institute of Criminology and the Office of Literature and Film Classification (OLFC) last December. If the aim of the conference was to produce clarity and provide some sort of scientific basis for the justification of media censorship, it failed. The fruitlessness of the search for scientific evidence in the censorship debate became clear as criminologists, censors, politicians and the couple of token media producers all revealed their ignorance of the parameters of each other's discourse.

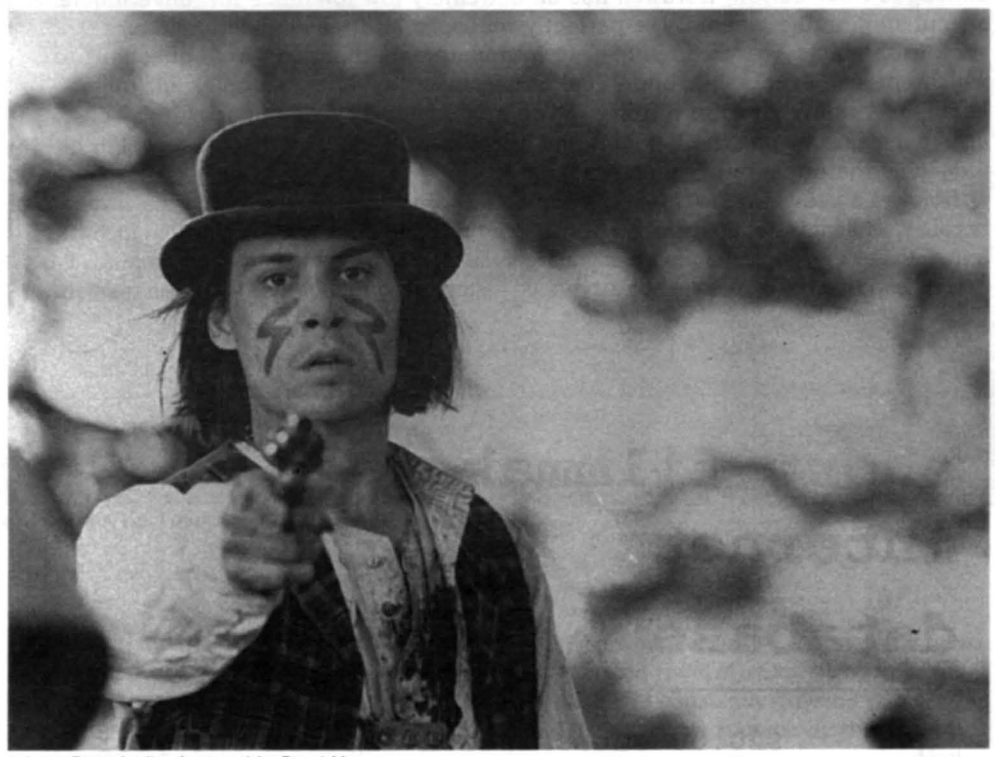
The criminologists were scathing about media representations of violent crime. Cinema and television, they told us, suggest violent crime is on the increase. Homicide is invariably represented as cold, calculated and perpetrated by a sexually perverse stranger with a firearm. Female and serial killers are now more prevalent on the screen than in previous years. The evil of murder is usually vanquished by moral goodness once the complex mystery of 'whodunnit' is solved. In reality, they said indignantly, none of these 'facts' is true—in 'fact' the very opposite is true.

If their indignation was justified, they will have to accept that so too is the indignation of the media producer or analyst. When discussing the media, the criminologists were abysmally ignorant of cultural discourse and research methodologies and every bit as dependent upon gut instinct to support their arguments. A leading criminologist from Melbourne, for example, stepped seamlessly into the realm of hunch as he authoritatively asserted several highly tendentious statements about the role the media plays in influencing public opinion and action. Likewise a visiting criminologist from the USA who stated that all viewers, especially children, respond the same way to all audiovisual media—whether cinema, television or computer screen.

This, of course, was music to the ears of the censors; it provides justification for censorship and for blanket classification, or censorship laws across all media. But such views are not supported by the observational research of any media analyst involved in audience spectatorship studies. Few of the speakers on either day revealed any awareness of such studies.

More worrying than the ignorance of the criminologists was that of the censors and politicians who also revealed their ignorance about how audiences read and make sense of screen texts.

This comes as no surprise to anyone who has read the decisions of the OFLC to refuse classification to films such as *Dead Man* (Jarmusch, 1995), *Hustler White* (La Bruce, 1996) and, of course, *Salo* (Pasolini, 1975). The ignorance of our censors about ways in which meaning is negotiated between film text and viewer is inexcusable; the confusion and inconsistency of argument may be the result of attempts to scientise their personal belief systems.



Johnny Depp in Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man*

Dead Man was initially refused classification to protect "the reasonable adult" from being offended by the now infamous four-second scene of forced fellatio. The decision was overturned once the Review Board became convinced of the moral and artistic intentions of the director.

The obvious intentions of the directors of the explicitly sexual and funny queer film, *Hustler White*, were ignored—suggesting the OFLC believes sexual desire and laughter are signs of immaturity or perhaps that homosexuals have to grow up.

Salo was initially awarded classification despite the director's obvious intention to offend adult audiences; the recent (re)ban suggests the Review Board believes the revulsion which the average reasonable adult inevitably experiences while viewing this powerfully emetic film is a sign of adolescence.

Victorian Nationals' Senator Julian McGauren is jubilant about the banning: "The old Classification Review Board lost touch with community standards and became a captive of the artistic set...The turnaround has come from the changes to the [Board] which were designed to meet community concerns...a new Chairperson has been appointed...there is now a greater representation of women..." (media release, 19 March 1998).

There is no evidence that the new members of the board are any less immune from attempts to scientise uninformed personal views, nor any better informed about the work of film analysts who challenge the notion of a single authorial voice in the production of meaning by identifying multiple audience readings of screen texts. The appointment of Barbara Biggins, self-declared crusading pro-censor and protector of childhood innocence, as convenor suggests our censorship laws may be based on the suspicion that the average adult Australian is neither reasonable nor mature.

Conference on Violence, Crime and the Entertainment Media *was held jointly by the Australian Institute of Criminology and the Office of Literature and Film Classification, December 4 - 5, 1997.*

Jane Mills is Head of Screen Studies at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School. She is a founder-member of Watch On Censorship.

Book review

Problems with the debunker

Adrian Martin tests David Bordwell's critical limits

David Bordwell
On the History of Film Style
Harvard University Press, 1997
322 pp

The annals of film history, theory and criticism are full of woolly, wild-eyed ideas. Many of these fix—in a rather dramatic way—on what we soberly call the 'periodisation' of cinema. But, even in the driest of texts, this medium has a history fairly bursting with sudden renunciations and reversals, bloody battles and palace revolutions, not to mention multiple crises, deaths and re-birthings.

The historical schemas pile up in books and articles, on classroom blackboards: the talkie sabotaged the aesthetic development of silent pictures; Modernism killed Classicism; the post-World War II period introduced a 'crisis of the action-image' and a passover from movement to temporality; Postmodernity marked an end to history and a random shuffling of all available cards. Commentators, hooked up on a weekly basis to the lure of novelty, feel the first tremblings of a 'new cinema' in everything from high-tech action movies and *Titanic* to the jittery camera moves of a Wong Kar-Wai film or an ephemeral program of local Super 8 shorts.

This is surely a mad, makeshift methodology, but—as one who has often experienced a roughly similar thrill of presentiment at the movies, even during something as garish and ham-fisted as *The Crow 2*—I feel that it deserves a defence. Isn't part of cinema's attractiveness precisely this minute, almost hallucinatory sense of an audio-visual texture shifting dramatically from one key movie 'event' to the next?

David Bordwell is a theorist and historian of film not given to wild and woolly ideas of this sort. Indeed, much of his project these days seems devoted to the patient, hyper-rational debunking of such ridiculous flights of fancy. Like his colleague Noël Carroll, Bordwell has an extremely low tolerance for 'unverifiable' speculation on the cinema. His perfectly reasoned and reasonable injuncture is to stick to the facts—or, as he puts it, to formulate only those research questions to which one can eventually supply real answers. Lesley Stern has referred (quite accurately, in my view) to Bordwell's "characteristically deflationary mode" of argument: one by one, he ticks off and 'disallows' all lines of discourse which he judges as rhetorical rather than practical.

Bordwell's latest, *On the History of Film Style*, poses a delicate problem for a reviewer because, while it is not an especially exciting or inspiring book, it is also, within its own terms, exquisitely logical and virtually inarguable. The book's title is precise and just: it is neither a manual on film style nor a synoptic history of formal properties of the medium (despite the inaccurate enticements of the back cover blurb), but a critical re-reading of the available cinema histories and their methodologies. This finally leads to a proposal about how we might best research the history of film style today, and a careful case study (on 'deep focus' and staging in depth).

There is so much that is helpful, useful, illuminating and superbly presented here: the explication of André Bazin's 'dialectical' view of film history and the unity of Noël Burch's 35 year-long 'oppositional program'; the account of how archives, libraries and travelling collections of prints have decisively shaped the 'canon' of film histories; and—most decisively—the rebutting of several highly influential, grand, neo-Hegelian scenarios of the cinema as a medium that slowly 'unfolds' or evolves towards its essence.

The anti-essentialist flavour of Bordwell's historical project is captured in a statement crowning the final chapter. "A technique does not rise and fall, reach fruition or decay. There are only prevalent and secondary norms, preferred and unlikely options, rival alternatives, provisional syntheses, overlapping tendencies, factors promoting stability and change." Time and again he warns us not to make too much of the innovations of the present moment, or to blow out of proportion the apparent radicality of one aspect of a film: there will always be far more convention than newness present, and we must grasp the modest economy of this balance.

All of this is interesting and even salutary, but one does at times wish that Bordwell would abandon himself to the repressed demons of poetic imagination and fanciful, even irrational speculation. His habitual disallowances put a brake on what he is willing to make of his many specific examples from cinema history (beautifully illustrated and annotated). He considers, for instance, 'meaning' (as in thematic interpretation or, worse, any kind of 'free associative' reading) to be a kind of 'second order' abstraction, almost a creation of deluded, projective critics and theorists (rather than part of the stuff that artists actually work with).

So, in this wilfully restricted vein, he can conclude with evident self-satisfaction: "In many national cinemas between 1930 and 1960, *mise en scène* was a demonstration of pacing and poise, a sustained choreography of vivid foregrounds, apposite and neatly timed background action, precisely synchronised camera movements, and discreet *découpage*, the whole leading the viewer gracefully and unobtrusively from one point of interest to another". Peggy Lee's ghost is now singing in my ear: is that all there is to *mise en scène*?

For Bordwell, the answer seems to be yes. *Mise en scène* is not about mood or tone or atmosphere or a dozen other variables difficult (but not impossible) to grasp or quantify empirically; it's not about acting or performance within the frame; it's not much about emotion (beyond a few functional notations: fear, intrigue, open-air joy) and it's certainly never about what Thierry Kuntzel called 'the other film' forming and deforming in our conscious, pre-conscious and unconscious heads as we watch in that dreamlike state of absorption characteristic of moviegoing.

'Cultural theory' (and its post-'68 predecessor, materialist-ideological analysis) is the biggest irritant buzzing under Bordwell's bonnet. He resists, in every chapter, the received wisdom that large-scale 'cultural factors' can be deployed to explain the fine-grain intricacies of style. But it is not merely the mis-match of scale that bugs him. Bordwell baulks at the rampant 'constructivism' of much contemporary theory—the notion that nothing is given or 'natural', that everything is assembled and created.

Instead, Bordwell prefers to speak of our 'hard-wired' perceptual and cognitive capacities; of 'universal', cross-cultural understandings; and he tries to stage a welcome comeback for old-fashioned, lovely things like individual 'agency' and creativity. As a response to the constructivist excesses of contemporary theory, this is fair enough. But it leads Bordwell to an odd, almost perverse kind of degree zero: human culture is all about—seemingly only about—telling clear stories and getting nice picture frames cleverly balanced up. Which is all just a bit too prosaic for me.

I plunged into this book around the same moment that I read, in the internet magazine *Postmodern Culture*, William D. Routt's latest text "The Madness of Cinema and of Thinking Images". Many of the tendencies that Bordwell disparages are flaunted in Routt's magnificent piece: a 'wheels within wheels' logic (based on an opportune resonance between the theoretical categories advanced by Vachel Lindsay in the 20s, Gilles Deleuze in the 80s, and the classic semiotician Charles Peirce); the happy acceptance of a famous 'first' in early cinema history; and, above all, the speculative positing of a cinematic 'essence' that needs to be explicated and also celebrated. Routt's writing is persuasive to me in a deep, satisfying way that Bordwell's researches militantly refuse to entertain. And the key to that difference is precisely a kind of fine madness—especially the intellectual creativity and inspired poetry that such madness can allow.

Adrian Martin is film critic for The Age *and editor of* Film—Matters of Style *(Continuum, 1992).*

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APAIS, National Bibliographic publications, National Library of Australia, Canberra ACT, Australia 2600

Report

The Sillywood invasion

Paul Brown, an artist in wonderland at SIGGRAPH 97

SIGGRAPH is the Special Interest Group in Graphics of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM). I first got there in 1981 and followed the event fairly religiously throughout the 80s. If my memory is correct '81 was the last year that you could turn up with a videotape in your bag and have it shown in the Electronic Theatre. It was also the first year the event included an art show. As an artist myself it was like going to wonderland. After years of being marginalised for my work in art and technology I found myself in a "birds of a feather" session with 50 or so others from around the world who all shared my vision and interests.

Throughout the 80s SIGGRAPH was an exciting melting pot of talent and ideas. Computer graphics (CG) were "a solution looking for a problem" and specialists from many diverse disciplines rubbed shoulders to share the latest techniques and gossip. In 1986 there was a panel on the film industry. *Looker* (Crighton, 1979), *Tron* (Lisberger, 1982) and *The Last Starfighter* (Castle, 1984) had all used computer effects (CFX) and, although all went on to become cult movies, none did well at the box office. At the panel a frustrated producer joked that it was easier to get a location helicopter than agreement to use CFX and studio execs reiterated the conservatism of Hollywood.

In television the situation was different. By 1986 the digital video post-production boxes had had a significant impact particularly on current affairs, news and the wealthy commercials sector. Digital systems were helping to push video as a master production medium with digital production gear like vtrs, switchers and cameras hitting the marketplace. The video post houses grew as the 16mm film facilities, which had relied on regular TV work, closed their doors.

SIGGRAPH 86 was a turning point. New York photographer Nancy Burson was there to promote her new book *Composites* which documented her digital imaging. In a press session she proclaimed that the era of "photographic truth" was over. At another "bird" session a group of creatives claimed CG as their own and predicted that, in ten years time, SIGGRAPH would be their event. Back then we were a distinct minority. SIGGRAPH belonged to engineers, mathematicians and computer scientists. Many laughed at our claim. They didn't even like the increasing number of creative and media people getting elected to SIGGRAPH committees. At one point its parent society, ACM, expressed concern that its integrity as a professional society was being compromised by these outsiders.

Now, in the 1990s, computer imaging has found its own vertical markets and a whole host of new conferences, trade shows and symposia have sprung up to exploit demand. For many of us the expensive trip to SIGGRAPH has become less essential. So it was good for me to be invited to be a judge for the SIGGRAPH 97 Computer Animation Festival.

Los Angeles in August was in heat wave and the air-con for the 15 storey glass atriums at the LA Convention Centre was having trouble keeping up. Over 47,000 people milled around, mostly to see the trade show. In addition to the technical papers core (now a minority draw) were panels, screening rooms, the art show, the major trade show, the "start-up" park, the Electronic Garden, the education program, the outreach program and a host of lesser events. The Computer Animation Festival (CAF) offered four evening and three matinee performances in the Shrine Auditorium (home of the Academy Awards). Then there were the unofficial events, shows and parties all over town.

A chance meeting in the bar of the Hotel Figueroa best illustrates the changes in SIGGRAPH over the past decade. A schoolteacher from Malibu was down for the day to see the show, her first visit to SIGGRAPH. She explained that, if she hadn't had been told in advance that it was a CG show, she would have assumed it was just another film industry extravaganza.

For me the domination of Hollywood is a problem. Glasnost and the drying up of Defence Department contracts have forced the military supply industry in the US to diversify. Many have moved into the entertainment sector. This union of Silicon Valley and Hollywood is being described as either the Hollyvalley or Sillywood depending on your point of view.

I hope I'm not just an aging internationalist academic who is concerned about the power, parochialism and lack of ethics of the military/entertainment complex. The interdisciplinary foundation of SIGGRAPH, arguably its most attractive feature, is under threat. I spent much of my week discussing this with SIGGRAPH officials. If they don't succeed in reframing the show with a broad-base appeal it will become just another tool for the Hollywood propaganda machine. Links to the film industry are not helped by the decision to host SIGGRAPH in Los Angeles then Orlando on successive years.

Next year will be SIGGRAPH's 25th anniversary and the committee are keen to explore historical links and re-establish the cross-disciplinary emphasis. They may not succeed.

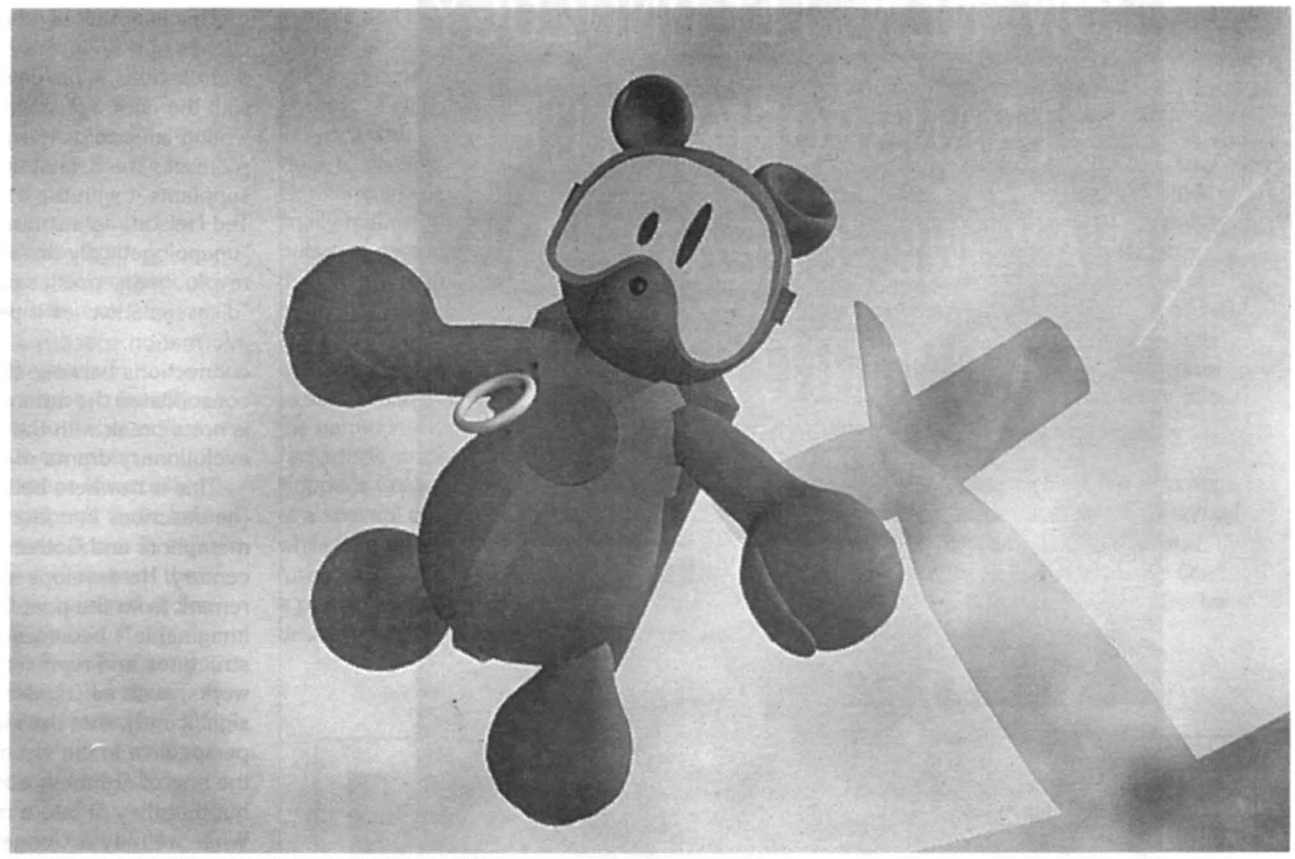
The Shrine Auditorium, like so many places you've seen on TV, was seedy and disappointing. First impressions were the smell of dirty carpet and the need for a fresh coat of paint. As a jury member I was a privileged VIP and found my way to what had been described as the best seat in the house (centre, front row, balcony) ahead of the crowds jamming at the doors. This was my first mistake. Minders moved in around me and, just before the show started I was surrounded by suited studio execs. The Japanese to my left. Caucasians to my right. They ceremoniously crossed the aisle to shake hands, bow and exchange business cards. Trusted lieutenants whispered essential data to chiefs..."that's xxx CEO of xxx, spouse's name xxx you should go and say hello"...before the ritual. This is a world that I neither inhabit nor aspire to.

I regretted not taking a seat in the stalls, 20 rows from the front, sharing in the vicarious rage of the crowd and enduring the inevitable crick in the neck. Studio chiefs don't rage, they clap politely, talk incessantly and clearly have trouble in comprehending why works by students, pieces of scientific visualisation and other unnecessary stuff is cluttering up the show.

But it's precisely that egalitarianism that makes the SIGGRAPH CAF (and before it the legendary Electronic Theatre) such a valuable and exciting event.

My favourite was *The DNA Story* a fascinating piece of biological visualisation from Digital Studio SA that tells the story of the "transcription, replication and condensation of a mitotic chromosome". Students' work was well represented with three pieces from Ringling School of Art including *Sharing* a lyrical tale of ice cream on a hot summer's day and *10,000 Feet* the tragic story of a talking Teddy who mistakes his speech tag for a rip cord. Australia was represented with extracts from Jon McCormack's *Turbulence*, and *Changing Heart*, a spectacular IMAX theme park opener from Animal Logic. The Hollywood studios were represented by *Titanic*, *The Fifth Element* and *Lost World*. CFX specialists Pacific Data Images fielded their usual high calibre down-time production in *Gabola the Great*.

People said it was a good show but, there again, I was wearing a badge that proclaimed my jury membership. Reliable feedback suggests that the show was good but, over the past three or so years, has levelled out. Not such a surprising outcome when you consider that major annual 'quantum jumps' that accompanied SIGGRAPH throughout the 80s and early 90s are no longer possible. The medium is maturing, the big picture has been painted and innovation now remains in filling in the details and, of course, telling good stories.



D.J. Cassel, *10,000 Feet*, Ringling School of Art and Design

Back in the mainstream film industry I was surprised when jurying to discover that most of the puppies in *101 Dalmatians* were computer generated (by ILM). On reflection it was obvious. The cost of maintaining a pack of trained, live and constantly growing puppies would have been prohibitive. CFX have arrived and their success is precisely that most audiences don't know they are there. Dinosaurs, volcanoes and tornados are obvious but the major use of CFX in Hollywood today is more mundane and practical. Things like wire removal, retouching and compositing.

It's here that digital post, which hit video in the mid 80s, has now hit the film industry. Every Disney animation feature since *Rescuers Down Under* has been mastered digitally. Most opticals are now "digitals" done on systems like Kodak's "Cineon", Quantel's "Domino" or one of the new crop of "shrink wrapped" film-resolution app's for general purpose workstations and personal computers. One industry specialist I spoke to claimed that there is only one optical house still trading on the West Coast "...and they're only doing titles".

Specialists also predict a major shake out in the CFX industry before long. The margins are too small for a competitive international industry. One example I was given was a quote from a UK company of $200,000 versus $1,200,000 from one of the big California CFX houses. The larger companies like ILM and Digital Domain are expected to go into full production and contract out SFX work to "one off" companies who set up to service one production with short-lease premises, rented computers and fixed term contacts from a growing talent pool of freelance CGI specialists.

In fact this is already happening and many regret the passing of the large specialist companies who can sustain the in-house research and development that has been an essential component of the medium's development to date.

Launched at SIGGRAPH and essential reading is Clark Dodsworthy's Digital Illusion—Entertaining the Future with High Technology, *published by ACM SIGGRAPH and Addison Wesley. Copies of the SIGGRAPH 97 Computer Animation Festival available as Issue 120 of the SIGGRAPH Video Review. VHS PAL for US $75 or NTSC for US $60 from svorders@siggraph.org or int+1 212 626 0500 (USA).*

Sydney Intermedia Network (SIN) will screen the Electronic Theatre program from SIGGRAPH 97 at the Chauvel Cinemas, Paddington, on Tuesday May 26 (information tel 02 9380 4255).

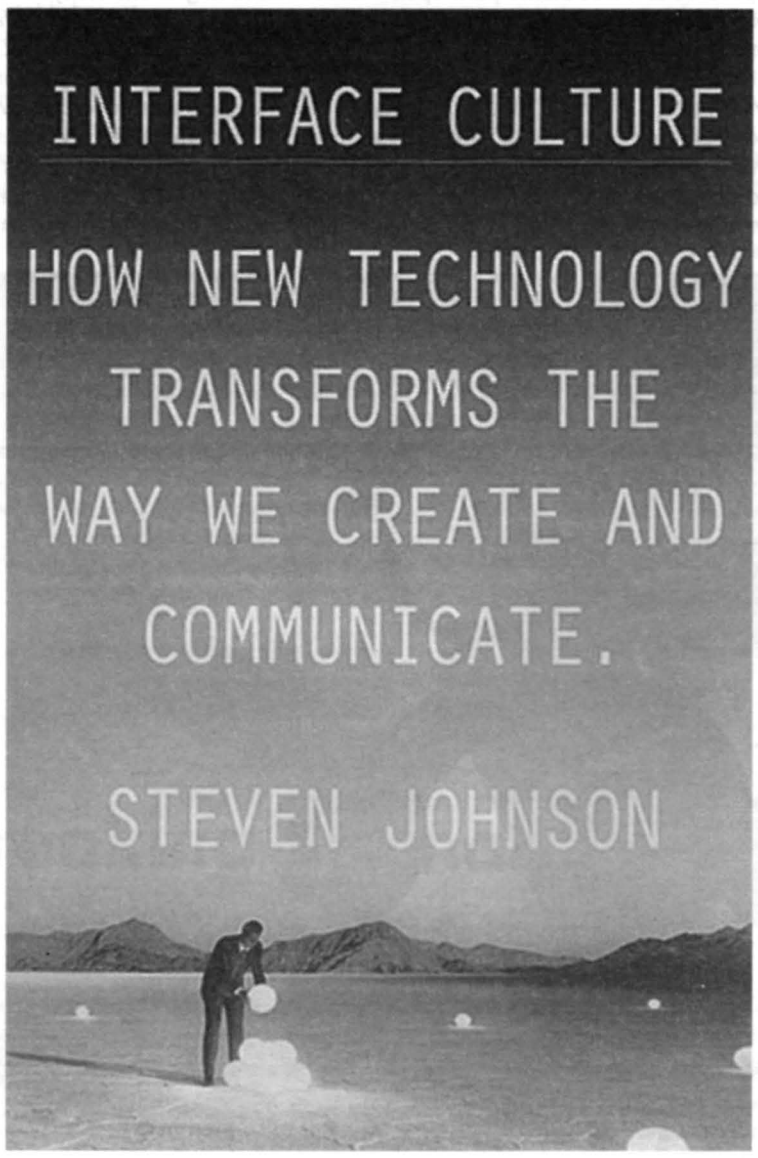
Since 1992 artist and writer Paul Brown has edited fineArt forum, *one of the internet's longest established art 'zines. His trip to SIGGRAPH was supported by Film Queensland, the AFC's Industry and Cultural Development program and the Queensland Arts Office Digital Media Program.*

Essay

The archaeology of the interface

Darren Tofts applauds a new book demythologising interface history

Interface Culture: How New Technology Transforms the Way We Create and Communicate
Steven Johnson
New York, Harper Collins, 1997
264pp



In the emerging discipline of "interface criticism" there is an unfortunate tendency to de-historicise the relationship between people and information spaces. The idea, a la Borges, of the digital world coming into being five minutes ago, with no memory of a past, is a nonsense. In *Interface Culture* Steven Johnson has impressively treated this cultural amnesia and set the record straight, hopefully once and for all, on the history of the interface. There have been other studies of interface development and design, however *Interface Culture* is written with such verve and modest authority that it resounds as the most persuasive and engaging work on the subject to have appeared so far.

Interface Culture is thoroughly researched and fluently written. It covers all the familiar bases and offers a succinct account of what could be called the standard genealogy of the interface. This incorporates its founding moments and decisive breakthroughs, the usual suspects, such as Douglas Engelbart, Ivan Sutherland and Vannevar Bush, and their signature technologies, the graphic user interface, Sketchpad and the Memex, respectively. It also outlines the predominant conceptual models of interface design that can be traced back to the late 1960s and the pioneering work done by Engelbart and researchers at Xerox's Palo Alto Research Centre. Johnson maps out the dramatic, transitional stages and trends within interface design, such as the shift from command lines to windows, desktop metaphors and the principle of direct manipulation which liberated the user from the need to remember esoteric strings of code. In its place the graphic user interface (GUI) offered a more intuitive, visual representation of different modes of operation—it revolutionised the way people conceived of information space by creating an illusion of information as something representable in comprehensible terms, and by allowing users to control the illusion by moving information around (cutting and pasting etc). Johnson also teases out the social and cultural assumptions behind such trends within interface design, quite rightly demonstrating that there is a lot more to the stages of the interface than technological determinism. Drawing on the work of Sherry Turkle, Johnson suggests that the shift from the "fixed position of the command line" to the "anarchic possibilities" of the windows environment traces the route of the subject in Western philosophy, from the breakdown of the unified Enlightenment self to the proliferation of multiple viewpoints, contingency and relativism; the state of being otherwise known as the postmodern condition.

This is not to say that Johnson touts a doctrinaire, postmodernist line, replete with clichés of non-linearity, indeterminacy and *fin-de* -everything. On the contrary, He is astute and cautious in his development of a critique of interface culture. He clearly has no truck with the cool, aphoristic posturings of the post-literate set, arguing that if a new way of writing is upon us it is not the offspring of cyberpunks or hackers. More specifically, he redresses the default theorising which relegates old media to the dustbin of linearity, and supplants it with the multiplicity of new media, such as hypertext. In the admonitory spirit of Ted Nelson, Johnson refreshingly advances that much web-based writing is "unapologetically linear" and one-dimensional, and is a far cry from the free-form, revolutionary poetics customarily associated with the web. Johnson denounces the theme of "disassociation" as it pertains to hypertext, and elegantly articulates how the navigation of information space is a synthetic, rather than fragmentary act, "a way of drawing connections between things, a way of forging semantic relationships". In this he has consolidated the emerging field of interface philology, which recognises that the digital age is not a break with the past, but a continuation of it, a transitional moment in the evolutionary drama of the grammar and technology of language.

This is nowhere better illustrated than in the inventive historical links Johnson articulates (he describes *Interface Culture* as a "book of links"), connections between desktop metaphors and Gothic cathedrals, hypertext and the metropolitan novels of the 19th century. He develops a series of fascinating and at times disarming conceits, in which a remark from the poet Coleridge ("The principle of the Gothic architecture is infinity made imaginable") becomes an heuristic device for conceptualising the way the interface structures and represents abstract information; or the tumultuous reception of modernist art works, such as *Ulysses* and *The Rite of Spring*, and the early responses to the GUI; or more significantly, that the identification of information space is as profound as the discovery of perspective in the visual lexicon of the Renaissance. It is not only that such parallels have the ring of rightness about them, as they are deftly woven by Johnson's measured prose, but that they fit into a much larger perception of the residual effects of cultural change. While we may no longer live in a world in which the novel, as an art form, fulfils the needs it satisfied in the 19th century (as people grappled with the technological effects of the industrial revolution), its underlying structure, or logic, prevails in the interface, which "performs a comparable service", namely, of providing intelligible maps of the "virtual cities of the twenty-first century". The significance of this Johnson makes compellingly clear, observing that the "way we choose to organise our space says an enormous amount about the society we live in—perhaps more than any other component of our cultural habits". For too long the interface has been delimited as a pointy-clicky way of working with information, when it is more profoundly and more fundamentally a semantic *gestalt* that has taken many guises over the centuries. The GUI is its most recent manifestation.

Interface Culture is a timely work that makes a vital contribution to current debates about interface design, information space, and the status of literacy in the age of the digital network. But even more than this, it is a wonderful archaeology of remembrance, a testament to the cultural memory of this thing called the interface.

Darren Toft's new book Memory Trade, *with artist Murray McKeich, will be published in June. He is also working on a collection of essays on culture and technology, which will come out later in 1998.*

Column

Cinesonic

Listening to *Contact*: Philip Brophy

In a world where sight is clung to in desperation to prove the existence of things, the validity of sound will always be suspect. The law may rely heavily on words, but only through recourse to its power of recording the spoken. And the law mainly wants to hear the words of eye-witnesses—those whose sight can be encoded through words for proof of existence. Ultimately, sounds and images are equally circumspect in their convolution of information for the auditor-viewer. And so it is with cinema. Each modulates the other to compound the experience: images confer with sounds, sounds defer to images. When visuals openly declare themselves, they do so with surreptition; when sounds boldly project themselves, they do so through refraction. Restlessly shifting between base linguistics and impenetrable phenomenology, the truth factor of cinema is as indigestible as so many laws. It hides away, beamed from a sound-proofed bio-box, distributed through invisible speakers. In the cinema, neither medium, form nor any dialectic juggling of the two will grant audio-visual absolution. Such is the beauty of living its many wonderful lies.

This talk of cinesonic truth is not as obscure and unnecessary as it appears. Sound designers the world over act like attorneys of the sonic. They encode sound in order to prove existence of events, actions and spaces, working to ordinances of legibility, plausibility, believability. Every sound they attach to an image lies, "I come from this image". Every sound they erase from an image lies, "I am but image without sound". Most films cannot bear the weight of their own falsehood. Their legitimacy evaporates the moment their audio-visual activity occurs, sucked into a smokescreen of artifice which attempts to have us believe that cinema is a knowing theatre of stylisation. All cinema knows is that it cannot tell any truth—yet cinema rarely can accept that it is actively lying when it tells its story.

In Alain Robbe-Grillet's inquiry into truth and fabrication, *L 'Homme Qui Ment* (1968, The Man Who Lies), the validity of image and sound are equally questioned, interrogated, disproven—then accepted. From the film's opening barrage of off-screen gun-fire causing a staged death and return-to-life, to the film's closing of a drawer containing multiple copies of photos which incongruously 'prove' the impossible lie Jean-Louis Trintignant has been spinning throughout the story, *L 'Homme Qui Ment* fondles and fingers the lining between sound and image, between the spoken and the witnessed, between the suppressed and the imagined. Typical of French jouissance and its slide from textual deconstruction into onanistic gratification, the film revels in the charade of role-play and its correlation to sexual games. In sex, all form of fakery is acceptable if pleasure can be mobilised, generated and sustained. That wig, those shoes, that implant, your voice—all lie to produce an undeniable and implicitly true effect. In greater accordance with artistic pretention and ontological presumption, Michael Antonioni's *Blowup* (1966) throws up a pasty, intellectualised pondering of erotic and psychological truth via the highly unimaginative metaphor of the camera lens. Brian De Palma's aural revisionism of the film in *Blow Out* (1981) may foreground the sonic, but only under terms of visual mimicry where sound technologies stand in for their visual precursors. Despite the polarities of the films' mode of address—fetishising either lenses or microphones—they concur in their reinstatement of a truth presented with all the hollow pomp of barristers.

Many films feature courtroom scenes where the truth is used as a driving principle as desperately as cinema denies its ability to deliver that very truth. In fact, too many films feature courtroom scenes. It's a cheap tactic for a desperate audience. Robert Zemeckis' *Contact* (1997) climaxes with a courtroom scene. But it does so to quell the mania for validity—to posit issues of belief as epicentral to the dissolution of truth-seeking mechanisms, technologies, institutions and dogmas. And it does so with a sharp awareness of the formal contract it must take out with the cinesonic in order to achieve its post-truth ideal.

The title *Contact* evokes legal process. Did you have contact with X? Was X aware of Y through your contact? When was contact initiated? When did it cease? In the law, contact implies awareness, in much the same way that sight impels confirmation. In a wider sense, contact facilitates a joining of realities, from infected bodies to psychological motivation to spiritual conversion to extraterrestrial life-forces. *Contact* opens with a visualisation of much that we could never see, but most of which we have culturally and historically been privy to. What at first appears to be a gratuitous computer-generated track through space is actually an astronomical journey through sonic time capsules, dotted across outer space in a line which documents the moments of their emission. Like listening to a hundred radios broadcasting from ulterior and unsynchronous time lines, a wash of song and noise is jettisoned through the screen's frontal zones and spurts into the rear surround sound field (one of many vibrant and scintillating sonic collages by Randy Thom which defines the unworldly sound design for the film). The direction of the dynamics becomes clear: we are travelling not into outer space, but from outer space. Our audio-visual perspective is that of an extraterrestrial who has by chance encountered the trajectory of our reckless and random data transmission throughout time, summarising a history of broadcast and recording technologies. As with so many technologically astute contemporary films, the cinesonic spectrum is used to invert audio-visual relationships as key leverage for proposing the realignment of cultural, textual and even mystical precepts. This scene is a suggestion not of whom we as central beings are in contact with, but who from beyond is contacting us.

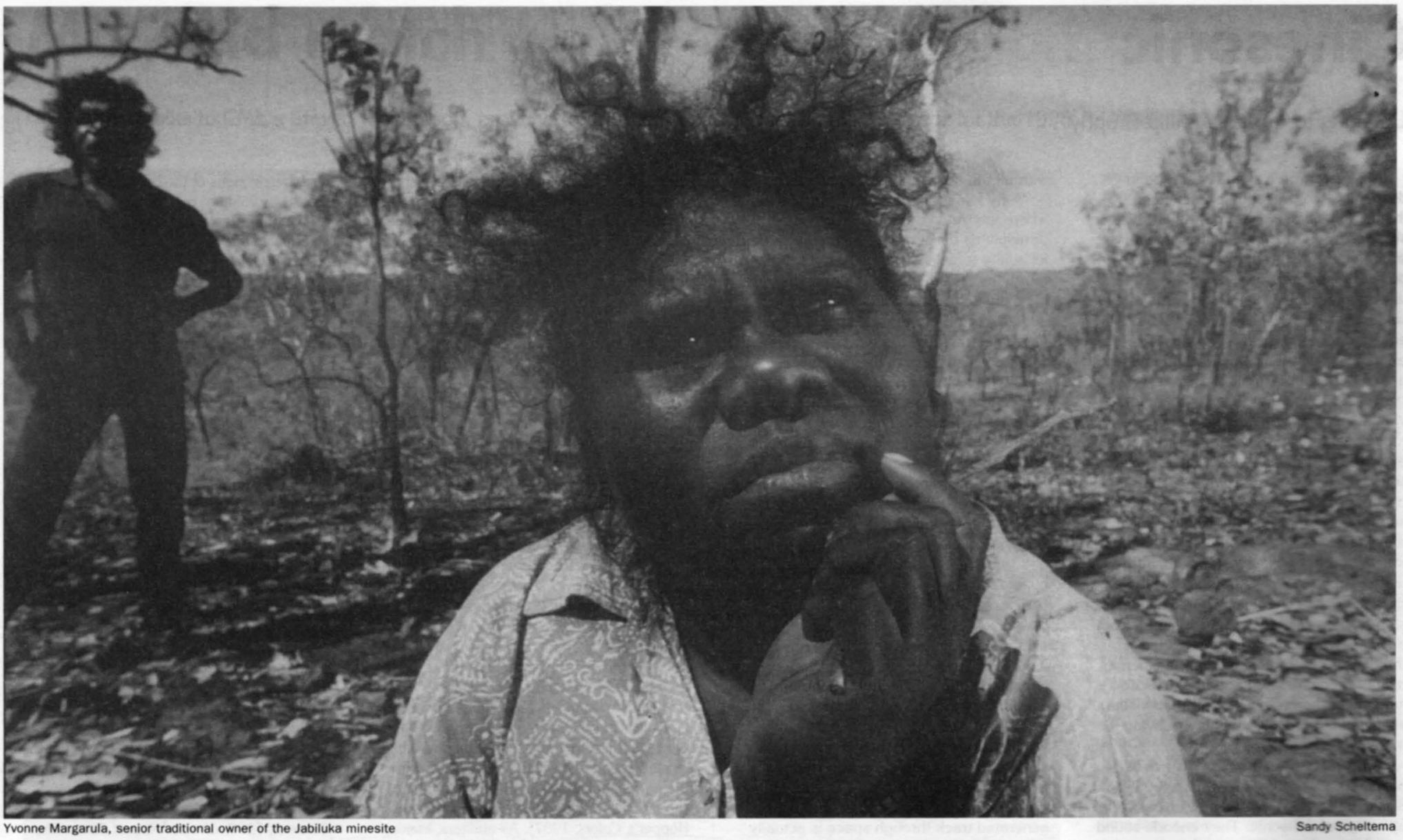
As comfortably centred characters, David Hemmings in *Blowup* and John Travolta in *Blow Out* go about their daily routines until their process of recording is interrupted by the unintended presence of data which provokes them to seek out a truth of which they are no part. Visuality and aurality, respectively, are the matter of their encoding, the rendered textures with which they create illusions. *Contact*'s central figure, Ellie Arroway (Jodie Foster), is literally light years beyond the pithy, planetary modernism of *Blowup* and *Blow Out*. From the beginning, she is searching for something—an unjustifiable existence which she cannot see—and is thus an active figure, less concerned with the remote rendering of things like models' bodies and women's screams, and more concerned with the remote possibility of other forces outside of herself. Crucially, she is not interested in encoding a past event: she scans the airwaves in the present, fishing for sonic signals which intersect her moment of seeking across radically displaced zones of time and place. She replaces the camera and the microphone—instruments behind which the encoder hides—with radar. She does not wish to 'find out' something; she wants to find something—directly, unmediated, unconditionally. If astronomical charts map what exists where, Ellie's obsessively pin-covered charts map what might exist but doesn't reside there. While the archaeologist (and all his symbolic brethren who populate the cinema) visually confirms existence through remnants of the past, the astronomer aurally sifts through the potentiality of existence in the present.

Many rich images in *Contact* affirm this, as Ellie closes off her terrestrial world while plugged into another realm, erotically lulled by a continuum of noise spitting through her headphones. Just as her inverse maps grow in scale and density, so too do her ears: from a single set of headphones to the earth-shaking scene when she commands a phalanx of gigantic satellite dishes to rotate in synch with her as she rushes in a pick-up truck to confirm the location point of an extraterrestrial sonic emission. When she finally makes contact, a dimensional pulsation grows which totally re-territorialises the cinema's auditorium. Through deft frequency manipulation and gorgeous spatialisation, the sparkling harmonic sound conveys the presence of something which exists beyond that which is presumed to be the narrational space and its fictive zoning (an artistic strategy Thom defined in Dennis Hopper's *Colors*, 1987). As auditors, looking at a spectral analyser with its pumping LEDs while hearing this sound, we occupy the fused headphonic/radarphonic space of Ellie: a primed and imaginative place where the desire to hear external presences creates the net wherein signs of the beyond can roost. Here is a profound moment of cinematic truth: surround sound activity (far more lively and kinetic then the dry notion of "off-screen sound") captures all that the screen cannot show. If we are to be contacted by something beyond, it is likely it will first make us realise the limited recording range of both our mental facilities and monitoring technologies.

The complex phenomenological and technological ramifications of *Contact*'s hypothesis warrant further in-depth discussion. It is a first (especially in Anglo-American live action cinema whose mystical rigour trails decades behind Indian musicals, Japanese animation and Hong Kong action movies) in employing surround spatialisation not merely for Judaeo-Christian mystical spookery, but for the investigation of how one shifts from a centred existence to a decentred one. Despite the knee-jerk reactions by many hip pseudo-non-believers who deep down fear the mythology of God, *Contact*'s mystical pondering is broad enough to not be thematically rooted in either religious or humanist dogma, and open enough to state the vitality of sound as a life-force whose energy fields and physical expansiveness effect us deeply despite the thinness of our ocular rationalism.

Contact, *1997, director Robert Zemeckis;* Blowup, *1966, writer and director Michael Antonioni;* Blow Out, *1981, writer and director Brian de Palma;* L 'Homme Qui Ment *(The Man Who Lies), 1968, director Alain Robbe-Grillet*

Report



Yvonne Margarula, senior traditional owner of the Jabiluka minesite

Sandy Scheltema

Urgency and reward

Ned Rossiter reports on the 12th Western Australian Screen Awards

The opening screening for the 12th WA Screen Awards set a tone of urgency of a political, ethical, cultural and ecological kind. Maverick documentary maker and one of the guests of the festival, David Bradbury, had the WA premiere screening of his video *Jabiluka*. The ABC documentaries department, headed by Geoff Barnes, declined to broadcast this high-definition video, demonstrating the malignant state of our Aunty when her keen ear opens too wide to the political intervention of federal government and its imminent and ongoing cuts to the ABC's operating budget.

Jabiluka maps the complex and allegedly illegal 'process' by which Pan-Continental Mining, with the assistance of the federal government and the Northern Territory government and a conflict of interest within the Northern Land Council, obtained a lease in 1982 to mine uranium on the Jabiluka site located within the World Heritage listed Kakadu National Park. Energy Resources Australia (ERA) purchased this lease in 1992 and wanted to begin mining in late March this year. This is land that belongs to the Mirrar Gundjehmi people, and the first ERA-operated Ranger mine continues to damage the social condition of the Aboriginal community and abuses the stability of the eco-system far beyond the mine site.

A large and diverse audience attended the screening of *Jabiluka* at Luna Cinemas, providing an index of the extent to which important issues can unite community groups, political organisations and individuals to appeal against the failure of structures of democracy to deliver justice. At the end of the screening Jacqui Katona, representative of the Mirrar, fielded questions from the audience and explained strategies of opposition if the Federal Court approves the export of uranium from the mine. As agreed by sections of the audience, it seems one immediate useful coalition can be made with the Maritime Union of Australia with their capacity to block shipments of uranium.

This opening event demonstrated the potential breadth of screen culture; the audience discussion indicated how films can still engage with ways of life exterior to those embodied in the narrative and aesthetics of a film itself. By way of stark contrast, the official opening and awards ceremony the following evening in the kitsch-colonial atmosphere of Camelot Picture Gardens displayed the way corporate rhetoric and commercial production practices can circumscribe screen culture expression. Premier Richard Court kept to his script in praising the apparently vibrant condition of the WA screen industry. So enthusiastic was the Premier's support for screen culture, that he disappeared for the second part of the award ceremony. And his absence was duly noted, with award presenter David Bradbury delivering an acrid synopsis on the WA Government's record on Aboriginal land rights and health issues, to the applause of a lounge-dressed audience fuelled on standard issue liquor, with a kiddie twist of Stoli-vodkaide.

I expect Bradbury's was an outburst of frustration as much as anything else; there seemed a distinct unease amongst the audience, boredom even, as the ceremony at times botched its emulation of the Logies. Occasional technical slips had award recipients video-projected either before they were announced, or the wrong excerpt of the awarded work projected as the winner took, or in some cases just avoided, the podium. Glitches and gloss such as these can have an endearing aspect, but in this case, merely detracted from the sense of anticipation, excitement and achievement in previous award presentations which once took place in the main hall of the Film & Television Institute (FTI).

Screen producers of this country, be prepared for a shift in the nomenclature of your endeavours—they are now referred to as 'craft-work'! And there's a new award category called 'Best Corporate' (best corporate what, I wondered). One could be excused for thinking of this as a new genre of ubiquitous scope, encompassing all and everything from 'short drama' to 'experimental' to 'acting', and then some more. With language comes culture, so those who identify themselves as contributors to screen cultural production need to ask whether they see such a paradigm shift as an enabling one.

The winning entrant for 'Best Corporate', then, was CVA Film and Television for their *Changhi Airport 7am*. As this was screened in its entirety only once, and on a Monday morning, I have to confess to seeing no more than the blip-extract on the opening night. Likewise, with all the winning entries without a showcase screening in the program, the only way to catch an award-winning film or video was to spread yourself across three days of screenings. This wasn't so hard given the air-con relief offered by FTI during the hot spell, but it no doubt inconvenienced many with other commitments. There was, however, a show-reel presentation of award winners March 17 - 18 at FTI.

Daniel Habedank took out Festival of Perth Young Filmmaker of the Year Award with his short video *Musicool* a bogan-'burb spoof of *Grease*. Gozde Hicdurmaz's *The Living Wall* won both the Cinevex Award for Experimental and the Channel 9 Award for Editing (Emerging Division). Her video is an hallucinatory study of isolation as experienced by a migrant woman, editing in shots of tree-roots as a literal metaphor for the longing for cultural ones. Producer Kelvin Munro's *Kerosene* picked up a swag of awards, including Stolichnaya Vodka Award for Best Overall and Annie Murtagh-Monks Casting Award for Female Acting. This film has the sound-image slickness of AFTRS graduate efforts and content reminiscent of Clara Law's *Floating Life* (1996). Documentary films maintained a diverse presence in the program with Christine Bray's humorous self-reflexive 'student' effort, *Dusting Off Broome*, and Paul Roberts and Des Kootji Raymond's *Buffalo Legends*—a strategic history of a 1930s Darwin Aboriginal football team and its social, political and cultural resonance across spheres of ethnicity since then—both collecting two awards apiece.

Interspersed throughout the screenings were a range of forums with Claire Dobbin (AFC), Cynthia Mann (AFI), Rebecca Bird and Ross Hutchens (ScreenWest) among others, giving advice on industry matters such as funding, distribution and marketing. The workshops included script development and assessment by Franco di Chiera and Rose Ferrell; digital editing, sound mixing, and special effects; and the very popular Super 8 filmmaking, run by feral cinema celebrationist, Keith Smith. Strangely enough, although Super 8 as an archaic craft could be a site of resistance to or—less '68-ish—a critique of corporatisation, it seems to be doing just the opposite in Australia. Kodak was the sponsor for the Super 8 workshop, and Metropolis Nightclub sponsors an annual Super 8 filmmaking competition, with films functioning effectively to promote the interests of the nightclub. Now such relationships are not automatically undesirable, it's just that the product has a tendency to suffer—most of the films in this competition are of the boy-meets-girl variety, and Hollywood does that wet-stuff well enough.

As a media studies teacher with a firm commitment to bringing theory and practice together, I was disappointed that a critical forum on screen culture was not included in the program this year, as it has been in previous years. That the forum and workshop program had such an industry bent suggests that university and TAFE media production courses are possibly not giving enough attention to these aspects of usually post-institutional screen production. And this is despite the seemingly enthusiastic embrace, or passive reception, of economic-rationalist ideology across the higher-education sector. An industry focus also suggests that the various funding and assistance bodies are not making themselves sufficiently visible throughout the year, the time outside the festival when screen producers will find them of most use.

12th Western Australian Screen Awards, Awards Director: Richard Sowada, The Film & Television Institute, February 27 - March 2 1998, http://www.imago.com.au/fti

For further information on the Jabiluka uranium mine contact: Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation, PO Box 245, Jabiru NT 0886, mirrar@topend.com.au

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Report

Cultural windows

Mike Leggett reports on emerging film, video and digital technology in Hong Kong

Hollywood Road winds its way along one of 'the Levels' on Hong Kong island. Its naming precedes its more famous counterpart by a couple of hundred years, being one of the original streets laid down by the British colonial traders. Antique businesses have since colonised the area, providing windows onto the artefacts produced by Chinese artists from the past several millennia. It is as if each diorama, viewed through the barrier of glass, reveals the vast wealth of craft skill and applied imagination in order to mock the ephemerality of cinema and its attendant real estate culture that throngs throughout Hong Kong and the New Territories. Within this context of the popular and the traditional, contemporary artists in Hong Kong are making determined inroads both locally and internationally. But in order to comprehend this, we need to go back again.

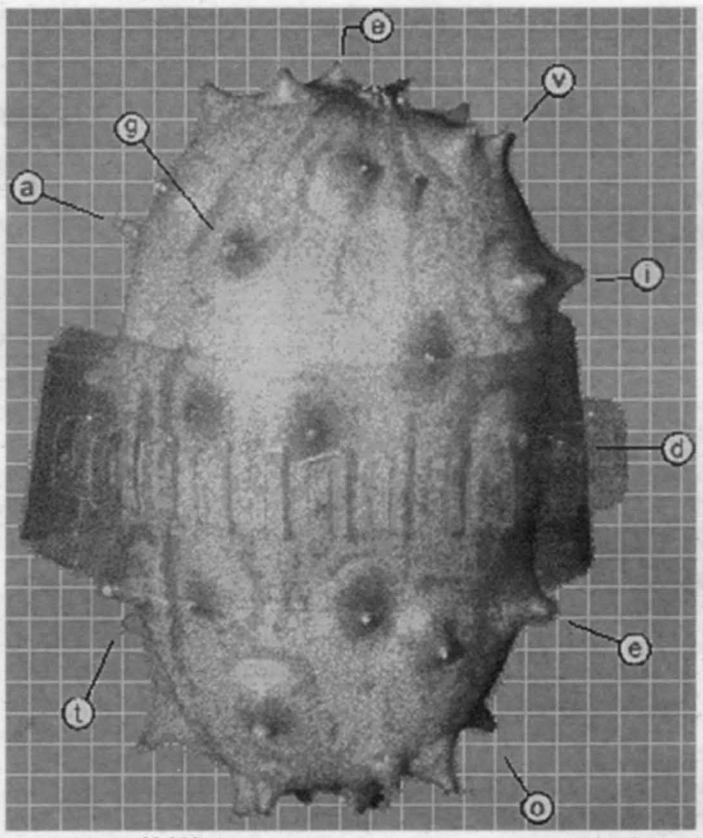
In June 1997 the British Colonial Authority "handed over" the administration of the region to the People's Republic of China (PRC). This was a highly promoted and publicised international event whereby one of the world's biggest commercial centres, home to eight million people, changed owners.

The event was represented as the end of the colonial era and a return to the motherland. The people of Hong Kong are quite philosophical however, regarding it as saying goodbye to one coloniser and hello to another, for they are Cantonese and make up 90 per cent of the population, with the ex-pats (predominantly Europeans, mostly English of course, Americans and Australians), mainland and others making up the rest.

During the British colonial period, Hong Kong's cultural activity was divided along ethnic lines with little integration and even less encouragement and support—until ten years before the British departure, when public money was invested into Museums, Galleries, Arts Centres, University art departments and cultural non-government organisations such as Videotage.

Videotage (*www.enmpc.org.hk/videotage*) was formed in 1985 as a video artists' collective to organise screenings of work in Hong Kong and overseas. By 1996 it had established some non-linear post-production facilities, and gained the resources to maintain an office, library and archive, and administer events including the annual international Microwave Festival of media art. Its current director is Ellen Pau, a widely exhibited video artist who, like many Hong Kong artists, supports her practice outside the arts—she is a hospital radiographer.

In 1997 the Microwave Festival invited Kathy High (USA) to curate several programs of video, myself to curate a 10 day long exhibition of artists' CD-ROMs (a long run by Hong Kong standards), and Steve Hawley (Britain) as artist in residence. The works selected gave a profile to the concerns and discourse prevalent amongst contemporary artists working within the 'western' aesthetic and language tradition. The audience were mostly under 30, had Cantonese as their first language and received the work within the multicultural context that is modern Hong Kong.



www.enmpc.org.hk/videotage

Computers are not expensive and CD-Video is a major consumer item. Software can be obtained cheaply if necessary—$AU7.00 will buy a CD-ROM with 30 top-line Mac applications, illegal copies like these being protected by the Pirates Union! Artists are just beginning to work with digital media as the opportunities become available through the universities and access centres like Videotage. Artists like Brian Wong, having pursued post-graduate study overseas, are not only beginning to produce challenging interactive multimedia but teach its basics in the universities.

The Microwave conference and seminar were well attended by artists, students, educators and members of the booming web industry. Many of the issues were, in parallel with realpolitik, about transition. From linear video art to options for interaction; and fears for the negation of one form by another; on an institutional level, in galleries and university departments, a tendency to hasten the eclipsing of one form by another, especially in those areas being driven by marketed technology. Repurposing the technology was felt to be a major component of any artistic enterprise and that this was not just restricted to technology but also to people and the wide range of skills and disciplines that, likewise, converge toward a multimedia outcome.

This expertise and experience has been around for 15-20 years. The performance group Zuni Icosahedron (www.zuni.org.hk) has at its core Danny Yung, a well known performance artist who spent some years in the USA, and is currently director of the Centre for the Arts at the University of Science and Technology (HKUST).

Para/Site is an artists-run gallery ("the first of many" according to Danny Yung) which acts as a focus for people from a range of disciplines who publish artists' books, including some digital output around the largely site-specific work, and also organise on-site forums. One writer explains that "it is necessary to think primarily in terms of 'borders'—of borders as parasites that never take over a 'field' in its entirety but erode it slowly and tactically". "The dominant group will have a well planned strategy to guard its field", warns another.

Meanwhile the well established Hong Kong International Film Festival is now entering its 22nd year, showcasing the famous local industry and world cinema. The Independent Film and Videomakers Awards, a Cantonese-culture vectored event is run by Jimmy Choi at the Hong Kong Arts Centre, a multi-artform venue in the newest part of the CBD in downtown Hong Kong. Entries come from all over the world, representing an alternative viewpoint to that of the Film Festival and, intriguingly, reproduce the deliberations of the Awards Jury verbatim in the catalogue.

Funding for much of this activity (only a fraction is described here) originates with the government (the Provisional Urban Council), which devolves to the HK Arts Development Council (similar to the Australia Council and currently employing ex-pats Hiram To and Jonathon Thomson).


www.enmpc.org.hk/videotage

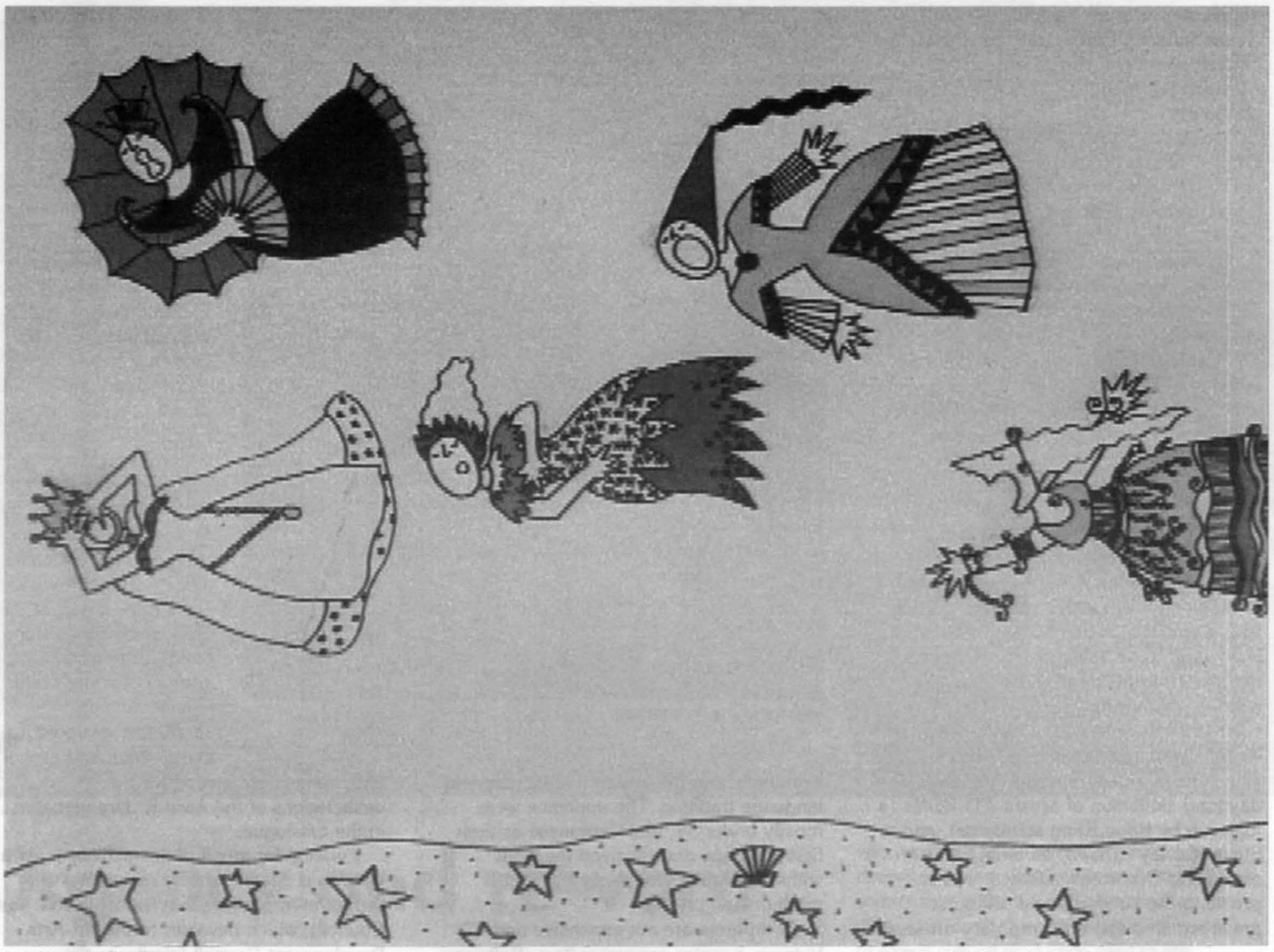
A double analogy could be made between the complexity of the many Chinese cultures and the many cultures on the internet, in comparison to Mandarin culture and the efforts of Microsoft Corp. According to Tung Kin Wah, the CEO of the Urban Council, "Hong Kong would be more stable if there are fewer dissenting voices..." Clearly there is official concern about accentuating differences between vibrant Hong Kong and cautious China. Since many Hong Kong artists, not only those working in the media arts field, speak about the issue of identity, the terms under which the 50-year window will be maintained will be central to their ability to contribute to the wider development of the regional as well as the national community.

*Hong Kong Video/CD-ROM Festival, December 1997; Videotage, director Ellen Pau (*www.enmpc.org.hk/videotage*); The Microwave Festival, December 6 - 12, 1998; Hong Kong International Film Festival, April 3 - 18 1998; The Independent Film & Video Awards are in January 1999, director Jimmy Choi, Hong Kong Arts Centre, choi44@hkstar.com.hk*

Interview

Mix and match

Noel Purdon talks to CME's Steven Richardson, producer of Barrie Kosky's *Voice Jam & Videotape* for the 1998 Adelaide Festival



Judy Horacek, *The Thinkers*

NP Let's start by defining the different roles played by the voices, composers, videos and directors of this event. In what sense is Barrie Kosky the curator?

SR Someone who has original skills, expertise and ideas. We invite this person to arrive with those ideas, and to collect works in much the sense that a curator of the visual arts would in a gallery or installation, around a theme or issue or a whole program. That's exactly what Barrie Kosky has done. He set the parameters of the work; he let the artists know those parameters. And to some extent he selected the repertoire, but not necessarily in the sense that he would control the audience situation. Essentially, he set the conditions under which people would work.

NP That sounds like Barrie in Diaghilev mode: an impresario for collections of performers, writers, musicians. How was your role as producer distinct from his?

SR Well, I'm certainly not the Nijinsky to his Diaghilev, for sure. (Laughs). I'm not sure that I agree with the Diaghilev analogy. In one sense we collected Barrie. We invited him to participate with the activities of Contemporary Music Events, and he came on that invitation. He had about half a dozen ideas, any of which could have been an event. In the process of negotiation, discussion about what was possible and the personnel and technology involved, we hit upon the final concept of *Voice Jam & Videotape*. He brought the idea; we developed it into something that had some sort of screening or performance outcome. Because the project has occurred over a period of 12 months, his role was basically to come in at certain times. Then he'd have to shoot off and earn a living, and reappear and intervene again.

NP Someone must have been thinking of the historical ancestors of this sort of experiment—Pierre Henry and the Dziga Vertov group, for example.

SR Well, we're taking the show to the Salvation Army Temple in Melbourne after Adelaide. It's argued that they produced the first feature film in the world, called *Soldiers of the Cross*. We approached the Army in order to give the work some sort of historical context. Not at all the kind of cinema experience that Hollywood provided and standardised. You know: hit the GO button and watch the whole show played out. Instead they had a combination of film clips, slide-shows and spoken word performance. In that sense it has a certain resonance with the style we're touching on. It's also important for the audience reaction. People who come to a cinema have been so well trained in expecting Hollywood-style production values that it's very difficult to do a multimedia experiment in a traditional cinema screen venue like the one here. In terms of the Melbourne leg of our show, that will be central, because it will be an "alternative" space that sets the ground in which people view the work. Not a Hollywood-style film but something else.

NP If you had the choice of an environment where there were tremendous things to look at with nice background music, or a place which was visually indifferent but had brilliant sound, which would you take?

SR I guess for me it would be the music. For us this is a musical event. Then again, I suppose that's the crest of the debate we're trying to foster. When does the music become primary, and when is it an afterthought? When a multimedia event works well it's an equal partnership between the power of music and the power of the image. With our event there are unexpected moments where the music colours what we're seeing. In conventional cinema the scary music leads up to the scary moment. We wanted to avoid that cliché. That was one of the things Barrie had in his head: to create those unexpected moments instead of carefully crafted and fully realised mixes. And I think we were successful.

NP In cases where the musician put the images into counterpoint, I agree. But some of the sounds on track, and even more in performance, merely reinforced the image. What direction did you give to the musicians?

SR Again, I don't want to put words in Barrie's mouth. That's the area of curatorial responsibility. We didn't really set parameters for example, that forbad illustrating the movie. We said: "We're asking you to respond, and how you respond is up to you". Bearing in mind that some composers received films that they had little or no empathy for, whereas others received films that they absolutely loved at a personal and aesthetic level.

NP Some of them were already much more sophisticated with images.

SR Probably. In the selection of composers we deliberately aimed for a range from experienced film composers to sound artists who hadn't much experience in the traditional film area.

NP And the live performers? How were they instructed to fit in with the on-track score?

SR We had Tyrone Landau as musical director. Basically his role was to co-ordinate with composers and to interpret their scores. In rehearsing the singers, he was the lynch-pin. He drew out of the scores what the composers wanted, bearing in mind that there was little dialogue and no composers were present at rehearsal, which is in itself unusual in the development of a new work.

NP The notion of editing used here perhaps needs the same kind of explanation as curating. The footage is supposed to be 'as-it-comes'. But in fact you're using all sorts of transitions such as dissolves.

SR Yes. I suppose most people think of an edit as a cut. But of course there are all sorts of edits possible in camera.

NP You also used additional line-editors. Did you instruct them?

SR No. Again that was left completely up to the filmmakers.

NP Didn't that depend on their sophistication as well?

SR To some extent. The non-experienced filmmakers did receive some kind of training. They knew what the technology could do before they jumped into the shoot, so they were up to speed by the time they came into the editing room.

NP What sort of suite were you using?

SR A Media 100.

NP Then why didn't you transfer from film rather than working directly on video? Surely the image quality would have been better.

SR This was Barrie's decision. To reverse the look. To get a grainy raw feel. Though we did have a beautiful little digicam worth about nine grand.

NP So were you pleased with the results?

SR For me personally it was the integrity of everyone involved. For a filmmaker to shoot something presumably close to their heart and art, and surrender it into the unknown. For a writer/director to wave goodbye and say "Well, I don't know where that film is going, or who the composer will be". Similarly with composers. To ask them to respond to a work they had no dialogue with is very tricky. What we all tried to avoid was making video clips to contemporary music, like a chunk of rock on MTV. Hopefully something more challenging and unexpected. Those who know Barrie's work come to expect the unexpected.

NP Ay, there's the jam.

SR That's it. In a musical sense a band jams away and there are random outcomes. Some of these outcomes and experiments work fantastically well and some of them are absolutely horrible; or horrible to some people and fantastic to others. That's the nature of the jam.

Voice Jam & Videotape, *director Barrie Kosky, Adelaide Festival, Mercury Cinema; Salvation Army City Temple, Melbourne, March 13 - 15*

Melbourne, Noel Purdon is an Adelaide based arts and travel writer. His next book Spinning the Globe *will be published later this year.*

See page 46 for more on Voice Jam & Videotape.

Report

Virtual encounters

As part of the Adelaide Festival, ANAT celebrates its 10th birthday

A sizeable fold gathered at the very smart (or 'bourgy', depending on your perspective) Ngapartji Multimedia Centre in East End Rundle Street for FOLDBACK, the day long forum exploring media, sound and screen cultures, organised for the festival by ANAT (the Australian Network for Art and Technology). Richard Grayson gave a user-friendly welcome invoking the the 10th anniversary of the other summer of love—"the famous event in south-east England, where techno ecstatics transformed the urban psyche of hyper-decay and escalating pan-capitalism into trance and psychedelic experiences" (ANAT newsletter)—stirring our barely repressed British memories of driving minis through Essex out of our gourds, on the lookout for parties we could never find. Paul Brown who says he actually found the party, stirred some of the same nostalgia in his account of the slow emergence of multiple media practice as 30 years on the fringe, citing rampant conservatism behind the form's status in the artworld as part of a global salon des réfuse. There was some sense in this hankering that "legitimacy" meant legitimacy in the visual arts world which suggested perhaps a narrower engagement with the arts than expected. This was happily contradicted in subsequent sessions that demonstrated the vital relationships between new technologies and writing, sound and performance. A very writing-based day all round.

Cyberwriter Mark Amerika re-traced his steps from underground artworld, performing "acts of voluntary simplicity", through his swerve into publication with the cult hit *The Kafka Chronicles*, which hurled him unwittingly into the public sphere and onto the digital overground. While he was busy collapsing the distance between author and reader, his online publication network, AltX (www.altx.com) was attracting the attention of international money marketeers. Like a lot of the international guests at the Adelaide Festival, Mark Amerika seems to be able to pat his head and rub his tummy at the same time. He may have achieved some fame and a little fortune as web publisher, but he's still addressing the frictions between electronic art and writing. His writing-machine (*Grammatron*) still grapples with spirituality in the electronic age, asking questions like "Who are I this time?" (www.grammatron.com).

ANAT's first executive officer, cyber-artist Francesca da Rimini, took some of her own advice (Quick! Question everything) rudely interrupting her own spoken text with others emanating from her cyber pseudonyms gash girl, doll yoko and gender-fuck-me-baby.

In **water always writes in *plural* Linda Marie Walker and Teri Hoskin, from the Electronic Writing Research Ensemble, linked up live with Josephine Wilson (WA) and Linda Carroli (QLD) who have all been part of the first joint ANAT/EWRE virtual residency project, writing together online to create a work entitled *A woman/stands on a street corner/waiting/for a stranger*. Duplicating the act of writing for a live audience was an interesting if slow process, producing some nice accidents of speech: the odd poetry of phonetic translations, the Simple Text voices reproducing typos; suggestive intervals between writing and spoken text. You can read the piece on *http://www.va.com.au/ensemble/water*

Programming Linda Dement after lunch was a brave move. Still, it was soothing to hear a female voice in the dark still in love with the possibilities of technology for realising her expert if sometimes gruesome images. You would expect a sustained sequence of bloody bandages accompanying a diatribe on censorship to empty a room but here the pleasure of seeing the work of this former fine-art photographer projected on such a scale and in such vivid detail held too much fascination. Me, I spent a lot of time looking at the floor. Afterwards, diatribe met diatribe when a man in the crowd accused Linda Dement of male-bashing, citing "the situation in Bosnia" and then "all of history" as reason enough to censor, presumably, any statements along gender lines.

No wonder the cheery Komninos Zervos with his *Underground Cyberpoetry* received such a warm response after this error type-1. His CD-ROM was produced while Komninos was ANAT's artist in residence at Artec (UK) last year. Using performance-poet delivery and adopting an assortment of streetwise London personae, Komninos playfully navigated his word animations. Screen became spin dryer, words tumbling as Komninos moved among us. The performance potential of multimedia works is really only beginning to be explored in Australia. Outside groups like skadada in Perth and Company in Space in Melbourne, we don't see a lot of performance engagement with the new media. It's an area that ANAT clearly see as important.

nervous_objects is an eclectic, accidental experiment in internet artistic collaboration. They met at ANAT's 1997 Summer School in Hobart and have continued to collaborate online, in locations as remote as Perth, Woopen Creek and New York City exploring notions of realtime internet conferencing and manipulation of artistic pursuits in virtual and physical space. In their first project *Lingua Elettrica* (*http://no.va.com.au*) at Artpace and created for ISEA 97, they built an interactive website and publicly destroyed it. In a day otherwise free of technological accidents, nervous_objects encountered a few, making it sometimes difficult to decipher their precise intention. Their calm in the face of calamity produced a laid back form of subversion.

The stakes lifted when Stevie Wishart entered. Not an Adelaide Festival accordion in sight but improvising with medieval hurdy gurdy and live electronics she extracted an amazing array of sounds and tones. Real Audio was streamed from Sydney and mixed as it came through. As Stevie played, Jim Denley navigated the new CD-ROM track created with Kate Richards from Stevie's new CD (*Red Iris*, Sinfonye, Glossa Nouvelle Vision GCD 920701).

In the energetic Q and A session, Mark Amerika brought up the need for new writing about multiple media, citing the likes of George Landau and Gregory Ulmer as critics who practice what they preach and engage with the work on its own terms. Chair of the New Media Arts Fund, John Rimmer, asked just how much technical difficulties (lags, delays, congestion) are intrinsic to the work and how they might develop given more bandwith. For nervous_objects, if it gets too fast, too polished it's not interesting anyway. There was some discussion of Garry Bradbury's score for *Burn Sonata* using pianola and digital technology. When someone in the audience thanked nervous_objects for sharing their process. Garry begged to differ, accusing them of utopian dreams of machines generating ideas. The nervous_objects said it was something that pushed *them* and they certainly didn't expect the machines to generate ideas. Working with content issues was what they were doing. Afterwards all repaired to the Rhino Room for the launch of the excellent new CD by Zónar Recordings, *Dis_locations, Incestuous Electronic Remixing*, coordinated by Brendan Palmer.

RT

FOLDBACK, *ANAT, Adelaide Festival, Ngapartji Multimedia Centre, March 8.*

An accompanying exhibition, possibly to tour, was exhibited at Ngapartji for the duration of the Adelaide Festival's Artists Week. http://www.anat.org.au/foldback

Celebrating an endangered species?

Diana Klaosen sees cinema at the *Edge of the World*

Cinema Afterdark is a venue with a welcoming ambience. A large open space upstairs in the converted factory-warehouse that is the Salamanca Arts Centre in Hobart's main arts precinct, it incorporates a small licensed cafe and is furnished with 50s-style tables and chairs, armchairs and sofas. An equally eclectic range of arthouse and mainstream films are shown there and it actively supports local filmmaking—principally through the highly successful *Edge of the World* Film Festival, now virtually the only film festival held in Tasmania.

The large number of entries makes *The Edge* one of the larger festivals in the country. This year some 220 films were chosen from a total of 300-plus possibilities for the initial fortnight of screenings at Cinema Afterdark.

Each session was generally about two hours long with a judicious combination of films. Programs were usually not themed, but showcased the range of possibilities of short films in all formats from VHS to 35mm and covering a staggering range of subject matter, genre and duration. The mix meant that every session became, in effect, a sort of mini-festival of shorts.

Three Tasmanian films were included among the 62 entries in the Short Film and Video Competition based at the Theatre Royal. From 30 seconds to 30 minutes in length, the films had budgets from almost zero to almost a quarter of a million dollars. The other major section was the three-minute Super 8 film competition, catering for everything from professional productions to movies shot on Handycam. As festival director Graeme Wend-Walker observes of local filmmaking efforts, there is a high level of resourcefulness on display.

The gimmicky "three-minute film" competition was popular. It was held in Hobart's beautiful Theatre Royal, the oldest functioning theatre in Australia, modelled on the 19th century architecture of London's West End. Significantly, *The Edge*'s programs were the first film screenings ever held at the Royal and offered an equally rare opportunity for local filmmakers to compete and to see the work of their peers.

For this competition, each participant was permitted three-and-a-half days and just over three minutes of film stock to create a finished work directly, in the camera, with no editing. What you made was what you got—the finished results were screened in competition without the directors even having a chance to see them! This concept has its own built-in limitations and, obviously, one "makes allowances" when viewing such films.

A few problems occurred in screening, viewing and assessing these offerings. First, they were judged by the carnival-style "clap-o-meter" which may be fun but, inevitably, while the first films screened inspire wild enthusiasm, as applause-fatigue sets in, later screenings don't rate so well. Also, it was sometimes difficult to tell where one film finished and the next started. The eventual winner, *Summer of the Penguin* was a popular favourite, the director claiming to have put it together in the final half-hour before the deadline for entries!

As for the festival's other award-winning films, *Uncle*, directed by Adam Benjamin Elliot from the Victorian College of the Arts, won the SOS Digital Best Film Award—$3,500 in in-kind services. The AAV Australia Digital Pictures Best Director Award, $1,000 in in-kind services, went to Michelle Warner from Queensland, for *Bum Magnet*.

The Audience Vote for Best Film ($500) went to *Steakhouse* by Sean Byrne (Tas). Polly Watkins (Vic) won Best Screenplay for *Sparrow* for which Laverne McConnell won the Best Actor award. Best Screenplay went to Laszlo Baranyai (Vic) for *Skud* and Best Editor to Martin Connor (NSW) for *What's the Deal?*. Nick Myers (NSW) won Best Sound for *The Sapphire Room* and *Journey*, by Ian Senn (Qld) was awarded Best Original Score.

Highly commended were: *Beneficiary*, dir Graham Burfoot (NSW); *No Way to Forget*, dir Richard Frankland (Vic); *At Sea*, dir Penny Fowler-Smith (NSW); and *My Second Car*, dir Stuart McDonald (Vic); with a Special Commendation for directors Paul Misbrener and Luke Torrevillas (NSW) for *Plan-E*.

The general audience response was very positive. I particularly liked the documentary *After Mabo* (John Hughes, 1997); *Preparation of the Bride* (Leah Irving, 1996) a play on the history of the Courbet painting of that name; *Metamorphosis* (Trish Nacey, 1997), a fast-moving look at notions of contemporary identity; *Rock Et Man*, the allegedly true story of Darwin Cole, a Death Row inmate who claims, amongst other things, to have deflected Tesla's Comet from colliding with the Earth; *Sunday Hungry* (Lawson Bayly, 1997), a poignant and funny film starring Kim Gyngell as a working class father with aspirations for his ungrateful medical graduate son; and *My C*nt* (Deborah Strutt,1996), from the wonderful Maudie Davey's witty monologue (the title caused a storm-in-a-tea-cup when it was considered unsuitable for mention on ABC).

Typically, many of these emerging film artists are producing their works without regular markets or guaranteed audiences. *All* television channels could look to presenting more short films, whether as 'fillers' or regular programs in themselves (like SBS-TV's *Eat Carpet*); cinemas could begin their sessions with one or two shorts...

There were only a few minor glitches evident in the organisation of the *Edge of the World*. Some scheduled events failed to materialise; the festival's "enquiries" phone number, promoted as one of its hot-lines, was often left unanswered; screenings invariably began about twenty minutes late—a pragmatic response, I guess, to the fact that many patrons routinely arrived at least that late. Another quibble: the second session on most weekday evenings started at 11pm!

Cinema Afterdark and its events and programs have had ongoing difficulties in gaining and maintaining sponsorships. Indeed, the local Minister for the Arts is on record as saying "The Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board's major focus is on *arts* activity *but* it does apportion some funds to *film*..." (my italics)

Consequently, after the massive effort of organising a successful festival, the cooperative is "closing down for a bit" to re-think its future directions, if any. It seems ridiculous that a popular cultural organisation with a *proven* track record and a core of committed individuals, largely volunteers, cannot attract funding. Hobart's film buffs have their fingers crossed for the future of Cinema Afterdark and its umbrella events, especially the *Edge of the World* Film Festival.

Edge of the World *Film Festival, at Cinema Afterdark and Theatre Royal, Hobart, January 31 and February 1, 1998.*

Report

Queensland: are you being served?

Suesan Ward attends the launch of QPIX with hope

On March 31, Queensland's new screen resource centre (close to the historical 'Gabba Cricket Grounds) was launched by Joan Sheldon, Treasurer and Minister for the Arts in Queensland at a discreet affair with invited representatives from the AFC, the Pacific Film and Television Commission (PFTC) and the local film and arts establishment.

This official opening of QPIX signified the end of an exile for the local production community. Unlike Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Adelaide, the Brisbane community has not had a focus venue for screen cultural activities. There was no state or federal government commitment to a film cultural infrastructure until Premier Bjelke-Petersen was replaced by Ahern in December 1987. However, it has taken another ten years of negotiation between local screen organisations, the state government and the Australian Film Commission to realise this concept of a screen resource centre and how it should operate.

Over the years, Film Queensland had made a concerted effort to develop a local voice. It subsidised the establishment of a regional AFTRS office, a number of professional development schemes including workshops, support loans to producers, travel to conferences and marketing events as well as considerable seed funding for project development. It ensured face to face contact between the AFC, FFC, ABC and SBS, and the local filmmaking community. It attempted to set up a government film unit as a training ground for local independents, without much success.

The current Borbidge government was not impressed by the outcomes of Film Queensland's creative development programs; whereas the Pacific Film and Television Commission (PFTC) was—in terms of production dollars spent in Queensland with off shore and interstate productions—a clear winner. Late last year Film Queensland was absorbed into the PFTC which intends to use its corporate contacts to lever more federal and private investment funds to the state.

As many in the local community see it, Queensland screen resources have continued to exist in a state of underdevelopment that is self-perpetuating. Producers have had neither the experience nor the means to access resources. For Stewart Glover, the manager of QPIX, the organisation has a very clear mandate. "We have to make up for the absence of other kinds of creative infrastructure...the absence of any large production houses, or locally based production from the ABC, SBS or Film Australia. We have to generate as many production outcomes as we can by fostering links between the local filmmaking community and market opportunities that exist elsewhere, and by supporting the projects themselves."

The PFTC will be QPIX's major client, commissioning QPIX to facilitate professional training for selected individuals who have viable projects to develop. The services offered in terms of production facilities, contacts and advice also free up its constituent member organisations, including State of The Arts (SOTA), Women In Film and Television (WIFT), Queensland Documentary Group (QDoX) and Queensland Multimedia Arts Centre (QMAC). These organisations can now focus their energies on production. QPIX will also facilitate screenings, discussions on work-in-progress as well as stimulate discourse on local screen practices. However, within the context of the PFTC's corporate agenda QPIX's future will be determined by its performance and production outcomes. Cultural screenings and film festivals (such as the Brisbane International Film Festival) remain the responsibility of Film Events which is now officially part of the PFTC.

While many within the industry have quietly expressed concerns over the changes in the bureaucratic structure and culture of Queensland's production support, there are just as many who are mollified by the PFTC's commitment to the establishment of a local media resource centre. Metro Telelvision, Sydney, and Open Channel, Melbourne, are the highly regarded role models for QPIX. The touchstones for success will include a consistent infrastructure that provides production experience, professional skilling and employment opportunities. State and federal budget cuts not withstanding, things can only get better.

QPIX, 33a Logan Road, Woolloongabba QLD 4102; Ph: 07 3392 2633; Fax: 07 3392 2314; email: QPIX@mailbox.uq.edu.au; website: http://www.uq.edu.au/qpix

Suesan Ward is currently completing her PHD on regionalism within the audio-visual industries using Queensland as her case study. She has worked as a researcher, writer and co-producer of documentaries and is currently working as editor for the QPIX monthly publication.

Preview

Breaking the habit

Negativland's Mark Hosler, with Leslie Savan, introduces *The Ad and the Ego*

The comment people make most often about ads—that is, after "they're the best thing on TV"—is "Ads don't influence me. Just because an ad says, 'Buy this pizza or that beer', I'm not going to run out and buy it. I'm not a robot".

Hey, no one said you are—not even advertisers. But as long as your criterion for "influence" is that ads lure you into stores mouthing like some Frankenstein monster, "I-must-have-a-Land-Rov-er-Disc-ov-er-y", then you have your eye on the wrong ball.

While we assume that ads can't make us buy a particular product, advertising is busily influencing us on broader, more subtle fronts, asking us to believe that products in general really can bring us romance, success and happiness. Ads encourage us to feel anxiety about our looks, our bodies, our attitudes, our sense of self; preferring style over substance, babes over brains, promotion over probing, and wealth over wisdom.

Our illusion of immunity to advertising is what makes it more powerful. But finally, here is a new anti-ad product that rips away that illusion like a layer of a Glad Wrap. It's *The Ad and the Ego*, an hour long documentary that comes with soundtrack and sound design by the culture jamming noise group Negativland. With nary a knee jerk, the video acknowledges the pleasures of the advertising world, while laying out its nefarious effects.

The Ad and the Ego is one of the few documentaries that uses advertising techniques to consume them in their own flames. Literally thousands of ads appear in the film—sometimes a spot appears for only a few frames—but the amphetamine pacing in *The Ad and the Ego* is merely the absurd end point of faster and faster cuts ever since MTV made its mark on advertising. Flames overtake a man shaving, female butts and breasts abound, a gal feels zestfully clean, a Native American cries that single tear, and when someone says something about Pavlov's dogs, we see the RCA dogs from their latest ad. In the archival material Freud appears, so does Goebbels and Hitler, the latter saying something in German-accented English about Lay's Potato Chips, the words borrowed from a Lay's spot about a wacky German U-boat commander.

That sassy lip synch is one of the audio overlays on Negativland's track of *found sound*. The US band of 'media pirates' appropriates, distorts, and collages bits from ads and other media to mock commercialism's most comforting platitudes. "He's a consumer—just like you", a bizarre nasal voice recites in the background "He's got problems—just like you".

Harold Boihem, the Philadelphia filmmaker who produced, directed and edited this film, asked Negativland to join his two-and-a-half-year project because "I was essentially trying to do with visuals what they do with audio—with more critical analysis running under it".

The analysis running under the sound and visual collage is the other reason the film works. The comments of the talking-head media critics, who serve as a counterweight to all the surrealism, build on each other, the ideas gaining more force than is usual in these sorts of interviews.

"The most powerful propaganda system is that which doesn't allow itself to be recognised as propaganda", says Sut Jhally, sociologist and producer of another reconstructing documentary, *Dreamworlds: Gender/Sex/Power in Rock Video*. "It appears to be the way the world is—it appears naturalised". "That's one of advertisement's most brilliant accomplishments", says Bernard McGrane, sociologist and a former professor of Boihem's, "to get us to believe that we're not affected by it".

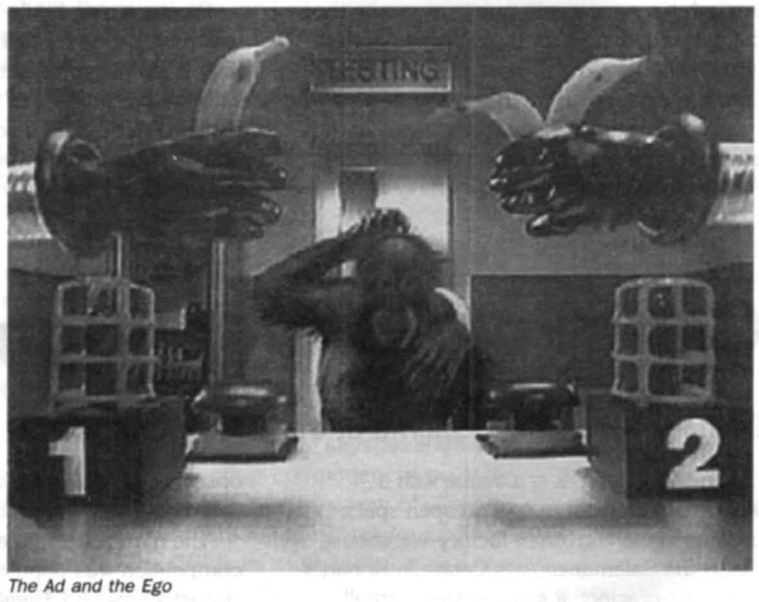
Ads manage to avoid our radar, in part, by acting as either the coolest dude around or the town idiot. "Because the ads are stupid and trivial, people assume that the whole phenomenon is a stupid and trivial one", says Jean Kilbourne, who lectures on media and created *Killing Us Softly*. "But in order to understand advertising, you can't look at just individual ads themselves", says Stuart Ewen, Hunter College media studies professor and author of *PR! A Cultural History of Spin*. "People's experience of advertising is not one ad by itself each at a time, but rather that advertising begins to sort of constitute a totality for people. It becomes an environment."

And what do we breathe in this environment? Among other things, anxiety. The film makes clear that in order to sell an excess of products, advertisers have to manufacture more markets, and that means manufacturing anxiety. As one ad in the film states, "You're only 24, but there it is (the mirror cracks)—dry skin". "Does your mouth feel *really* clean? Does your mouth feel baking soda clean?" another spot asks, triumphing at the end: "You're not as confident as you thought".

Advertising, say McGrane, is "the opposite of therapy...it's designed to generate an inner sense of conflict with ourselves". As Jhally adds, advertisers "know that they can't give us what we want (autonomy, recognition, love, community). But they can take that image of what we want and link it up to these objects. It's not about manipulation, it's not about false consciousness. It's about getting into the dream life of people".

In this age when the majority wants to stay on the good side of the corporate will, this film is radical. Not because it's extreme, but because it simply steps outside of the prevailing assumptions and looks in.

The first step back out is also simple. "I don't think the point is to smash the advertising system", says McGrane, and of course that isn't going to happen anyway. "I think the point is to disengage from the advertisers. Take the advertising out of oneself. To do that, you have to seriously ask yourself—'Where does advertising end and myself begin?'".



The Ad and the Ego

The Ad and the Ego, *documentary, produced, directed and edited by Harold Boihem, soundtrack and design by Negativland; duration 60 minutes.*

Mark Hosler of Negativland is introducing the Australian premiere screening of The Ad and the Ego *at the State Film Theatre, Melbourne, Saturday May 2.*

Review

The space of desire: seance fiction

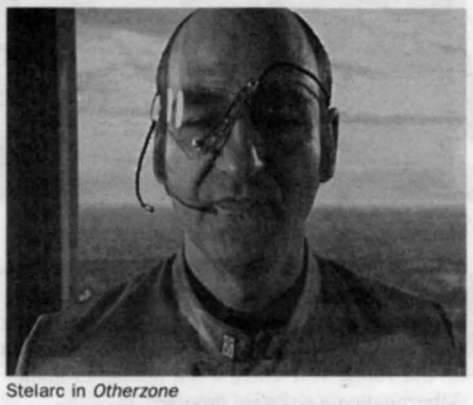
Christopher Waller enters the Otherzone of David Cox's new film

Considered as a film, *Otherzone* could be viewed as a 15-minute sketch for an expensive Hollywood sci-fi feature, or the preamble to an arcade game. As an experiment in narrative form, *Otherzone* realises a film's potential to expand beyond celluloid.

Otherzone is a radical departure from the style of writer and director, David Cox's earlier and hauntingly paranoiac, *Puppenhead*. His new project is a snapshot manifesto, "a future-prox cautionary tale in the cyberpunk tradition" about a group of disparate citizens who unite to overcome the ruling class.

Set in the near-future in urban Melbourne, Zheng (Marie Hoy), daughter of an underground freedom fighter, undertakes her mother's quest to smash the global tyranny of the MAN (Machines All Nations) corporation. MAN dominates global communications using a satellite system powerful enough to contact other dimensions. The hero's quest is the Ameth Scarf—an artificial intelligence device capable of immersing users in the Otherzone, where they access the space of their desires; villains exult in couplings with erotic nymphs, the living mediate with the dead. (Cox describes it as 'seance fiction'). Zheng must deliver the scarf to liberators on the moon so MAN's global network can be destroyed. To do so, she must evade MAN's chief, Nam Melogue (Stelarc), and his confederacy, who will stop her at any cost.

Cox succeeds in executing a tightly-knit plot and characters are fleetingly



Stelarc in *Otherzone*

delineated between evil (ambitious, therefore ruthless) and good (questioning, therefore moderate)—archetypes in Cox's vision of the cyberpunk realm. They also audition well as arcade-game combatants. The result is a pacy, generational wrangle over cultural and political power. Classical in its epic pretensions, and an intelligent inter-weaving of media and message, Cox works *Otherzone* hard at so many levels the film stretches at every seam.

Otherzone is overtly postmodern in both production values and content. Central to Cox's methodology is the principle that "you can make a film out of any scrap, as long as it has a thread". It's a fitting metaphor. To crash so many ideas and images through, *Otherzone* is deliberately, perhaps of necessity, composed of different types of filmmaking formats and techniques. The result is a juxtaposition of patched-in computer animation, live-action video and digital composites which open up the story's vista. Zheng powering her wired '76 Charger past industrial refineries, transmorphed into an ethereal metallic shark, and moonward-bound by zeppelin (an encore Cox motif) are glimpses.

According to Cox, "*Otherzone* is a film from the perspective of cyberpunk slackers"—people who traverse easily between real and technologically-mediated worlds. "Characters see their own environment from different perspectives and, therefore, see their lives through different media", such as security cameras, head-up displays and virtual-realities. "All the film's characters are fucked up—a condition of living in the 20th century", he reflects.

Otherzone is loaded with digerati cues and codes: avatars, motifs, virtualities, GUIs, icons, prosthetics, androids and an ensemble of cyber-kitsch. Zheng wears net-spex, Nam Melogue Stelarc's Third Arm, Chickensticks prosthetic robolegs, and so on. The scarf metaphor was inspired by Bruce Sterling's speculation that tightly-woven networks create a fabric of light and electrons with properties of artificial intelligence, "Magic handkerchiefs with instant global access". Reading *Otherzone* as the preamble to an arcade game legitimises this compendium as items in each player-combatant's strategic armoury. As a logical extension, choose your character in an interactive experience designed to immerse you in an action adventure.

Cox asserts that video games are the ultimate form of narrative structure. "Life really is a video-game where there are pick-ups and a mapping of a 3D environment which people have to negotiate and navigate", he says. "The video game privileges space over humanist interest in the subject." Using game-theory as a basis for narrative structure is not without its tilts. Someone has to win so the game premise infers a degree of determinism. In the creation of metaphysical, multi-dimensional "story environments" where characters compete, the characters gain purpose and risk losing dimension. *Otherzone* is populated by hell-bent, hard-core desperadoes in a do-or-die cyber-epic.

Cox has consciously developed the interactive side to the project. The film is accompanied by a CD-ROM, which contains a prototype game version of *Otherzone*. You are Zheng, interacting with characters in a QuickTime VR version of the film's bar scene. The CD also features a comprehensive multimedia presentation of film production and background notes.

A word of warning about Cox's paranoid cautionary tale. Remember, it might be a game. As Cox says, "Everyone in the film who takes themselves seriously finds themselves dead".

Otherzone, *writer/director David Cox; music, Ollie Olson; sound design, Philip Brophy; animation, Graeme Jackson, Marco Bresciani, Andrea Bresciani, David Cox. 15 mins.*

The Otherzone *website is* www.cinemedia.net/otherzone

Newsreel

TropNest Development Initiative

TropNest is a new centre that has been established by John Polson (of *Tropfest* fame) and David Hely to encourage writers in the development of feature film scripts. Four writers will be chosen each round (on the basis of a synopsis and interview) to participate in an intensive six week writing program. There will be five rounds held in 1998. Other than a $10 application fee, the course is free. TropNest is open to all writers across Australia, regardless of experience or age. Co-writers will also be considered. Each writer must live-in at Fox Studios, Sydney, for the six weeks and will learn from industry professionals as well as other resident writers. Call Creative Director David Hely on 02 9380 2351 for further information and application forms.

Experimenta Media Arts—Call for Artists and Writers

Experimenta Media Arts are seeking interactive artists to send artworks for possible inclusion in their CD ROM exhibitions. They are also looking for new writers for their publication *MESH*. Current Experimenta events include the *Nothing Natural* National Tour, works by Martine Corompt, Ian Haig, Patriccia Piccinini, Christopher Langton; Festival Centre Artspace, Adelaide until May 9 1998. Experimenta Media Arts, PO Box 1102, St Kilda Sth, VIC 3182. Phone 03 9525 5025. Fax 03 9525 5105. experimenta@pegasus.com.au

Digital Media Studio launched by Metro

Metro Television recently launched Sydney's first open access Digital Media Studio dedicated to the development of digital skills by new and emerging screen practitioners. The studio is equipped with 10 high speed computers with the latest design and imaging software for video, multimedia and www production. It will offer entry level training and subsidised access to its facilities. In 1998 Metro is offering accredited courses in Interactive Multimedia, Digital Video and Audio, 2D animation and Digital Imaging. Metro is also hosting a number of seminars including What Funding Body is That? (how to fund and produce low budget films) on Wednesday April 29, 6.15 - 9.15pm, $20; and Pitching Your Project (pitch your film idea to a panel of TV, film and doco producers) on Wed May 27, 6.15-9.15pm, $20. tel 02 9361 5318. metrotv@s054.aone.net.au

1998 Graveyard Shifty Films Competition

Presented by arena tv, calling for B-grade short films, any genre, any format as long as they're shorter than five minutes. Deadline is April 15. Entry forms at Palace Cinemas or tel 1900 140 122. Films must be under 15 minutes in length, finished on 16mm, 8mm, VHS or Super VHS. Deadline April 15. For more info contact Andrew Leavold tel 07 3252, fax 07 3216 0520.

Eat My Schlock: Home Groan Film Festival

Second celebration of Bad Taste. Any subject as long as it's gross.

State of the Heart @ the Australian Centre for Photography

A number of Digital Media Projects are running until April 25: *The Love Machine* by Michelle Barker & Anna Munster, an installation looking at the morpheme, a hybrid of technology and flesh made possible by digital imaging. *Diagnostic Tools for the New Millennium* by Josephine Starrs and Leon Cmielewski, a work investigating the artists' personal relationship to new technologies and privacy issues. *dollspace* by Francesca da Rimini with soundtrack by Michael Grimm, a website presented as an installation piece with a soundtrack, a labyrinth for the character doll yoko and her orphan words to haunt. The gallery is situated at 257 Oxford St Paddington. tel 02 9332 1455. acp@merlin.com.au

SIN Change of Address

Sydney Intermedia Network (SIN), one of Australia's leading exhibition organisations for innovative screen arts, has relocated its office to Paddington. It is now a co-tenant of the bustling Sydney Film Centre which also houses the AFI's Sydney office, Metro Television, Chauvel Cinemas, WIFT (NSW) and Australian Screen Editors. SIN's new contact details: Upper level, Sydney Film Centre, Paddington Town Hall, cnr Oatley Rd and Oxford St Paddington. PO Box 522 Paddington NSW 2021. tel 02 9380 4255 fax 02 9380 4311. sinsite@ozemail.com.au http://www.ozemail.com.au/~sinsite

SIN Equipment Relocated to Metro TV

Coinciding with the office relocation, the hiring of SIN's range of production equipment (including Super 8 and video cameras and projectors, Super VHS VCRs, Sony professional exhibition monitors) will now be facilitated by Metro Television. You must be a current financial member of SIN in order to hire its equipment. Contact SIN (tel 02 9380 4255) to obtain a copy of the revised equipment hire rate card and membership details; contact Metro for all equipment booking enquiries, tel 02 9361 5318.

SIGGRAPH 97

Sydney Intermedia Network presents in association with SIGGRAPH - ACM the Sydney screening of the *Electronic Theatre* program from SIGGRAPH, the world renowned festival of computer animation art: Tuesday May 26 6pm, Chauvel Cinemas, Paddington, Sydney. For more information about this and other SIN events, contact Alessio Cavallaro, Director, SIN, tel 02 9380 4255 sinsite@ozemail.com.au

Reviews

The body interrogated

Kathy Cleland is *eXXXamined* at Artspace

crosSeXXXamination is a collaborative website project by New York artist Beth Stryker and Australian artist Virginia Barratt (ex-VNS Matrix). The exhibition was the culmination of Stryker's artist-in-residency at Artspace and was the first public viewing of the *crosSeXXXamination* website.

The site-specific installation housed two Powerbook computers in circular cubicles with plastic curtains creating a sense of privacy and intimacy while offering voyeuristic glimpses of the interior to those outside the cubicles. In the window frontages of Artspace, small video screens projected images of bodies and body parts supplied by guest artists. Opening night also featured a performance where audience members were invited to be examined by solicitous plastic-clad attendants, their tender ministrations given a sinister twist by the fact that the 'consultations' took place on top of a dissection table.

Timed to coincide with the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, the project has been influenced by Alan Turing, well known for his work on artificial intelligence. In his paper "Computer Machinery and Intelligence" Turing described a game where a man and a woman each sitting at remote computer terminals try to convince a third party who interrogates them that they are a woman. In the now famous Turing Test it is a software program that competes with a human, both trying to convince the interrogator that they are the human. The idea of the test (which has become a popular benchmark for testing computer 'intelligence') is for the computer to convincingly perform as human or 'pass' as human. These boundary crossings—male/female, human/computer, deviant/straight—echo throughout the *crosSeXXXamination* website. Turing himself was forced to undergo organotherapy, a hormonal sex change, as a supposed cure for his 'deviant' sexuality after he was arrested for consensual homosexual sex.

crosSeXXXamination parodies and subverts the way in which medical discourses seek to discipline and pathologise socially 'deviant' subjectivities and desires. On entry to the *crosSeXXXamination* site, the user/subject checks a number of randomly generated statements before being processed, *eXXXamined* and classified.

Your subject code classification is an indecipherable hieroglyphic (my most recent was 'Bxxx.LB.brut' which didn't tell me much—kind of reminiscent of those arcane squiggles doctors make about you in their notes when they don't want you to know what they're doing!).

You can then click your way through to the next section where you 'claim your body'. Having been interrogated, classified and assigned a body yourself, you can now interrogate and examine the revealed body parts (yours?), cut-up image fragments of head, torso and legs. Clicking on each segment reveals new images which disintegrate on further clicking to reveal new images. If you haven't already guessed it, yes, you are still being interrogated; the images that you show a particular interest in determine where you will next end up...this can take some patience as you need to keep clicking on ever smaller segments.

Finally, you move into one of the various examination rooms designed by the artists Beth Stryker, Virginia Barrat and guest artists Sarah Waterson and Rea where you will be met by one of a variety of *eXXXaminers*. Unlike the situation in the Turing Test where it is a human examiner interrogating a software program, in *crosSeXXXamination* the tables are turned as the computers interrogate, provoke and question the human users/subjects.

Beth Stryker and Virginia Barratt, *http://203.35.148.178/xxx/*

Xstatic> I've been waiting for you...Will you stay with me...?

Xperiment> Do you always wear clean underwear?

MachineLove> Look into yourself to see if you see what others see in you.

After you have concluded your examination, you can choose another body by clicking in the graphics at the top of the screen. This will take you to a new section where you can scroll through and select various different bodies (text descriptions), for example, "inmate autopsy brutal softcore", "butt lesboy autopsy invert", "alien blueboy Other softcore".

crosSeXXXamination is a technically ambitious, conceptually provocative and visually intriguing website. However, navigating the site can be a frustrating experience with lengthy waits while images load and an absence of instructions about how to progress at certain stages.

Users can quickly get confused and irritated if they are not given sufficient guidance or feedback that they are doing the right thing. It is difficult to know how much of a site you have seen. How do you know when you are finished? A number of users I spoke to got stuck in the Body Shop, confused about how to progress any further or whether that was all there was to see.

Some users will also have problems if their computers do not handle Java well (Java is programming language for the web). PCs generally perform better than Macintoshes in this area and there is still the odd bug that needs to be ironed out. This is a website that requires patience and perseverance (and a reasonably fast system!) but it's worth the effort.

One of the particular strengths of on-line art projects such as *crosSeXXXamination* is their dynamic nature. As well as users being able to interact with the work in real time, aspects of the site are themselves randomised, so that users will have a different experience every time they visit the site. On-line work can also be adapted, modified and added to over time. The creators of *crosSeXXXamination* (along with guest collaborating artists) plan to continue the development of the website and tour the work in its exhibition incarnation both nationally and internationally.

crosSeXXXamination,
http://203.35.148.178/xxx/
A collaborative website project by New York artist Beth Stryker and Australian artist Virginia Barratt, Artspace, Sydney, February 5-28.

Kathy Cleland is a Sydney-based curator and writer.

Corporeal cinema

Paul Andrew sees experimental at *Queer Screen*

Foucault once said he felt it was his job "to put doors where there were once windows". Queer film-makers too often perceive a similar duty, to put doorways where there were once cinema screens. Considering the 'grand narratives' forgot homosexuality, it is only natural that many queer film makers should pick up where the Goliath-like heterosexual auteur left off and keep their filmic sights on those Hollywood lights. For others those lights eclipse the prismatic and anarchic possibilities of film at once queer in myth and technique.

Queer Screen has been purveying this different 'mainstream' and 'underground' film-making since its inception in 1994, bringing Sydney's voracious audiences a plethora of bent doorways from Australia and overseas, evincing a truer spectrum of humanity's lived and imagined experience. The fact that few queer films espouse an experimental edge suggests a more urgent hierarchy of needs, of acceptance over defiance.

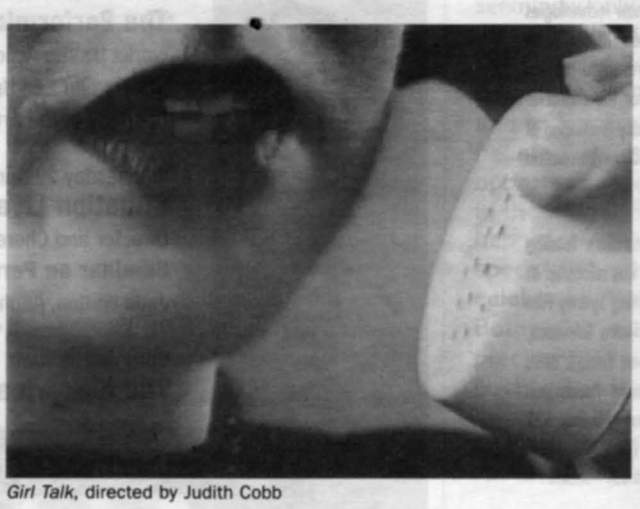
Each year *Queer Screen* brings together many films which celebrate desire, the body and its spectacles under the auspices of narrative or documentary. This 20th Anniversary Mardi Gras program also includes some historical gems. These films largely follow Hollywood and television rhetoric. Importantly, they are films which interrupt the heterosexual orthodoxies of narrative and desire but rarely do they interrupt the genres, structures or form of film itself.

However it is the 'My Queer Career' component of the festival that provides many Australian and New Zealand short-film makers the impetus to put the underground back into mainstream filmmaking, to put a labyrinth where there was once a cinema screen.

'My Queer Career' has become a touchstone for short-film makers jaded with 'popular' representations of homosexuality or its absences and have treated homosexuality as a given. Some have taken to task the most basic tenets of modernism and filmic structure and in so doing have critiqued the basic tenets of subjectivity.

In this year's Mardi Gras Film Festival films like *Manawanui*, *Nature Studies*,*Seamen* and *Girl Talk*, retrieve nomadic and poststructuralist film-making from the dogged predominance of prime-time style, linear production values and together question the myopic repertoire of the 'queer' gaze and what comprises a *good* film.

The 'My Queer Career' competition, with the major prize provided by the Stephen Cummins Film Trust (a gifted Sydney queer filmmaker who died prematurely of an AIDS-related illness in 1994) is a fervent tribute to this cinema interruptus. There are some films infinitely more true to the spirit of the competition, more mercurial and open-ended than narrative, that provide us with a corporeal cinema, a media which at once invokes bodies and enlivens the prismatic and carnal impossibilities of the screen.



Girl Talk, directed by Judith Cobb

Deliberately non-narrative in approach, these are films with legs which run jump and skip at the liminal possibilities of the screen, with an ardour for introspection and their sights on interactivity. For these filmmakers the screen is more than a clean surface which ingratiates our attention span and provides us with sweet closure.

Seamen (director Craig Boreham, 16mm, 12.5 mins) is a delightful film which owes more to naivete than a parody of the early films of Kenneth Anger which it evokes so presciently. *Seamen* invokes the seedy sailors from Anger's films and contrasts their mercurial sexual and nomadic lifestyles with the strange antics of men in public places, a counsellor and his young male patient and the strangeness of masculinity itself. This People's Choice competition winner is closer to the multinarratives of Jim Jarmusch and Todd Haynes in structure and explores an 'anything goes' approach which together with these other films, will inspire others to follow. Like Judith Cobb's *Girl Talk*, *Seamen* plays with filters. lenses and in-camera effects that could teach Russ Meyer a few new angles.

Manawanui (director Brent S Haywood, Beta 7.5 mins) is an elegiac film which surfs filmic and electronic media styles. At once phantasmic and mortal, chaotic and Zen, it parodies the conduit of near death encounters and notions of transcendence in the spectre of HIV/AIDS. *Manawanui* is clearly the most experimental film in this year's festival and, happily, the winner of the 'My Queer Career' prize. Hearsay amongst denizens of experimental film in the audience described it as *mad*; denizens of the internet in the same audience called it *everyday*.

Nature Studies (D B Valentine, VHS, 9.5 mins) is filmic frottage and, paying tribute to Warhol's filmy exploits, begins by making the screen shudder like an orifice which pulses with the body's inhalations and exhalations, an open-ended series of ironic observations of *nature morte*, strange juxtapositions of fruit, bodies and objects. This series of quixotic tableaux look like many of the lesser scenes in Derek Jarman's films. These are contrasted with cutaways of fabulous nobodies like the extras in Andy Warhol films who make Joe Delassandro look good. Then, like a bad experience with anonymous sex, it takes a different direction and as with many of Warhol's films, suddenly Maltesers seem much more enticing.

While less cutting-edge, *Girl Talk* (director Judith Cobb, Beta, 6 mins) is a witty, open-ended spiral into phone sex. A girl wants to be dominated without pain, she rings a Sex Line and speaks to a girl who gives good phone while doing her nails, reading or eating Kool Mints. This sex fantasy, like the film itself, is interrupted by other stories—Christians at the door, her mother on the other line. The anxious one turns dominatrix as her fantasy is continuously interrupted; the indifferent sex worker swallows her cool (mint) and is suddenly swept up in the seduction of subserviance. Their roles reversed and the climax is, well, a climax at least for the indifferent sex worker. The clever use of voiceovers and the abstract closeups leave much to the viewer's imagination.

These filmmakers are the rare breed who feel it is their job to put the sensual back into sense, the pores back into pornography, the breath back into depth and breadth and the open back into end.

Short-film makers in all guises are beleaguered with the notion that shorts are simply a perfunctory duty in the rise to feature film and television production. Hopefully the advent of new technologies and uses of the internet, world wide web and changes to video marketing and existing programming parameters of commercial TV will recognise the inherent value of simply packaging short films differently. *Eat Carpet* and ABC programs like *The Summer Collection* and *Race Around the World* have already achieved this.

Short-film makers are faced with an inherent ambivalence specific to the form of short film, acceptance or defiance, to be playful or not be playful which is often the difference in being screened or not being screened. Arguably, once the commercial viability of short films is more secure, with the helping hand of commercial television, it will be interesting to note changes to the hierarchies of needs and inherent structural approaches to filmmaking.

The nature of both the winner and people's choice awards, *Manawaui* and *Seamen* respectively, of this year's My Queer Career would suggest the timeliness of cinema interruptus and the increased literacy and articulacy for *difficult* films.

How sweet it would be for Mardi Gras and *Queer Screen* in negotiating next year's rights to broadcast Mardi Gras to include a television hour of queer shorts in the package as a *fait accompli*. Given this year's ratings for Channel 10's coverage it would seem Mardi Gras is in a prime-time position with media clout to further the debates around identity politics and retrieve its once subversive activism, and what better way to do it than with the artform of the 20th century on prime time television. In promoting the rich heritage of queer filmmaking alongside the Mardi Gras parade, thus providing a wider and more inclusive context for queer, gay, lesbian and transgender representation, Mardi Gras may also unwittingly help shift the paradigm for commercial television programming of short films, to put Davids where there were once Goliaths.

Queer Screen Film Festival, Pitt Centre, Sydney February 11 - 22 and Village Roxy, Parramatta February 12 - 15

Defying gravity: trends and meanings

RealTime asked Peta Tait to survey physical theatre developments in Australia

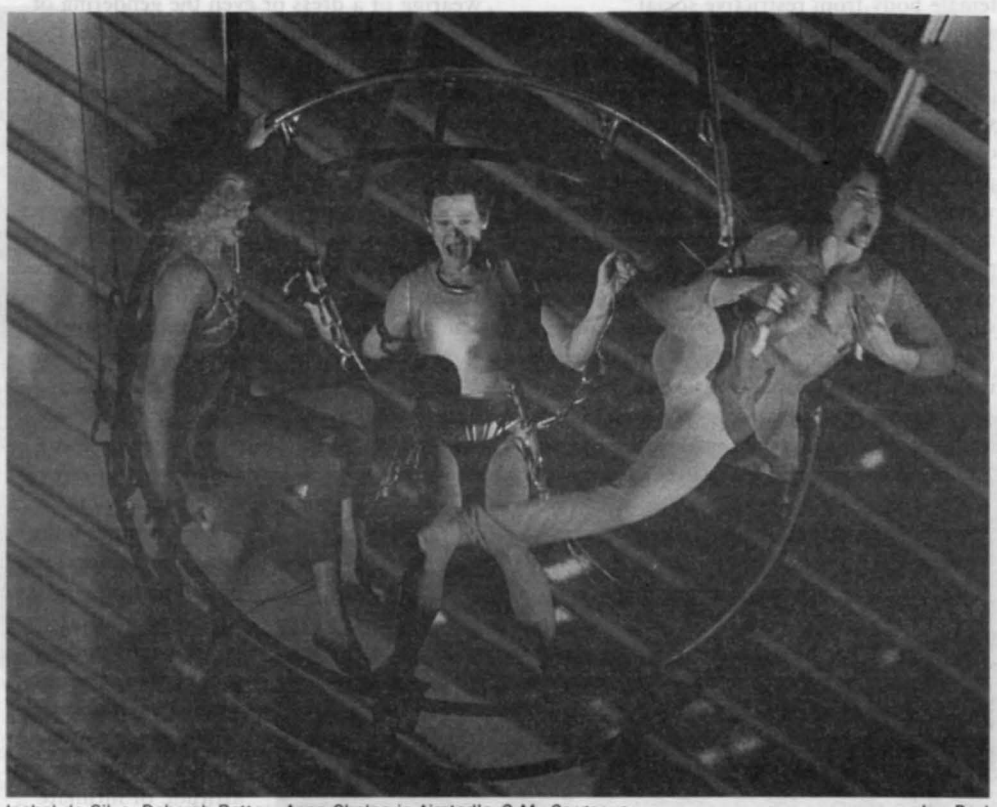
I discern three distinct trends in the performance of bodies in recent innovative Australian physical theatre derived from circus skills: the fusion of apparatus and gendered costuming, the queering of bodily inter/actions, and disguises toward androgynous non-human shapes. These are spectatorial texts; the performer experiences his or her body doing the trick (a sequence of learned moves) in a separate text, one imbued with the consequences of extreme exertion—pain.

Dress/ings

In advance of her dazzling and very complex solo trapeze routine in Airated's *O My Gorgeous* set high in the glass-roofed atrium at Melbourne's Southgate (October 26, 1997), Anna Shelper sat on the ground binding her lower leg with a bandage 'dressing' to go under her tights. For the spectators the show seemed to have begun, since the performer was in the roped-off performance space (there was no 'behind' stage). But the roof was the backdrop for this act. In daylight Shelper was blue-green, sky-like; at night, incandescent against the darkness in her daring, fast twists as she fell from a standing position on the swinging trapeze bar to hang upside down by her ankles. I was intrigued by the revelatory nature of the bandaging, given that Shelper also revealed, at the end of her routine, how the safety line (apparatus) could support her weight. Was this 'dressing' apparatus a continuation of the way circus rigs are in view of the audience? Or does Shelper's action, inadvertently or otherwise, imply the beginning of a separate performer's text: one in which the strong body commences battle with the painful limits of its own physicality?

My companion wanted to be left with an illusion of dangerous risk; she wanted traditional circus and did not want to be shown the mechanics of Shelper's act nor, I suspect, evidence of the performing body's pain. On the other hand, I had become curious about why an overt dressing of a recalcitrant sexed body has emerged in innovative acts by female performers who clearly reject the illusionary feminine of circus' costumed flesh. Dressings over and under circus' ubiquitous and gendered leotard set up cultural spaces for the performing body to traverse. Airated made this explicit when the Brazilian Isabel da Silva, who brought the *tissus* (a French invention of a hanging doubled fabric length) to Australia in 1997, opened *O My Gorgeous*. She began wearing the *tissus* as a sari-style gown with a pregnant belly—Orientalist in style, yes, but like Joan Copjec's reading of Clérambault's images of shrouded bodies, potentially showing the Other's pleasure as fallacious—before unravelling it into a hanging apparatus to be wound and unwound around parts of the suspended body (in a frilled leotard) doing mid-air turns and poses. Following the *tissus,* Deborah Batton's Russian ring (large metal wheel) doubled as the hidden hoop under her 19th century dress before she 'undressed' to reveal the apparatus and stood inside it as an adolescent boy in a mid-air ascent.

I have anchored this discussion in selected acts from the 1997 International Melbourne Festival because its extensive but under-recognised outdoor program is an excellent show-case of this type of work by Australian performers, and because in the late 1990s outdoor festivals and corporate gigs are artistically significant as well as providing vital income between projects. Circus Oz, at least, has gained corporate sponsorship and, with iconoclastic humour invented the Sorbent dunny roll pad as landing apparatus. Australian physical theatre is a thriving genre—at last reckoning, there were over 30 groups not to mention individual performers—and there has been an increased appropriation of its apparatus, although unfortunately not necessarily its skilled performers, for conventional theatre and dance.



Isabel da Silva, Deborah Batton, Anna Shelpa in Airated's *O My Gorgeous* Lyn Pool

A gendering of the apparatus has become apparent in the work of female performers in physical theatre. They employ the apparatus of social identity, albeit enlarged and distorted, to double as the (aerial) apparatus. Conversely, the male performers whom I have seen recently, do not seem to fuse with or emerge from the apparatus; they uphold its utilitarian purpose as separate from the body and the wearing of a decorous costume. Instead, innovative male bodies subvert stereotypical preconceptions about the fleshed muscles of masculinity in action.

The oversized partly-transparent dress is a common motif in recent work by female performers. From Beth Kayes in Theatre Physical's *Miss Haversham's Dream* (1995), using a metallic skeleton of a dress doubling as ariel rig, to Anna Yen on the slackwire in a long dress with crinoline in *Chinese Take Away* (1997) to The Party Line's 1994/7 outdoor show, *Divas*, with its voluptuous black and red ball gown shapes by Angus Strathie. Here, the dress *is* the apparatus. (Outside the genre, performance artist Jill Orr worked her dresses—from white insect shell husk to pink rose-petal prison—in her 1997 Melbourne International Festival Myer window performances.) One prototype of this dress-apparatus would seem to have been the dress which weighted down Celia White's opera singer persona in Legs on the Wall's *Hurt* (1992) directed by Gail Kelly. However, the action has shifted to conquering the dress. Kathryn Niesche's solo act on *tissus*, *Going Down*, directed by Gail Kelly—first performed at the 1997 *Body Contact* conference in Brisbane, organised by Rock 'n' Roll Circus—starts with the fabric coming from under a long gown, before being violently ripped in two, to become the *tissus*; the (dress) fabric reinvented as apparatus.

While a transparency of the dress shows the body, why is it also oversized? In Leg's on the Wall's emotionally compelling *All of Me* (1994-7), directed by Nigel Jameson, an opaque dress which fits the mother signs Woman in the costume although this is undercut by the performer's actions. Through an implied excess, the oversized dress can be seen in its juxtaposition to the body and parodying the graceful elegance of a docile, feminised physicality. It evokes the long-standing attractions and resistances of fabric and flesh: the adoration of the dress, its iconic centrality to social events, and its function as a visible trophy of control over

• *continued page 32*

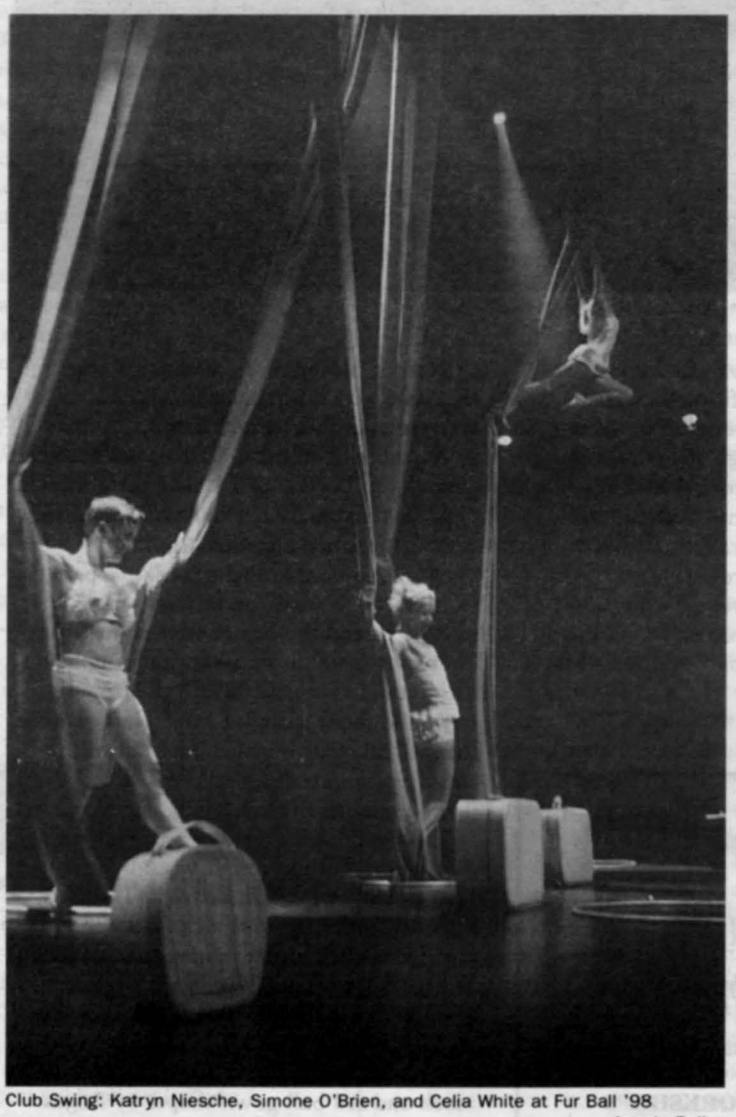
Defying gravity: trends and meanings

• *from page 31*

the female body's movement. These recent acts by female performers manipulate the idea of the dress and perform a freeing of the female body from restrictive social apparatus.

Similarly, in configuring an imagined (adagio) duo between a phantasmic (the spectator's) and a performing body, the oversized dress offers a space for a projected phantasmic to join the act. But when the dress is discarded, its function as mechanism visible, the spectator's phantasmic body as feminine is exposed/freed. (An alternative staging is suggested by France's Victoria Chaplin in *Le Cercle Invisible* in which the oversized dress is transformed in visual illusions.)

In circus, the execution of the trick requires a recognisable nomenclature of bodies in action but the illusions of identity

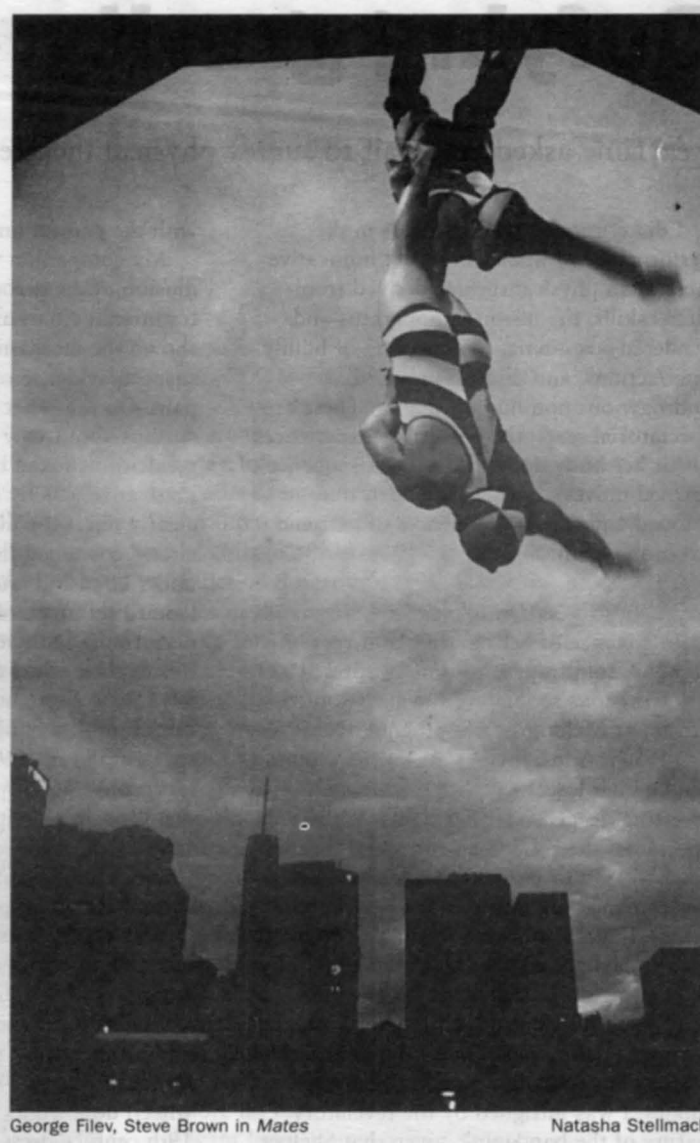


Club Swing: Katryn Niesche, Simone O'Brien, and Celia White at Fur Ball '98 Angela Bailey

are maintained because the mechanisms are masked. I argue elsewhere that the costuming and gesturing of gender identity is part of the aerial act and that a feminine coding of the body has been used to heighten the sense of danger. But the stabilisation of identity in the performance of separations—performers sign either masculine or feminine as part of the routine to offset how the physical body moves across both—contains the potential to destabilise sexed bodies. However, a body in a leotard cannot simply be queered by the wearing of a dress or even the gendering of the apparatus. Rather, in this form, it is destabilised in the actions of bodies. In innovative physical theatre works, a gesturing acrobatic body sexualising the action—something circus studiously avoids—roves across categories and desexes the body.

Mates, by Steve Brown and George Filev, shows two male bodies performing eroticised actions on a clown swing (looped rope)—aerial duos are predominantly male-female. For the 1997 Melbourne Festival they played cricket, wearing oversized ocker stomachs (like dresses) for comic effect, before 'undressing' to life-savers' costumes and balancing in a low-risk but sexually charged routine—serenaded by jarringly sentimental songs. These strongly-built muscular bodies were positioned in sustained holds, legs wrapped around torsos, taut, straining against each other, often upside down. At the same time, an attitude of intimate gentleness made each performer seem to be caressing the other. This unexpected tenderness in the inter/action between male bodies radiated a sensibility of queer. A queer aesthetic in current Australian work ranges from the award-winning Club Swing with its strongly muscular female bodies dressed in sexy underwear parodying erotic interactions between female bodies, to Acrobat's Simon Mitchell on the web (single hanging rope) wearing a latex leotard and net stockings, subverting the circus feminine. Queer in sexualised physical theatre arises from the disruption of cultural preconceptions that muscular strength in action signifies the unemotional 'brutish' force of male bodies lifting more graceful female bodies in an implied heterosexual binary.

Reinhard Bischel, physical theatre promoter of the Tollwood Festival in Munich—the international show-case—describes Australian work as distinctive. In viewing works at the 1997 Tollwood, I agree and speculate that such differences arise from Australian texts which explore how form (performing bodies) is inseparable from social meanings derived from body surfaces (the content). European acts with men in frocks at Tollwood 1997 merely reiterated the traditional cross-dressing clown from circus, its costume as gag routines. I could speculate that Australia's innovative work destabilising sexed bodies echoes a conflation of our geographical marginality with that of circus as a socially and artistically marginalised Other. But I know that a number of these performers have performed at dance parties and gay and lesbian/queer venues for over a decade (see photos). Probably the spectatorial economies of specific venues contribute an implicit dialogism to the sexualised languages of Australian physical theatre.



George Filev, Steve Brown in *Mates* Natasha Stellmach

Therefore, conversely, what happens to the social meanings of the text when the inter/action is not eroticised and the body is not visually gendered or sexed? For example, in the dynamically powerful *Mimi* (1996) stiltwalkers extend the body's shape with apparatus to create insect-like spectres in Stalker's collaboration with Western Australian Aboriginal dancers, story-tellers and musicians. This distortion confirms strangely unknowable, almost unimagined, bodies. Similarly, De Soxy as frog-like creatures of indeterminate sex created a delightful acrobatic act for the 1997 Melbourne Festival; two yellow-green child acrobats clung to the bodies of the two blue-pink adults, their faces painted, their amphibian movements in a reptilian routine of lifts and balances which tumbled and somersaulted along concrete. The residue from this non-human action is an impression of an androgynous body—Teresa Blake and Dan Whitton often appear interchangeable in body shape and action in their work—a physical theatre text in which the body as apparatus has become de-sexed.

De-sexing Pain

In displaying her bandage dressing Anna Shelper implied that the body functions as apparatus but with its limits set by pain. Kathryn Niesche says bruises and lost skin are part of every performance. If actors train to convey pain, both psychological and corporeal (felt or not), physical theatre and circus performers work to hide their pain. Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain* writes of pain's "unsharability", unlike, she claims, other feelings; pain resists verbal objectification and destroys language because it exists without objects. Physical theatre languages dress silent (objectified) bodies doing extraordinary feats to perpetuate the circus' illusion that this is painless movement. In doing so, do they expose the unknowability of all feelings until they are sited/cited by cultural languages?

A gulf between the performer's experience of his or her body and the spectator's perception of the performing body in the text becomes apparent in a discussion of pain. While the spectator sees the artistic effect without dissecting the moves in each trick, a progressive mastery of increasingly difficult tricks motivates performers. Almost all the performers responding to a recent survey report one or more of the following injuries: broken wrists, ankles, strained ligaments and shoulder muscles, repetitive strain and weight-bearing injuries. What is apparent is that the physical extension needed to complete the trick is usually beyond the limits of painless movement. A strong invincible muscular body appears to dress a damaged one; one irrevocably changed in the doing of the action.

As with circus, these performers smile enjoyment and exhilaration to exploit the tension arising from the spectator's false perception of risk; anecdotally, a greater risk in Shelper's act is that the apparatus might fail her. The possibilities of pain operate in the same way. The spectator might presume that pain will happen if the action fails, while it is more likely that in the doing of the action, the body as, and/or on, the apparatus works against its own threshold of pain. Physical theatre performers know that the apparatus is not benign. Annie Davy, who recovered from a serious fall due to faulty apparatus explains: "Working on trapeze is like being hit over the backs of the knees with an iron bar". Leeroy Hart, ex-Bizirkus, reflects "on the frustration of damage and knowing that you can't do certain complex manoeuvres any more". While the damaged body works differently, this can be advantageous. Geoffrey Dunstan explains: "You work with the awareness of a past injury, structuring the training and the creative work to find ways around it, but this also contributes imaginative ideas in the performance".

Given the recent conflation between social identity and costumed apparatus, it might seem more likely that the damaged female body will be undressed. But I contend that a glimpse of the possibility of pain de-sexes bodily specificity; it evokes heightened sensory states beyond the space in which a body struggles against its physical limits. Like pain, apparatus as accoutrements of gender identity, the queering of muscular flesh in graceful action and even the revision of a species-specific body, embellish the ways the performing body in physical theatre rebels against the fixed gravity of cultural identity and pushes beyond.

Peta Tait is in the Theatre and Drama Dept, La Trobe University and writes for the Sydney based performance group, The Party Line.

Various gravities

Keith Gallasch looks at the physical in new work from Meryl Tankard's ADT, Gravity Feed and Legs on the Wall

Prelude: The industry

While watching Performing Arts Market performances I was struck by the presence of performance stalwart Katia Molino, seeing her one day performing with Stalker, on another with NYID, both shows requiring considerable physical fitness and dexterity. It was a reminder that there is a broad body of work loosely defined as physical theatre within which various subsidiary forms exist and across which a number of performers participate. Thor Blomfield, one time performer with and now Marketing and Project Coordinator for Legs on the Wall, commented that given "there's an increasing crossover between companies, for example Legs people working with Stalker", just how valuable last year's *Body Contact* Conference, convened by Rock'n'Roll Circus in Brisbane, was for an area of performance he describes as "encompassing a range of contemporary circus, physical theatre and street theatre groups."

Blomfield said of participants Circus Oz, Rock'n'Roll Circus, Bizirkus, Club Swing and The Party Line, artists from Darwin, Legs on the Wall, Desoxy, Stalker, some overseas artists and others that "it was an interesting combination that had never come together before. The sense of community in physical theatre has been growing but this conference was the first time we've come together formally. It's timely now to discuss where we all want to go and what we need to do in regard to training, funding and touring. The base for our work was in circus, in the foundation of Circus Oz 25 years ago and that was uniquely Australian though with the influence of Chinese training. Now physical theatre has moved into taking on more European influences and other Asian physical performance traditions."

Asked why is it important for these groups to talk about the future, Blomfield explains that there are industrial issues to discuss, training proposals (a national circus school), the exchange of information (being informed about overseas work, the rare opportunities to see each other's work), understanding how companies operate artistically (Desoxy, Stalker, Mike Finch—ex-Circus Monoxide, now director of Circus Oz—spoke about this on a *Body Contact* panel) and issues like the role of the director, which can be critical for ongoing ensembles working with guest directors. He indicated that there was some preliminary debate about what the proposed training school should do, whether it should provide conventional circus skills or also include, for example, courses in Butoh and various training regimes.

A committee was formed at *Body Contact* to hold a conference in October 1998 so that these issues could be pursued in more depth, perhaps even to consider whether or not to form an association of companies to promote the standing of physical theatre, which Blomfield describes as being sometimes treated by the broader theatre profession as "the little kid they really don't know about". Belvoir Street's inclusion of Legs on the Wall's *Under the Influence* in their 1998 subscription season could be the start of something. Other areas Blomfield would like to see explored include marketing (making the most of marked US interest), physical theatre's relationship with dance (choreographer Kate Champion has directed Leg's *Under the Influence*; one of the Legs' team was advising Meryl Tankard's ADT on the use of hand loops for their Adelaide Festival production *Possessed*) and speech in performance. Physical theatre has proved itself an elastic form, one rich in hybridity and political range as well as being eminently marketable: doubtless for the artists and companies in this area to confer regularly, to see each other's work, to debate training and artistic issues, to think collectively on industrial and marketing issues, can only enrich their work.

Physical theatre dances

Legs on the Wall, *Under the Influence*
Adelaide Fringe Festival, February 25

I didn't know what was cooking, the sausages sizzling at the entrance to the 'performing area' situated on the seventh floor of the carpark, or the audience beneath the tin roof in 40 degree heat plus lighting, say 45. Either way it wasn't a good smell. And yet, Legs were cooking, giving a virtuosic physical performance despite being awash with sweat. They pretty much held their audience though it wasn't clear how Legs were managing to hold each other. This is a company blessed with a kind of performance ease, physical feats are achieved without 'drum rolls' and the acting is laid back and lucid. To ease into this, a prelude of apparently casual exchanges and acrobatic events (and their 'accidents') unfolds as the audience enters asking has the show begun—well yes and no (except to say that this particular postmodern gag is a bit overripe and is somewhat scuttled when lights etc finally do mark a start. A pity.)

Physical theatre has always lent itself to the choreographic impulse (doubtless inherited from the lyricism of the circus trapeze artiste), and is certainly evident in Desoxy and The Party Line, but here, under the direction of choreographer Kate Champion, it goes further, not into dance per se, but into a dextrous patterning of moves and holds that provides a magical fluidity for the work, everything from small gestural motifs and work with domestic objects and clothing to large scale sweeps of movement and a coherent dance-theatre totality. It was fascinating to watch the thoroughness and the inventiveness of the movement and I found myself surprised at how much the performers must have had to absorb choreographically when already faced with considerable physical challenges. Legs are not to be underrated. As for the show as theatre, this early version was too discursive, key images (as the broad narrative works itself out) seemed to repeat themselves as long in duration as their original incarnations, one-off numbers looked more than suspiciously like unintegrated individual performer favorites, some scenes wandered too far from the dangerous intimacies central to the work, too many lines fell short of funny and into whimsy, personalities were just a little too abstracted, and the overall shape plateaued early, a not unfamiliar problem for physical theatre with its constant battle to escape the string of tricks. But for all of this it's very good and by the time *Under the Influence* reaches its Sydney season hopefully everything that already works—the physical skills, the choreography, the ease of playing, the sensual energy and cheery fatalism—will be sustained by tighter scripting and shaping.

Dance does physical theatre

Possessed
Meryl Tankard Australian Dance Theatre
Ridley Theatre, Adelaide Festival, March 14

Possessed is the next stage of Meryl Tankard's adventure with dance that leaves the ground, seen first in *Furioso* but also evident in another way in her choreography for the Australian Opera's *Orfeo*. I have a vivid memory clip of her dancers as Furies flinging themselves relentlessly at a giant revolving wall. It looked dangerous. There is some harness work (first explored in *Furioso*) in *Possessed*'s central scenes, but the impressive new material that frames the show in the first and last scenes suspends the dancer by wrist, or by both wrist and ankle, using loops. While doubtless placing enormous strain on joints and muscles, there are advantages for fluidity and freedom of movement for the dancer in the air. Of course, it's not a trapeze and they're

Meryl Tankard's Australian Dance Theatre, *Possessed* Regis Lansac

starting from the floor, so there's not a lot they can do by themselves without help from the ground, the push that leads to swing as their earthed partner determines the direction of the swing and acts as catcher and cradler (and assistant). That said, once airborne, the dancer can amplify their swing and create delicious physical shapes and defiant arcs out over the audience. It looks dangerous as the arcs extend and the dancers swing fast and low over the fence around the big stage. It's exhilarating because it looks so free, so unencumbered. And these dancers look so at home taking the grace they defeat gravity with on the floor into the air. The opening scene featured male pairs, generating a surprising intimacy, the aerial device allowing them ease at lifting the fellow male body, leaps into space being taken off the body of the ground dancer, returns from space greeted with great care. That aside, the women dancers provided some of the most spectacular and unnerving flights. If *Possessed* has any meaning, it tells of an obsession with flight and the defeat of gravity. Psychoanalyst Michael Balint called these possessed "philobats", lovers of flight, and suggested that we all have some of that obsession in us, though we're mostly happy to let others do it for us, at the circus for example. Not surprisingly then, the audience for *Possessed* clapped and cheered at every stage of these flights.

Another possessed body appears in the second scene—an obsessive sporting body, its centre of gravity low to the earth, absorbing everything in its almost militaristic path (shades of NYIDs' monopolistic one-dimensional fit body at the Performing Arts Market), first possessing individuals in separate gender groups and then obliterating even that difference, taking with it every expression of pain and anxiety and the strange shapes that pitifully express them—a clawing fall to the floor or a wipe to the eye. A later comic scene has a group of men parading like women in a beauty contest—high heels and parodic stances (but around me the audience broke into shrill cheers exclaiming, "the Chippendales, the Chippendales!"). A line of women in red dresses challenge the men to do it right and all but one fail and exit, the victor taking his place centre line, locked in the same smile he began with, totally absorbed.

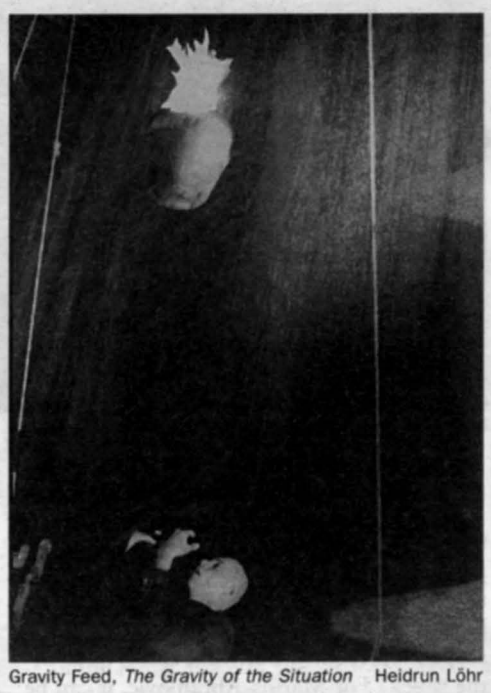
Much else in the evening seemed incidental, making it a show of bits and ultimately a bit of a show, despite the consistently powerful contribution of the Balanescu Quartet. The first, second and the final scenes of *Possessed* could be assembled into a powerful work instead of the sprawling entertainment it unashamedly is. Some in physical theatre might see Tankard as appropriating their aerial space, and there are times when the showbiz of it all seems to say so, but physical theatre is not all circuses these days and Legs on the Wall have a choreographer-director who's worked with DV 8. Stalker have come down off their stilts and are working the air in other ways. It's an intriguing physical moment.

Embracing the unbearable

Gravity Feed, *The Gravity of the Situation*
Bond Store tunnel, The Rocks, Sydney
March 19 - 22

Gravity is upon us, from above and from beneath. It is weighty, it sucks, it pulls, it compels and commands from all sides. We act because we must, bound to this archaic form the cube which contains nothing yet everything. This is the tabernacle of damned creatures, and in its lightness is the source of their constant anxiety. Program note

Part of me wants to read this show literally. I resist. This is performance. We all inch our way in past signs that intimate danger. We are in a high ceilinged tunnel not in a theatre. Men in tired suits, some unshaven, hair straggling or shaved creep and dart about, oblivious to us, gathering lit candles in paper bags, placing them on a high ledge above a tall ladder, or in a cluster on the ground further down the tunnel. Me, I think I'm witness to some tramp ritual, a subterranean fire-worship culture, such is their care for their charge, fire that disintegrates that which is heavy into flame and ash as light as air. A soundtrack rumbles the resonant tunnel into a hymn of unremitting threat and mystery. It doesn't let go of us. One of the men tugs at a huge metal cube walled with what looks like triple-ply cardboard (light but remarkably tough) and lets it roll down the slope of the tunnel, barely impeding its speed with all of his bodyweight. This is the first of the journeys of the cube, a miraculous device, Prometheus'



Gravity Feed, *The Gravity of the Situation* Heidrun Löhr

boulder to be rolled endlessly up the slope, a self-generating Platonic ideal that grows new walls as soon as old ones fall away (great design and construction), a perfect material to ignite (it takes and then refuses, glowing like a Red Milky Way), a tabernacle for unwilling worshippers whom it sucks to its centre from time to time and then once and for all. I can read *The Gravity of the Situation* literally, not as a tramp fire cult, of course (but what about those swinging buckets of flame?); it's what it says it is, its heavy heart upon its sleeve. But lightness is as feared as much as gravity in this inverted Manicheanism. In a delicate and suspenseful moment the men hold the cardboard walls they've liberated from the cube vertically above their heads and criss-cross the space fearfully, juggling the surface area of the walls against the air in the tunnel.

The Gravity of the Situation is something more than the beginnings of the great work we've all been expecting from Gravity Feed after *The House of Skin*. What it needs now, now that the scenario is there, the shape is there, the marvellous cube is there, is for all the attention possible to be lavished on the choreography of bodies and space, a distillation of the opening, the establishment of a surer relationship between performers and Rik Rue's awesome sound composition, and even perhaps opening space in the soundtrack so we, the congregation, can hear the performer bodies groan against the weight of the light and the heavy. In the past, Gravity Feed works have evaporated. Isn't it time to embrace the unbearable lightness of being?

Shock and aftershock

Edward Scheer interviews performance artist Marina Abramovic

Marina Abramovic, *Haematite Mirror for Departure*, 1994

A criticism of much performance art is that its merit is frequently derived purely from its shock value (think of some recent reactions in the mainstream media to Mike Parr's *Bride* or even to Stelarc's early suspension events). But what *is* the value of the shock? For Marina Abramovic, it can be measured in gold.

Marina Abramovic's performances, particularly her early *Rhythm* series, are frequently shocking, but for herself first of all. In a gallery in Naples in 1975 she asked the audience to use a selection of instruments and materials on her body. The audience dutifully stabbed her with rose thorns and slashed her with razor blades until a loaded gun was thrust against her head and her friends finally intervened to close the event. In Austria in 1975 Abramovic performed *The lips of Thomas* in which she cut a five pointed star into her stomach with a razor blade, flagellated herself until she was numb and then lay on blocks of ice until it was clear she couldn't move and some members of the audience removed her some 30 minutes later.

Shock follows sensory overload. Too much sensory information produces a state of extreme physical and psychological vulnerability but one in which the sites of physical and emotional reception are expanded beyond the threshold that the ego normally permits. The self undergoes a kind of symbolic death. Abramovic repeatedly uses this symbolic death as a means of opening herself and her audience to new experiences. The value of the shock is perhaps just this resensitising of the self through an exposure to experiences which do not permit a retreat into the past or the future. Physical shock warps the sensorium. Time freezes over.

From her experimental performance work as a solo artist in the early to mid 70s through the period of her collaborations with Ulay (1975-88) and right up to the recent solo performances and installation works, the "long, immense and reasoned breaking down of every sense" as Rimbaud described it, could be an epigraph to the Abramovic oeuvre. But this oeuvre has not always constructed itself out of shock. It is unclear if Abramovic would have been able to sustain a working process so potentially destructive. The values of shock, in increased sensitivity and receptivity, needed to be reached through other means. Ironically, on the verge of her first return trip to Australia in almost 20 years, Abramovic told me that she had found the answer to this problem on her last visit here in 1979/80, particularly in her interactions with the Pintubi people of the Central Desert:

MA At the end of the 70s Ulay and me came to the end of these high voltage pieces we were doing and at that time everyone was looking for a new solution. Colleagues that had been doing performance found that too much energy was being exposed, they were too vulnerable so they all went back to their studios and started painting and doing objects. We felt that the ultimate solution was looking for a solution in nature. So we went to the Australian desert and the desert was the best place to go because it's so minimal and everything else is there to return you to yourself. It's a hard space, the heat and the isolation...but it makes you focus on and understand what is happening with yourself.

When we came back from Australia we came not with a painting solution but with a piece like Nightsea Crossing. *The original title,* Gold found by the artists, *was very significant because the piece is about finding the alchemical gold, but we also really found gold while we were panning north of Perth, 250 nuggets of pure gold. This is one of the most important pieces for me because we found the nuggets but we also found the real gold. We found the solution and the solution was in the culture of the Aborigines, in the idea of ritualising life, ritualising everyday life. Their approach is that ceremony doesn't just happen on a few occasions throughout the year, it's always happening. It's the way things are.*

Nightsea Crossing was a signature piece for Abramovic and Ulay for the five years after their travels in the Australian desert and consisted of an exploration of a degree zero performance, a naked confrontation with space and time. In it the two artists sat opposite each other in silence for seven hours (gallery hours). The silence would not be broken after the gallery closed but continued until the piece was concluded often a week or so later. No food was consumed in this period. Sometimes small ritual objects were placed on the table as focalisers for the meditation/performance.

In the piece named *Conjunction* in 1983—the part of the *Nightsea Crossing* series which Abramovic rates as "One of the most important performances I think we've ever done", presented at the Museum Fodor in Amsterdam—Abramovic and Ulay invited Charlie Taruru Tjungarray from the Pintubi and Ngawang Soepa Lueyar from Tibet to sit with them for four consecutive days without talking or eating. Abramovic was keen to point out when I asked her if they had stayed in contact with their collaborators that it was "a friendship relation not just a working relation".

MA We wanted to create the axis east/west because while Picasso and all the rest of the guys just ripped off those other cultures by using the elements we took the people and tried to cooperate with them and to treat them with dignity and respect without taking their culture apart and re-integrating it into something else but allowing the public to see the whole person and not just a fragment of the culture.

Nightsea Crossing *was special to my experience of that whole thing that happened between the Aborigines and us. For five years we did this performance every year but we did it first at the Art Gallery of NSW in 1981. That time we went for 16 days with no food, completely silent, sitting motionless while the gallery was open. All over the world 10am-5pm are the gallery hours so that was the unit of time we used. We didn't want the public to see us begin or end the performance but only this permanent moment of "now", present time to stay in their minds.*

In her work, even in her sculptural pieces, Marina Abramovic mostly prefers to speak in the present tense. In the present the force of an event can more easily be transformed into an experience. Abramovic has conducted her audiences into a direct engagement with the senses, the experience of the present. Rose Lee Goldberg has also noted this trajectory through the Abramovic oeuvre describing it as "indicating the consistent vision of an artist whose over-riding obsession has always been with presence". Abramovic insists that this was a lesson learned from the Aborigines.

MA The most profound realisation and the fundamental experience I had was coming to Australia and being with the Aborigines especially the Pintubi people, because there we learned that there is only "now", there is no past and no future as in the dreamtime stories in which, as you would know, they actually refer to situations happening right now. They do not say it was or it will be: it is. It is a mythical time but these events in mythical time are always there, it is always now and that moment now is the most difficult for us in the West because we're always reading the past or projecting the future and now doesn't figure in this. We are in a TV time which is always the future, the direction is always forwards which is why performance is important to freeze the moment "now".

Abramovic's sometimes romantic affirmations of Indigenous culture and her memory of the gold it brought are nonetheless based on her own experiences and her view that "one is never changed by reading a book or by seeing someone else do something. The only real thing is when you experience something for yourself and that's what permits the really profound mental and physical changes". The acknowledgment of the debt she feels to Aboriginal culture strikes an almost political note at a time in the history of this country when that culture is under constant pressure to justify itself before those who would seek to extinguish difference beneath the apodicticisms of the same (we are all the same and must be treated the same...). Her forthcoming performance/lecture and exhibition at the MCA in Sydney is not a homage to Aboriginal Australia. It makes no direct correspondences. But like the works we have in the MCA exhibition—video works from the early pieces as well as the more recent performances, objects in crystal and stone, furniture for non-human use...enigmatic, often shocking and perverse—the gold is there for those who would find it.

Marina Abramovic performance/lecture, Museum of Contemporary Art, Wednesday April 8, 6:30pm, in association with the exhibition Marina Abramovic: objects performance video sound, *MCA, Sydney, April 10 - July 5; lecture/performance, RMIT, Storey Hall, Melbourne, April 5, 4 - 6pm*

National bodies at play and beyond

Performances by Derevo, La Ribot and Forced Entertainment in London reported by Aleks Sierz

What can the body tell us about nationality? The 20th London International Festival of Mime provided a chance to check out the way national characteristics are embodied in performance. From the first moments of Derevo's *Red Zone*, mime's love affair with the circus leaps out at you as four clowns try to juggle axes and turn cartwheels. They fail, but it doesn't matter. They've brought their own canned laughter and applause. One clown asks an audience member to kick his rump. A shy British body tries—but the Russian wants more force. Founded in Leningrad in 1988 by Anton Adassinsky, Derevo (the name means "tree") is inspired by photos of Japanese Butoh performance and by their collaboration with mild clown Slava Polunin. In the show, Derevo soon stop clowning. In a twilight landscape, two shaven-headed men swing a ball between them. Then a man walks in circles around another in what looks like a grotesque parody of social life—avoid the other; keep him at arm's length. Then they fight.

Using postures that remind you of the asylum and the correction camp, Derevo gives a vivid image of suffering humanity. This is Russia after Communism—there's no safety, the body is exposed. And smacked about. Hit flesh and the dull thud of bodies falling off the stage. The sound of kicking and punching. At one point, a punctured sphere pours water and ice on the stage—a bruising slide. Freezing. In a red light, a foetus evolves. Religious corpses go East. Find anarchy, desolation, fear. A rough and ready show, more 1960s than 1990s, Derevo invent an image of the human body which is victimised, beaten, hurt and cut. By contrast, La Ribot, the 35-year-old Madrid-born performance artist who won't reveal her real name, uses her body as a playground. Her *26 Distinguished Pieces* were started in 1993 as part of a project which aims to build up 100 fragments, each sponsored by an individual or institution. Lasting from 30 seconds to 10 minutes, every one investigates a different aspect of her body.

Her signature piece is a comic strip-tease, which dates back to 1991. La Ribot comes on stage with what looks like a very lumpy figure. To the music of a piano sonata, she starts stripping. But under every garment, there's another similar item. Shedding several charity shop sweaters, many bras, lots of knickers and plenty of stockings, this strip-tease is not erotic but ludic. A seven-minute game about fashion and the female form. With bright blue hair, a muscular, angular body, and a few props, La Ribot moves on to her brief, witty and surreal *Distinguished Pieces*. In one she is lying down, wearing a Marilyn Monroe wig. To the sound of a huge mechanical digger her body twitches. And twitches. That's all. Men's work, women's bodies—no repose as the boys tear up the planet. In another, she is bent double and just moans into a microphone, in yet another she dances in slow motion and falls when a shot rings out. Most disturbing is the one when she leans against the side of the stage dressed in a white robe. Music suggests pins and needles. Blood begins to appear from her right breast. Images of menstruation and mastectomy. But the blood isn't real—she pulls out the rubber bulb that pumps the red paint and rubs it all over her. Wounds become a mess of paint.

Womanhood turns into childhood. Other pieces explore the geography of the body. La Ribot takes a tape and measures parts of her body absurdly. From belly button to cleavage; from ankle to big toe; from knee to arm. Then announces "36, 24, 36". The effect is hilarious. Another time, she points at all the parts of her body which have English names: Neasden for the knees; Hertfordshire for the heart. She takes polaroid photos of her breasts and pubes, then attaches them to those parts of her body and we watch them develop rather than looking at her. This is the body ironic and the body ridiculous, the body playful and the body changeable: it can be anything and everything—it is all she's got and it's all she needs. La Ribot says that the strip-tease is the first item of the show because once she and we have stripped away the artifice, all other transformations are possible.

Away from the festival, Forced Entertainment's 16th show, *Pleasure*, features a goofy pantomime horse—and brings us back to British culture. Formed in Sheffield in 1984, the Ents are directed by Tim Etchells, who describes their new show, subtitled "dirty work at the crossroads", as "dark, slowed down, comical and very late-night". It's easy to see why. The feeling is that of staying on long after the party has finished. The record player has slowed down to 16rpm, everyone's gone home and for those who are left and chilling out, thoughts are dreamy, groggy. A woman half-dressed in white wedding gear is swigging from a gin bottle; other women, down to their black underwear, are wandering around, looking vacant. They put on Hawaiian skirts. Half a pantomime horse appears. Drunk. The DJ puts on a blindfold. He pours a drink. It goes all over the place. He picks up a gun and plays the William Tell game with one of the women. "Some nights this moment goes on for ever." Silence. "It is the kind of silence you get in phone calls to the person you love." The gun twitches. "It's the kind of silence that follows a car crash." No gun shot. But lots of tension.

On a blackboard, dirty words are scrawled in fascinating profusion. The panto horse urinates. A quiz about modern life "being shit" is acted out. Music drags on. Beautiful lost souls, hypnotised, drowsy, sluggish. This is the party where drinking never really lifted your spirits, where the hangover began before you got to bed. This is the urban body at the quiet limits of its vulnerability—one push and these narcoleptics are out of it. Here the depressed body cries out for Prozac, or maybe just a good night's sleep. The DJ's voice drones on, pitiful—open the window someone. This is Cool Britannia's body—and it looks all partied out.

Forced Entertainment's Claire Marshall, Cathy Naden and Terry O'Connor in a scene from *Pleasure*

Red Zone, *Derevo, Purcell Room, Southbank, Jan 10 - 14;* 26 Distinguished Pieces, *La Ribot, Jan 13 - 18 ICA, January 10 - 25;* Pleasure, *Forced Entertainment, ICA Jan 20 - 31*

Aleks Sierz is theatre critic for the London Tribune.

Brecht for now

Julie Postle welcomes the CIA production of Brecht's *Baal*

Baal was Bertolt Brecht's first play. It's decadent, lewd and fierce in parts. It certainly pushes against the fervour of the naturalism of the time it was written, but in the context of the contemporary its theme is not so much scandalous as familiar—the corruption of 'positive' values such as love and friendship by hostile forces. Almost as candid as Tarantino, Brecht reveals the excesses of society, particularly the excesses of the bourgeoisie.

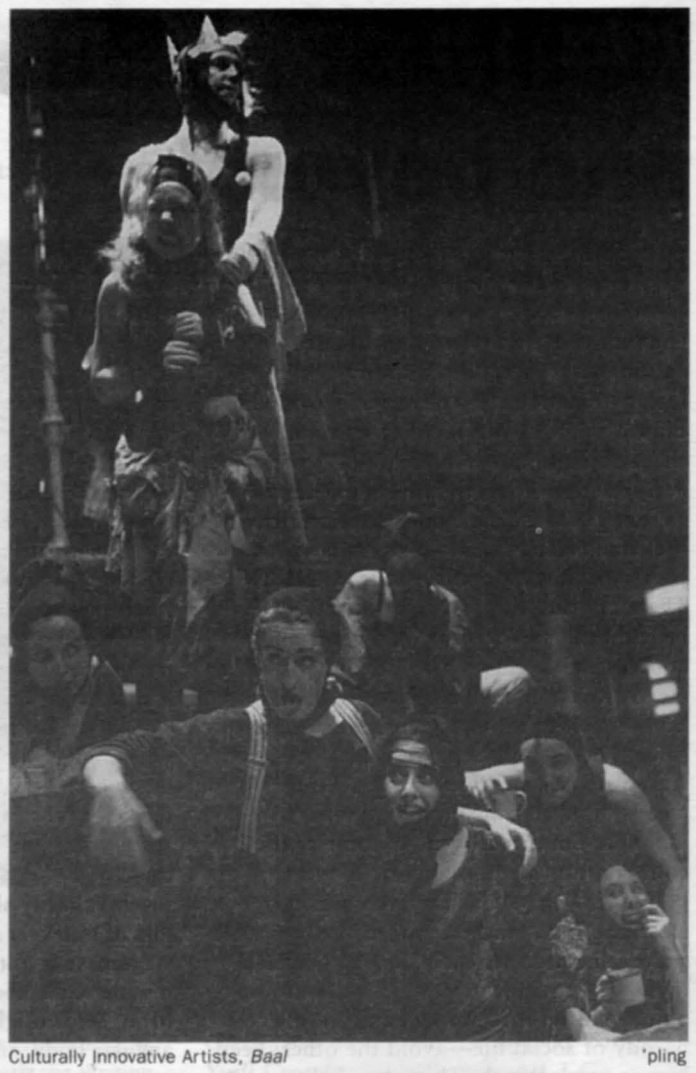
Baal the character is a poet with a few problems. He's an alcoholic brigand and general rascal with a magnetic quality that draws in the poor souls he meets along his self-destructive journey and then proceeds to consume. His is the kind of love that devours its objects and spews them out afterwards. But as a poet, Baal possesses a depth of insight into what it is to be human. His poetry—and indeed his life—is about indulgence of the spirit and the flesh, and Baal certainly fulfils his own poetic vision.

Canberra's Culturally Innovative Artists (yes, CIA) managed to present the rawness of Baal the man in this production, and in doing so they also provided the audience with a rare, entirely perceptive insight into Bertolt Brecht. David Branson's Baal was more than appropriately lascivious—the stuff of horror films at times—but superbly fashioned. His songs were wonderfully libertine, with all their oom-pah-pah overtones. Branson carried it off superbly; in fact maybe *too* superbly.

Director Joe Woodward chose the intimate Street Studio for his production and added a couple of interesting extra dimensions to the production. The use of video was particularly effective, bringing a clarity to the performance. Zooming in on the faces of different actors, with the television monitor hanging behind them, the layering of images was a play with the obvious physicality of the performance. Allowing the audience simultaneously to be close to and distant from the work made one more aware of the ways in which one views performance, the subtle shifts in perception. The live band added an aural layer, with the music of viola, clarinet, accordion, double bass, and percussion transforming the text throughout.

It's not often that this sort of transformative production is so successful. In fact, it probably made Brecht's message more potent. And maybe Brecht is even more pertinent now than in the period he was critiquing? Dramaturge Jonathon Lees summed up so fully the significance of Brecht for us, his audience: "A playwright courageous enough to inform society what it didn't want to know: that Baal is not an aberration, he has been formed by the society in which he lives; his self-centred and predatory love is that of society; his death alone, anonymous and desolate is our response to death. But his animal energy is ours. His laughter is ours; and his search for an answer or release is also ours".

Baal, *Culturally Innovative Artists, Multicultural Festival, The Street Studio, Canberra, January 19 - 31*



Culturally Innovative Artists, *Baal* 'pling

Vision and invention

Diana Klaosen enjoys getting lost in Salamanca Theatre Company's multimedia maze

not hyper real
not virtual real
this is just real
watch your back
wear sensible shoes
and be prepared
to play ball

from *Ecstasy* poster

When the publicity for *The Ecstasy of Communication* came out, I found it difficult to envisage just what *Ecstasy* was going to *be*. The title gives nothing away other than its *implication*, perhaps, of some engagement with illicit recreational substances. In fact, it's taken from a work by Jean Baudrillard questioning the credibility of much of what is presented by the mainstream media.

A project of Salamanca Theatre Company, the piece is a joint effort involving Hobart and Sydney-based artists with no traditional use of script or story-line, but a multitude of images and environments. Salamanca caters primarily for school-aged audiences (without any patronising theatre-in-education-type agenda) and also presents some theatre for a wider audience.

Ecstasy is co-directed by Salamanca's Artistic Director Deborah Pollard and Alicia Talbot from Sydney. The designer is Samuel James of Melbourne, who constructed the maze along with Don Hopkins. Sound design and video installation are by Nicholas Wishart. The performers are from Salamanca, 14 of them rotating the roles each night of the season.

This novel collaboration between emerging artists incorporates a variety of visual artforms, video, photography, computer-generated images and soundworks, along with integrated grabs of live performance, randomly encountered as one travels through the maze. Alicia Talbot described the event as "a bit like being the ball inside a pinball machine". A local newspaper came up with another analogy: "a website made into a real space, a maze with corridors and illusions in which it is entirely possible to get lost".

Michelle Ferguson in *The Ecstasy of Communication* Craig Blowfield

The idea is this: audience members arrive at the scheduled starting time, are organised into groups of about 10 and, at 10 minute intervals, are invited into the "reception area" of the maze, where a hyper-efficient, slightly hysterical "secretary" (very amusingly played on opening night by Sarah Chapman) "interviews" them, gives a few suggestions for negotiating the maze—and off they go, more or less separately from that point. (You find your own way, you don't have to stay in your group and you go in whatever directions the fancy takes you.)

The first obstacle is the entrance proper, which starts as a passage but becomes a low tunnel through which one has to crawl. From then on there are choices of mysterious doors, concealed entrance ways, intersecting corridors and specially constructed rooms, nooks and alcoves. Everything is in semi-darkness. Each space has a *raison d'être*; there are artworks here and there (nothing conventional, of course), an interactive, a video to watch, or a peephole, a sound installation or walls of textures to explore, or... The attractions are ingeniously simple but very seductive: a phone and answering machine installation with messages "just for you"; a TV showing a video by, for example, Matt Warren from the Empire Collective (featured in *RealTime* 23), complete with a box of TV Snax; a tableau photograph by Craig Blowfield staged as a visual pun on Bernini's *Ecstasy of Theresa* and itself constructed as a photo-collage—a postmodern in-joke for Art History groupies; a red room carpeted and lined with fake fur and padded satin, to caress and roll around in...or whatever you choose; a closed-circuit TV where you can be the star, a fairground-style mini-theatre where you direct the actor...

Negotiating the maze was a fascinating experience and particularly notable for the camaraderie the whole exercise engendered between participants; as you ran into people in the various nooks and crannies you engaged with them, enthused with them about the experience—whether you knew them or not. It was that kind of event—much more people-friendly than even the most wine-soaked exhibition opening!

Interestingly, for an interactive piece incorporating technology with live performers, there were none of the embarrassingly forced "audience participation/humiliation" components beloved of stand-up comics...the sort of thing that makes one uneasy about sitting in the front rows at some theatres.

The contribution of several teams of personnel deserves mention. There was a rotating team of Salamanca Theatre performers, many of whom also worked on the volunteer construction team. Besides those cited earlier, multimedia works for *Ecstasy* were provided by Robin Petterd, Sean Bacon, Mark Cornelius, Sally Harbison, Brian Martin, Sarah Greenwood, most of them former or current students at the local School of Art.

It's difficult to make any unfavourable observations about *The Ecstasy of Communication*. It occurred to me, that the event may not be suitable for people with limited physical mobility. However, the availability of different entrance ways and access-points permitted some flexibility in this regard. The event generated a lot of interest amongst local schools and teachers. The prospect of accommodating largish groups of school-age visitors, let loose in a semi-darkened maze seems, to me, likewise a bit daunting—but again, not an insoluble challenge. I understand student visitors entered into the spirit with excitement and got the most out of it.

These are minor speculations, really, in the scheme of things. The sheer vision and inventiveness of *Ecstasy*, its ambition and *scope*, the skill and effort that went into bringing it to fruition—the pleasure and the surprise of the whole interactive experience—these are its achievements. The over-used and often incorrectly ascribed description 'unique' is, in this case, perfectly accurate.

The Ecstasy of Communication, *Salamanca Theatre Company, The Long Gallery, Salamanca Place, Feb 2 - March 13*

Late one night

Maryanne Lynch experiences a Cairns' *Urge* on the Adelaide Fringe with Leah Grycewicz, Rebecca Youcell, Russell Milledge, Rigel Best, Stevie Wishart and Jim Denley

I am in a dark place and something is happening. I am being ambushed by sound and movement; my senses are assaulted. This is a dream but I'm still awake. Pinch myself; no, don't do that; one of those performers who are moving in and out of spaces and personae as fast as they can might see me and join in.

This is *Urge*. This is Cairns and Sydney in relation. This is a conversation between Leah Grycewicz, Cairns movement artist, and Stevie Wishart and Jim Denley of Machine for Making Sense, embellished by Rebecca Youcell, Russell Milledge and Rigel Best. This is wild stuff.

I am in Adelaide, at a Fringe venue, a place called The Synagogue, late one night. A beautiful old building inside which Grycewicz, Youcell and Milledge move their bodies into a succession of shapes and moods in response to or provocation of Wishart, Denley and Best. *Urge* is described in the programme notes as "blurring the edges between dancer & musician, movement & sound, light & media" but here there are more edges than not—twitchy exchanges where menace is never too far away. Nor humour, for that matter, when danger becomes play.

There's a set of competing duos between dancer and musician, where body and sound respond to each other in what is, must be, has to be improvised dialogue. Wishart, violin on attack, skirmishes with Grycewicz. Best and Youcell have a love-hate relationship with the assistance of a double bass, Youcell fitting her body into its contours and all of a sudden, with darting action, seeking its soft spot—which could be the very same site. Denley and Milledge (the latter clad only in Y-fronts) pound each other with sax and stone-heavy limbs, the musician stepping across and through the dancer, literally and figuratively, and the dancer in turn showing no regard for personal safety as he takes the offensive.

Leah Grycewicz with Stevie Wishart's shadow, *Urge* Andrew Martin

And then, a tightrope act on a horizontal ladder with the sounds created by the musicians threatening to tilt Grycewicz and Youcell, clad in Drizabones and tutus, over and down. Instead, the dancers give themselves this moment, at first swaying from wall to wall, bodies hitting hard, until they choose to hang upside down and let the blood rush to their heads like beasts on butchers' hooks, their naked backs soft against the amplified distortion. Another thought: were they compelled to take such a step, driven by a soundscape that offered no other way out?

Later again, there's a moment of stillness. (Perhaps.) A woman, Youcell, stands in flamenco garb, a wig on backwards, the hair hanging down over a would-be cleavage, a displaced femininity presenting itself. Grycewicz then reveals another version of this cruel portrait. Standing, in red dress and black straw hat, against the opposite wall, her body seeks a crevice in which to hide itself and simultaneously lashes out. This time there's more strength, but also more desperation—and uncertainty.

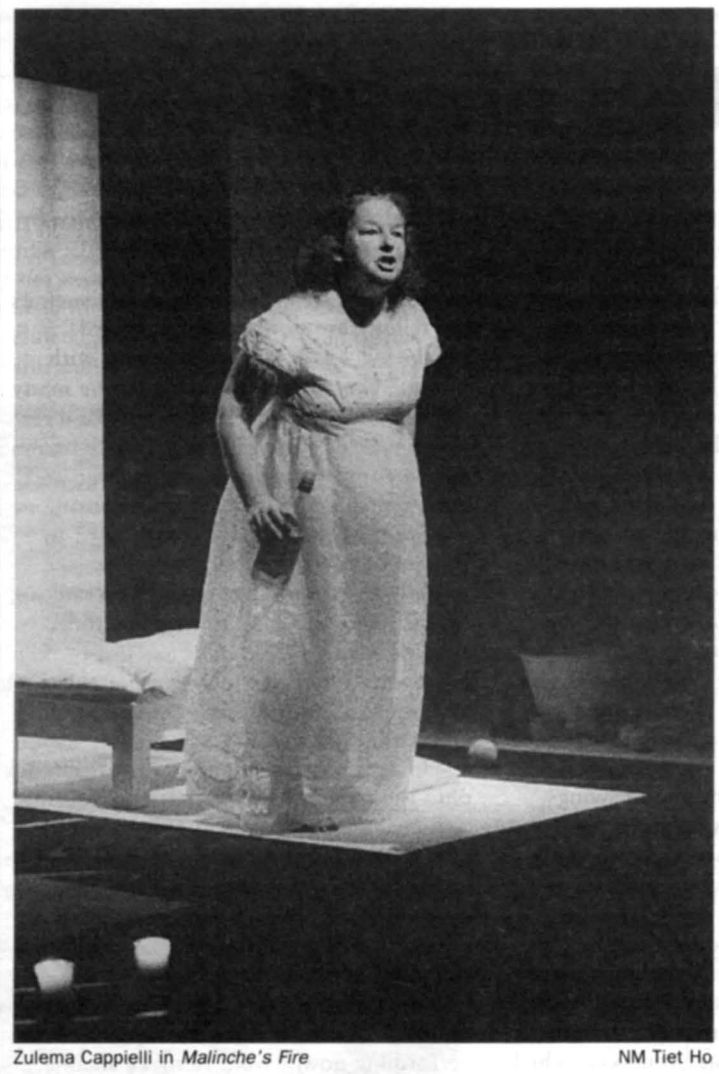
And so, too, me as audience. I'm not always sure where I'm supposed to be. I feel edgy. It's the changing mood; it's the moving space; it's the raw energy of this work (which is itself raw); it's the way the dancers throw themselves to the ground, or roll, huggermugger, across the floor and—if I'm not quick enough—my feet; and how the musicians threaten me with a soundscape that constantly shifts its terms of reference.

And yet, the most interesting aspect of this work for me is its beginning, in the outer room, a bar, where musicians and dancers begin to talk with small phrases, a casual look, constantly falling back into chat with each other or the audience, and then taking a running leap to the other end of the room, only to order a drink. This is a moment where the edges truly begin to blur.

Urge: a surrealist ballet, *Kick Arts, Tanks Art Centre, Cairns, Feb 12 - 14; The Synagogue, Fringe Festival, Adelaide, March 2 - 5*

NOTICE
Redfern (NSW),
March 26, 1998

Maintenance staff at the local aquarium were greeted by a macabre sight when they arrived for work at 7.00 am last Friday morning (March 13th): a severed arm, floating amidst the marine life. Initial suppositions that the arm was that of a shark attack victim proved wrong, as the severing was clearly done by a sharp instrument. A Coroner's report is awaited for information as to the actual time of detachment from the body and a determination on whether the limb was severed before or after the (presumed) death of the victim. Other details available at this stage are from a report which has been released to the press with an appeal to the public for any information or leads. The report describes the limb as a right arm severed just below the shoulder, and belonging to a female, aged approximately 32 years. Above the elbow is a tattoo of a small book, with the letters AUTOPSY in an embossed style, indicating the title of the book. The team investigating this case are treating it with utmost suspicion. Anyone able to offer any information is requested to respond to this notice without delay. Telephone (02) 9310 2370 or fax (02) 9699 1503.



Zulema Cappielli in *Malinche's Fire* NM Tiet Ho

The opening physical scene of *Malinche's Fire* was like watching a film, where the title credits are deferred until you have begun to get comfortable in the dark theatre and started engaging with the visual seduction of the medium. When Maria Teresa finally speaks, it is as if the entire audience is for an instant aware again of the conventions of theatre. With the entry of dialogue the show re-begins, although a heightened anticipation of cultural, poetic, physical and visual experience is already palpable.

Maria Teresa is the figure of an older Latina woman living in Sydney: she sits in the blue light of back-lit venetian blinds drinking tequila. The rest of the set is white and the other women's dresses are a transparent white fabric. This distilled quality, gives the whole performance a sense of ritual, within the parenthesis of a day. Maria Teresa wakes with a hangover, her husband has left her. The performance proceeds as a piece of magic realism, involving two generations of Latina women, the female symbol Malinche and plenty of salsa, fresh produce and water.

Malinche's Fire was written by poet Beatriz Coppello and further developed by the superb Latina cast (Rosarela Meza, Miriam Marquez, Zulema Cappielli and Carmen Salines) with the alchemy of Gail Kelly as director. Overall, the physical/visual elements sat well in the guttural narrative of the performers, though this made the disembodied voice-over of the actual poetic text seem unlocatable. It was as though the performance was already poetic—without the need for literal overscore. The bilingual production was initiated from material developed in community workshops with Australian Latina women.

Keri Glastonbury

Malinche's Fire, *produced by Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre, Belvoir Street Theatre Downstairs, Sydney March 4 - 8; Fairfield School of Arts, March 14 -15*

Bosnia through the cracks

Griffin are premiering Catherine Zimdahl's innovative *Clark in Sarajevo*. Catherine speaks with Keith Gallasch

Seeing the beginning. Playworks have been hosting influential workshops by writer-director Jenny Kemp across Australia (the next is in Brisbane in May). Catherine Zimdahl attended one of the first several years ago, drawing blanks, feeling increasingly frustrated, free associating nothings, until...she saw what she was going to write...and she wrote it. "It was one of those weird things, and I got the prologue. I began the sessions with no idea what I was going to write about. They were driving me crazy, but suddenly... And the same scene still introduces the play even though it's been worked on for three years. It came from something about war correspondents in a hotel in Sarajevo I'd seen at the Sydney Film Festival the night before. It was voyeuristic. It made me feel really uncomfortable. So I thought I should pursue it. It's the most unusual way a play has come to me. So I started researching it and got a commission from the Melbourne Theatre Company [the premiere though is by Griffin—ed.] and a grant from the Theatre Fund. Then the panic set in. I didn't know anything about this war. I decided not to speak to refugees about it because I felt I didn't want to be responsible for what they'd tell me. So I just read everything I could, newspapers, articles from all over at the library. I'd key in particular words to see what would come up."

Seeing the writing. "I have to see what I'm writing about. I can't just write dialogue. When I have, it's always been a mistake, because the language wasn't embodied. I don't like disembodied yapping theatre. I like visual imagery and music. I'd read the newspaper stuff and let it settle and see which pictures or shapes stayed with me—including what the correspondents were looking for, what they hooked their stories to. There were two years of research and writing but not with a narrative happening for quite some time, a collection of scenes and images. I felt really comfortable with that, but then a journey through emerged, a kind of narrative."

The shape of scenes to come. "The play is not a conventional linear narrative, which is incredibly liberating. It allows me to say, let's have a chorus. It allows me to work with shifting perspectives—which is the clear fictional logic of *Clark in Sarajevo* all the time. Clark the western journalist doesn't have a language for what he is experiencing, this eastern culture, this war. How can he comprehend it? I struggled with the scenes. Paring them back. Coming at them from odd angles." I'm reminded of Botho Strauss' *Big and Little Scenes*: like Lotte, Clark is often off-centre, barely even an observer, culturally and politically on the sidelines, doesn't know what he's seeing in events he cannot comprehend. This is amplified early on in scenes where he can't understand the language (a quirky translation scene reminiscent of some of the work witnessed at the Adelaide Festival), mouths liberal humanist platitudes ("suffering is ennobling"), chases clichés (missing the brute reality)...but suddenly he's in, he's shockingly complicit, we connect...or do we?

Necessary resistances. Zimdahl has created an iconic figure, Clark Cant ("without the apostrophe!", he declares), a satirical target, a late 20th century Candide, a character out of Brecht, an innocent who, says Catherine, "doesn't believe in evil". "I had to put up a lot of resistance. Various people wanted complexity, layering, more to Clark, like giving him a 'real' name. I could understand why they were saying that, they were worried about distancing, but I always felt that it wouldn't serve my purpose to make him more realistic. It's the gap between this strange naturalism of the play and Clark's incomprehension that creates the dynamic that is interesting to me. There have to be gaps for the audience to enter a work." Zimdahl offers no background to Clark, little in the way of personal responses or obvious intelligence or 'depth', she refuses easy empathy. "Why should you have to like or love a character? That turns your writing into product." Clark is soon no mere satirical object though, he's learning the hard way, and the audience with him and she expects him to be played "with honesty and emotion". Catherine laughs, "Sometimes you think all of this'll make people better, and it's crap, and you know it's crap. But...you want to hang on to reality sometimes and make it all worthwhile". Some Americans at a reading of the play in Cleveland disliked its reality and hated Clark ("He's an *asshole*!"), assuming him to represent only American values. "That upset me", Catherine recalls. "I'd gotten really fond of Clark. There was a period at the beginning where I thought the play doesn't have to stay with him, and I tried different things, but then I figured he was the camera, he was the mirror. He should be played in Australia with an Australian voice."

On the page. Reading a late draft of *Clark in Sarajevo* reveals a truly distinctive creation that incidentally evokes the political cartoon (can Clark ever strip down to Superman in a Sarajevo phone box?) and the theatre languages of Bertolt Brecht and Botho Strauss. But for every step back, for every distance opened, for every aphoristic hit, for every blunt political fact, there's a tug in, a grim, sometimes bitterly funny welcome to an alien space, a gap to step through, with ears opened by language that is deft and sometimes poetically acute. An angry American declared—"It's a film script not a play". *Clark in Sarajevo* is definitely not a screenplay, but it is visually and aurally evocative, even on the page, a rich challenge to actors, director, designer and composer...and to an audience which it will seduce and alarm.

Catherine Zimdahl, Clark in Sarajevo, *directed by Ros Horin, Griffin Theatre Company, The Stables, Sydney, April 17 - May 17*

One step ahead

Sophie Hansen interviews Adelaide Festival guest Wendy Houstoun in London

Wendy Houstoun, British performer and director of dance theatre, is on the move. She returned from teaching in Vienna to perform in a platform of British contemporary dance in Newcastle. She next travelled to the Adelaide Festival, to perform her solo trilogy, *Haunted, Daunted and Flaunted.* Before that she completed a site-specific commission for the Spitz cabaret club in London and conclude a mentoring project for emerging choreographers at The Place Theatre. Houstoun has been to Australia before, having toured with native Lloyd Newson's company DV8. She has an affinity with Australians. "People often think I'm Australian".

Houstoun's trademark melange of monologue, movement and mood swings, hovers around the fringes of the contemporary dance scene; uncomfortably in the UK, where she is often criticised for subordinating movement to theatricality, more easily in Europe and beyond. In Newcastle she was programmed into the marginal mid-afternoon slot, but still stole the show with the international promoters. Her part time manager has been avalanched by offers for touring. "The Italians didn't understand a word I was saying", Houstoun shrugs, "but they still wanted to buy the work".

Working on the Spitz commission when we met, Houstoun was remarkably chipper about her lack of progress: "That excruciating first step can take ages. One minute of dance can take five days to make". On her own again, Houstoun is nevertheless clear that solo shows such as the trilogy are not the way forward. "*Haunted* was a way of breaking with Lloyd," she admits, referring to the many roles she has created for DV8. "We were in a bit of a trap. We always started from devising and patterns would emerge and we'd repeat them and become sort of mutually dependent. It became hard to change or accentuate our ways of working. I would always end up cranking up the energy to get on the edge and become manic." The links are not broken however, "Lloyd still comes to have a look at what I'm doing. He can see what is under the work".

Houstoun is not in any hurry to get back onto the treadmill of international touring. "The trick is to keep free. There's a degree of ordinariness in my work which I want to maintain. It's to do with the claims you make for what you do. I want to avoid raising too many expectations. I can still change direction pretty easily."

She's at a turning point again: "I'm looking for a more internal way of performing now. I want to make smaller, quieter work. All this expressiveness is a bit juvenile". The trilogy could already be seen as a first step towards this aim. There are traces of the confrontational characters Houstoun created for DV8, however this work allows a range of personae to take the mike. "I don't see it continuing", Houstoun says, "The whole idea of a trilogy was a bit of a joke. It just sort of carried on. The next thing should be quite different".

Should be. Following Adelaide, Houstoun will work with theatre director Neil Bartlett on a series of performances in British cathedrals. "There will be a choir of 100 people, actors, dancers; anything could happen". As we discuss the relationship between text and movement in her work, we stray into her experiences as movement director for the Royal Shakespeare Company and Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre. Houstoun continues to feed off theatre but reaffirms her commitment to dance as "the best way to get at human interaction. Acting is boring in the end. I get tired of the relationships the actors have with each other, with the director, with the text. They're always talking everything through. Dancers take direction better, they take on shape without needing to know why". Directors she admires (and she has workshopped with the best of them) are those who, like Deborah Warner, exhibit, "a light touch". "Deborah has more of a manner than any specific technique. She leaves a lot of room around things. She's not subscribing to any school of thought".

There's no doubt that the actorly dimension in Houstoun's work will remain. Houstoun loves words and used them as the starting point for the trilogy. "Words often come way before the music. I often have to switch off, suspend thought to make the movement and to put the two together". The words she wrote for *Haunted* were stored away long before the idea of the performance emerged. "I looked at the structure of a few plays. I pinched the odd quote. I'm interested in ways of talking to people, not so much what the words mean, but what they suggest. Speech as resonant of something else."

In *Touch*, the short dance film Houstoun made with director David Hinton, there are no words. "A lot of the ambiguity goes out of words in film." The medium still appeals however, "I enjoy the rigour of film, the way it eats ideas". The pseudo-documentary she made in 1997, with Hinton again, taught her some lessons. "Maybe *Diary of a Dancer* didn't work as a dance film. It was too long, gentle, lyrical. Not slick. It's genuine. It has helped me to get away from some of the hardness too."

And Houstoun is back to the impetus behind the steady progression of her career. "I need to negotiate ways to keep on making interesting work." Whilst she cultivates a self-effacing modesty, it's clear from the patterns of her career that she is always one step ahead of her current project, retaining the most interesting parts and moving on.

"How do you mature with your work?" she asks searchingly. "Credibility and respect are hard to negotiate." Yet as the enthusiastic response to the trilogy and the offers of innovative collaborations with directors, musicians and choreographers keep on coming, Houstoun appears short of neither.

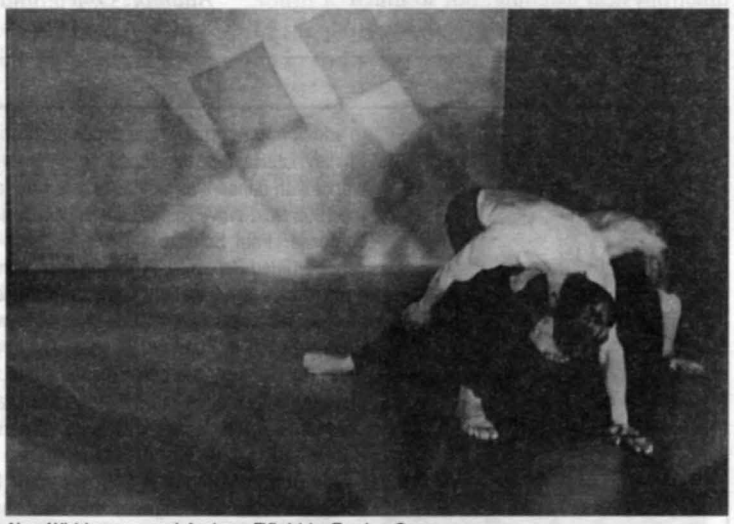
Haunted Daunted and Flaunted, *Adelaide Festival, Price Theatre, March 10 - 14*

Physical diffusions

Zsuzsanna Soboslay Moore reviews *Twelve Seas* and talks to choreographer Gary Rowe

In London, I saw John Tavener at a performance of one of his cello works. Very tall and resplendent in dark suit, shock of white hair matched with equal shock of white leather slippers and a profile like Franz Liszt, his presence matched the soaring quality of the strings. There is yearning in the pull of his cello pieces, yearning and a human growl that has been subsumed in a battle of soul and animal with the ethereal realm. Appropriate, too, for Gary Rowe to have chosen Tavener's *Chant* and *Eternal Memory* for solo cello/cello with strings for units of his *Twelve Seas*, interspersing long silences between the pull of strings. This is an elegant, meditative piece that seems awash with the blues of melancholy, waves, memory; of the loneliness of being marked by a ghost who is you/not you, a mirror not quite of the same substance. Four dancers slide and pivot across and into the space, meeting only in the general hum of time, but never in the specifics of a handshake, birthing, wartime. The movements are flags marking moments of longing; moments caught leaning against a ship's rail. Even an eyeblink is long—what you see between the sheets of skin with which we view, sense, absorb the world.

The arc of an ocean marks the opening, a projection with voice-over. The projections are held to this vista: only the sun moving across to mark a progression in time. Fundamentally, we stay on a long sea journey throughout the piece. There is no landing (although there is, perhaps, the desire to land); Poseidon's element, perhaps the song of corpses thrown in.



Alan Widdowson and Andrew Fifield in *Twelve Seas*

Ruth Gibson enters, sliding backwards, her arms stretch ahead, behind, a gesture from the heart into the world. She is vulnerable, with her backward slide, but also engaging, strong. This is the gift one makes in entering: an egg's offering. This is the risk one takes: to extend and meet, perhaps, no more than a curved line.

Two men enter, backwards. Mirrored by the two women; fisher-people pulling nets along the square. So quiet, this crossing the grid of the world. The men flick their feet like a horse its tail. Heads lift, dreaming of balloons. I watch their limbs: Gibson's arches as they slide, Fifield and Widdowson's foot-edges flickering turns, Sky's arms going for a dive.

I'm not impressed with publicity touting a "fusion of movement, design, music, and text". A piece this sure doesn't deserve to have its elements stated like starting blocks each at a different race. Image and music are subtle and discrete, text spare; success or failure rests on the quality of embodiment and the *dif*fusion of physical force, in relation to an almost personified sense of time. There is a moment where Gibson's elbows bend, then knees, arms reaching up (foot stretched ahead) as if lifting a block of turf into the sky. This is a lovely moment, where muscle meets cosmos, time enters the blood. Less successful is when Fifield and Sky, for instance, become too translucent, as if force, leaking at the elbows, no longer fuses out to the world.

Ships horns sound: departures, long journeys, salt air. Couples re-enter, carrying one another. Is memory carried, or the carrier? One spirit with four legs—two that walk, two that fail to touch the ground. Another with four arms: a pair that hold, a pair stretched like the mast of a ship, ready for sail. Motion propelled not by volition but another force. Each action has its shadows.

Hellen Sky as Gibson's double shadows Gibson's opening solo movements like the wind prodding and provoking her turns. The volition to move is the push of something else's hand. This is the force of another, an outside, who yet fails to copy, to mirror exactly, because not quite of the same blood. This is appropriate and quietly taunting, leaving a great sadness when Gibson next enters the space alone. "I have chosen you before, in other lifetimes, other centuries", says the voice-over. The Double is a lonely accompaniment. Two can be stranger than one.

There are other moments of syncopation between the men, I suspect unintended, because these fractured moments are not quite exact enough and the synchronicity for the most part is so good. And yet I like the idea of them, these fissures, breaks in coordination: they fit the bill, intellectually, psychologically. They seem caused, mostly, by a subtler elasticity in one body, a different catch of breath in the ribs. Widdowson in particular seems to me to dance with a *rubato* which could be quite exquisite if given rein.

In the end, "the sea takes its colour back". What is given is returned, goes back home. I must admit I dreaded the idea of a piece about this subject, fearing it exhausted before the dance began by a decade of theory and projects and plays; but Rowe has created an elegant, subtle and quietly disquieted piece that hovers in the place that expands and cools like ocean water, rising, falling in a day. This, too, is the who, the we, the I, the self that dives and dissolves and reforms as it swims. The subtle interplay of grasping, mirroring, and release, the residue of salt lining our human rims.

Dialogue with Gary Rowe

GR I worked from the text *The Coral Sea* by Patti Smith to create the movement/choreography—the 'poetic' images from that writing became the source/resource which defined/redefined the process of improvisation/composition. I also listened to *We shall see Him as He is* by John Tavener which too became a score (albeit a loose one) during the composition of the material.

ZSM What do you look for when you work with your dancers? What is the dialogue?

GR I work with people that I know personally as friends and colleagues and I try to work also with the same set of people—that really allows a 'shorthand' approach to work when time is limited (we both know what we are getting!). All the performers are practising artists in their own right and work from widely differing backgrounds of study and training—they are all involved in their own artistic research and development. I implicitly place my trust in them, in their ability to create and perform. All material created comes from an improvisational process which then is directed by myself into some form. I ask of them to enter fully into a process of creative development that hopefully allows their own personalities to come through. The dialogue is one of creator/performer and director, which evolves through time. I think that we all know each other well enough, and the demands of the work, to be able to be ourselves in the roles that we lay out. I am totally reliant [on] these people as they 'become' the work. I ask them to enter my 'image' world and to inhabit it with their own connections and to be there developing a language in movement.

ZSM The students in your workshop made much of how you trained them in sensing relationship, enabling improvisations with four, six, eight or nine students together on stage. How is your training of this skill different from that of other dance teachers/choreographers?

GR The difference is difficult to highlight. My teaching method has evolved from being 'taught'. I don't think I have one way of training a skill in perception. I would not want to claim such a standpoint. What I do pursue, challenge and encourage students to do is to work from a place where visual/choreographic strategies are as one. Training in how one 'sees' the world (both an external and internal process—a moment, a fragment of time, the larger picture) is central to how one sees language. Movement is located for me in that matrix—what we choose to see or to be seen. The choices inherent in this process are central to my teaching methodology.

ZSM Another description was about how you encouraged them to "open the body". What is it you think you "open" bodies to?

GR I hope that I 'open' bodies to the multiple complex of possibilities that arise from working and the taking of responsibility and action for one's imagination/creation and to make that manifest in some way.

ZSM The text for Twelve Seas *was sometimes exquisite. Still separable, though, into moving and spoken parts. Although I work differently myself, I didn't mind it in this piece, due to its meditative nature. Sometimes the words functioned like music, like rhythms interspersed with the strains of Tavener's piece. This is perhaps effective because the cello itself has such a human voice.*

I'm wondering, though, whether you ever have speech more linked with movement? Do you ever get your dancers to speak as they dance?

GR I have as yet to make a piece where the dancers speak. This I feel requires a special skill and creates a different kind of work to what I am interested in. The text when used in the work is read by actors, sometimes live. The next work is being made in collaboration with [Melbourne dancer/academic] Philipa Rothfield and will be a series of five solos each with a philosophy paper attached. Themes of lying, death, love, place and acceptance/resistance will be explored. The text will be read by a female actor, delivered as a paper, whilst the dance proceeds.

Gary Rowe returns to Australia for more workshops next year.

Twelve Seas, *Exploring themes of the double. Gary Rowe Company (UK). Conceived and directed by Gary Rowe. Created and performed by Andrew Fifield, Ruth Gibson, Alan Widdowson, Hellen Sky. Photography by Jim Roseveare. Sound: Michael Burdett. Dancehouse, Carlton, February 5.*

Motives for movement

Eleanor Brickhill records Rosalind Crisp's *Omeo Dance Project*

Some dance writers make it a point of honour to avoid personal involvement or knowledge of the dancers or choreographic process prior to seeing a performance, hoping that the work might somehow be less tainted by their own biases, and they will be clear of 'irrelevant' distractions, more objective, a state counted as desirable and attainable. Indeed, it would be silly to pretend that having seen a dancer's work over many years, liking their attitude, understanding the process with an intimate kinaesthetic awareness, a viewer wouldn't enter a performance with certain expectations, a particular focus and set of assumptions, all of which carry a high intellectual charge.

With this in mind, my understanding of Ros' work is a long one, having, in this particular project—part of her MA honours thesis at UWS—been invited to document over five weeks the three dancers' internal thought processes, even to intervene by suggesting what they seemed to me to be doing, and requiring them therefore to respond by explaining in words that very intuitional improvisational modus operandi.

So, with the feeling that any 'performance' is just a momentary crystallisation in an ongoing process, I watched this particular manifestation. And in fact, the lights, designed with Iain Court's delicate touch, and the palpable expectations of the audience induced a feeling of closure, pinning down some of the ideas, and making invisible some of the more vagrant possibilities in the work, threads of ideas I had seen before, too errant to become part of this 'performance' pattern.

What I have often seen which distinguishes Ros's work is that its subject matter tends to be open and layered, inviting contemplation. Each performer can be seen not as a technician parading various accomplishments, but as an individual with a uniquely developed personal language and physical demeanour. The motives for movement are different for each of the performers. Even though my 'outside eye' might have relied on its 'dancerly' experience, in the absence of a studied choreography, I was drawn more often to what seemed like ordinary, if heightened, behaviour, thoughts and feelings and their physical expression, the 'non-dancing' character of each, the parts that can get submerged beneath specific styles.

Julie Humphreys, in her dance *Telling Stories to the Sky*, has a most distinctive improvisational persona. Perhaps it is not her intention, but her dancing seems to draw from a slightly eccentric emotionality, a whimsical, funny, secret shyness, a state of mind that anyone might remember having been in: not feeling sure, being vulnerable, self-conscious, and aware of your own foolishness, in a place where there is no hiding, and no alternative except to be yourself. It is not about epically beautiful feelings or lines, or 'aesthetics', and indeed she is not hidden behind any 'dancerly' performer's shell. What you see is Julie Humphreys being really funny, breathing and laughing, sitting with awkwardly folded legs, running, gesturing, looking sideways, communing with something as if she's watched, being herself, and reminding us about the soft, secret, silly side of being human, in this particular rather difficult and distracting environment, this public exposure called performance.

Gabby Adamik's solo, *Tidal*, seems more straightforward in its dynamics. She works not so much with a muscular strength as with a central physical core to her body, undergoing seizures by waves and currents, pulling her to extremes, and back to calm, being thrown around, but clothed in a more indeterminate flesh which plays little part in these internal ebbing tides. Gabby's is a short, contained and well-formed idea, a strong and supple solo, with a rich, clear texture, a rising-ebbing symmetry.

Ros Crisp's duet with Gabby, *Audible Air*, has a similarly uncluttered structure: the dancers commence, widely spaced and obliquely angled, on either side of the stage, moving around and past each other, to change places. There are meetings in this dance, responses, awareness of each other's presence, self-containment, listening. It has a cooler, less intensely personal quality. You might see only one dancer at a time, widely separated as they are, depending on which side of the space you sit. I was aware of their changing spatial relationships, creating a deep and acutely angled field. The image of a blurred distant figure behind one which was very near and crisply focused, made a strange photographic image, emotionally more removed than the other pieces.

Ros's solo rendition of *Audible Air,* opening the program, also works with a quiet physical listening, not so much concerned with perceiving external sound, but with a slow internal cyclic resonance, waiting for the seep and swell of sensation and attendant imagination through the body cavities, through the breath, along axons, charging synapses, waiting, filling and emptying again from her body's contours.

On one level there is a clear dancerly beauty in her energy and gesture. Her expression has a practised and refined emotional sensibility about it—unlike Julie's more unravelled quality—which rests easily on a long and established physical practice. If speed, control, flow and precision are not primarily what she is concerned with, those qualities come to work inevitably and extraordinarily, providing a compelling focus for those who might find unsettling any departures from orthodoxy.

In the program notes, she has quoted Claudel:

*Violaine (*who is blind*): I hear...*
Mara: What do you hear?
Violaine: Things existing in me.

Omeo Dance Project, *Four improvisations directed by Rosalind Crisp:* Audible Air, *Solo—Rosalind Crisp; Duet—Rosalind Crisp and Gabrielle Adamik;* Telling stories to the sky, *Julie Humphreys;* Tidal, *Gabrielle Adamik. Omeo Studios, Newtown, February*

Shelley Lasica, *Dress*
Kate Gollings

In addition to her many solo dance performances in non-theatre venues, Shelley Lasica has developed an extensive repertoire of collaborative works with dancers as well as artists from other fields. In *Character X* at the 1996 Next Wave Festival she collaborated with architect Roger Wood, composer Paul Schutze and visual artist Kathy Temin. Following her series entitled *Behaviour* spanning four years and six performance works, a video and a publication, Lasica embarked on a new series of theatre pieces. The first, *Live Drama Situation,* was shown at the Cleveland Project Space in London last year. The second in the series, *Situation Live: The Subject*, is a performance about theatrical interaction, loss of memory, coincidence and the subject of space. This time, Shelley Lasica collaborates with dancers Deanne Butterworth and Jo Lloyd, writer Robyn McKenzie (editor of LIKE magazine and visual arts critic for the Herald Sun in Melbourne) and composer Franc Tetaz who works as a composer and sound engineer with artists as diverse as Regurgitator and Michael Keiran Harvey. *Situation Live* is about what happens in the interaction between spoken, written and movement language.

In *Dress*, Shelley's collaborator is fashion designer Martin Grant who created the 10 striking dresses with Julia Morison for the exhibition *Material Evidence:100-headless woman* at the Adelaide Festival. In *Dress* we see the way a body behaves and is arranged by the physical habits of clothing. Rather than making a costume for a performance, Martin Grant has designed an outfit that both defines and resists the performance of it. *Dress* was recently presented at Anna Schwartz Gallery as part of the Melbourne Fashion Festival. RT

Situation Live:The Subject *and* Dress: a costumed performance *will be presented for three nights only at The Performance Space, Sydney, April 15-17 at 8 pm*

Melbourne's very own contemporary dance company Chunky Move will headbutt its new audience at a preview screening on Saturday May 16 at the CUB Malthouse with their new hour-long dance film *Wet* commissioned by ABCTV, choreographed and scripted by Mr. Chunky himself, Gideon Obarzanek, and directed by Steven Burstow. A cluey collaboration—Burstow is one of a very few Australian directors interested in exploring the interface between arts live and on TV.

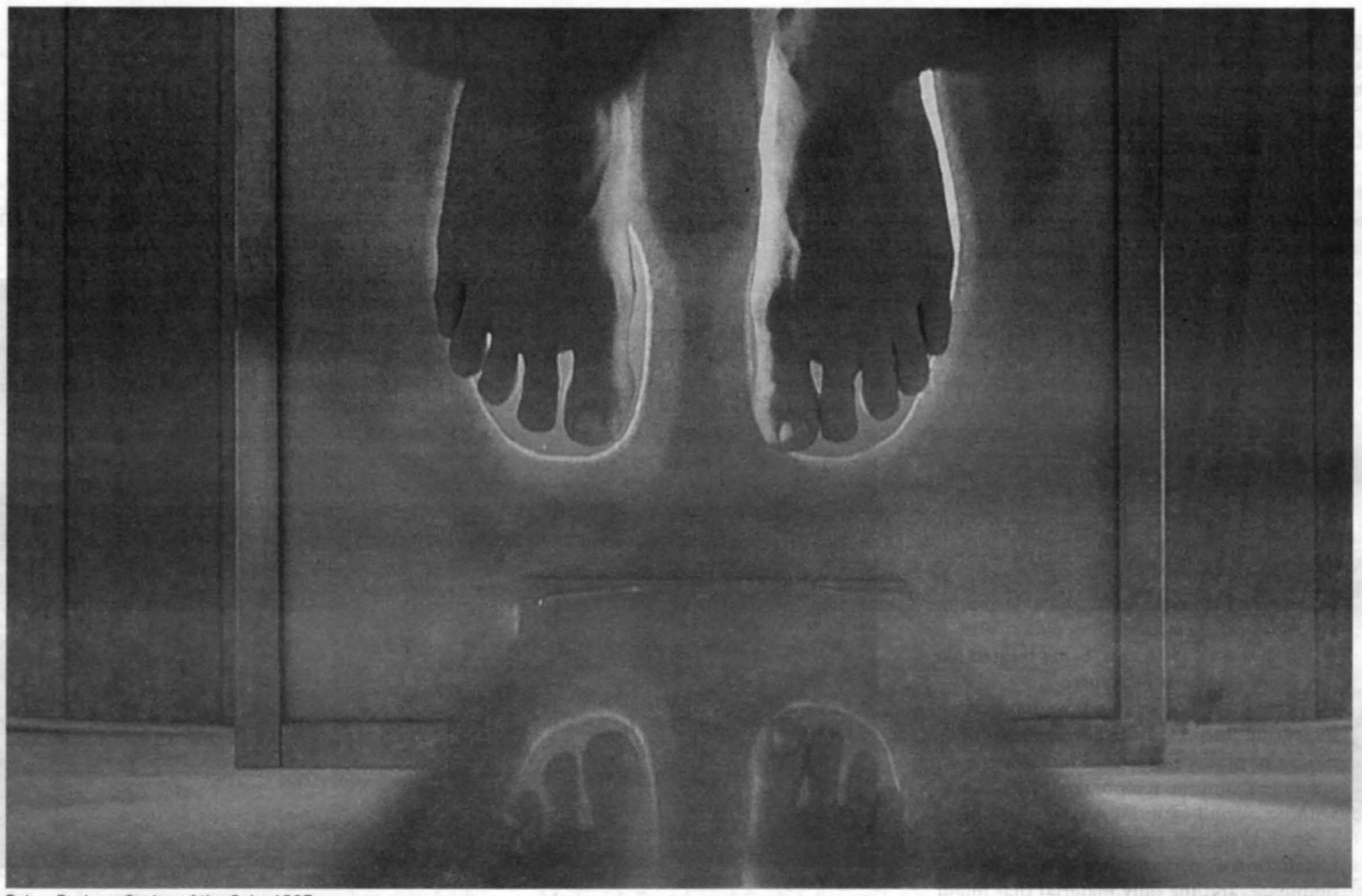
In a city full of fancy footwork, Chunky Move aims to do its bit to shift the boundaries of conventional performance in dance. The company's move from project-base to three-year funding status will allow it to realise works on a larger scale and to reach a wider audience. Let's hope that it also buys the company some of the time it needs to seriously develop new work. At the Adelaide Festival, companies like Belgium's Les Ballet C. de la B. made local mouths water with the relative luxury of their work processes—18 months non-stop for *La Tristeza Complice*. Nurtured over time, the works are developed further over a number of productions. Robert Lepage (*The Seven Streams of the River Ota*) says he doesn't write anything down until the 200th performance!

Brett Daffy and Kathryn Dunn in *Bonehead*

At this stage, the program is looking decidedly chunky. First up will be a remount of their recent work, *Bonehead* for performances in Melbourne in May following a tour of the work to South America in April. Gideon Obarzanek sees *Bonehead* as a work about the body as utilitarian being or object. "At one time," he says, "the body is able to be an hilarious caricature of a vulnerable victim, while at another, it is seen number-crunching frenetically through virtuosic movement combinations, reducing it to a mechanism of bone, sinew and muscle." *Bonehead* features some of Australia's most skilful dancers: Narelle Benjamin, Brett Daffy, Kathryn Dunn, Byron Perry and Luke Smiles and newcomer, VCA graduate, Fiona Cameron. A tour to Germany in June will be followed by a collaboration with Paul Selwyn Norton (UK/Holland) after which the company goes into intensive development for *Hydra*, a large scale work combining performance and sculptural installation which moves dance out of the theatre and into the pool. *Hydra* has been commissioned by the Sydney Festival and will tour Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane and internationally throughout 1999. In June next year, a new triple bill will premiere in Melbourne including a commission for Lucy Guerin. RT

Art sensor

Jacqueline Millner on the work of Robyn Backen



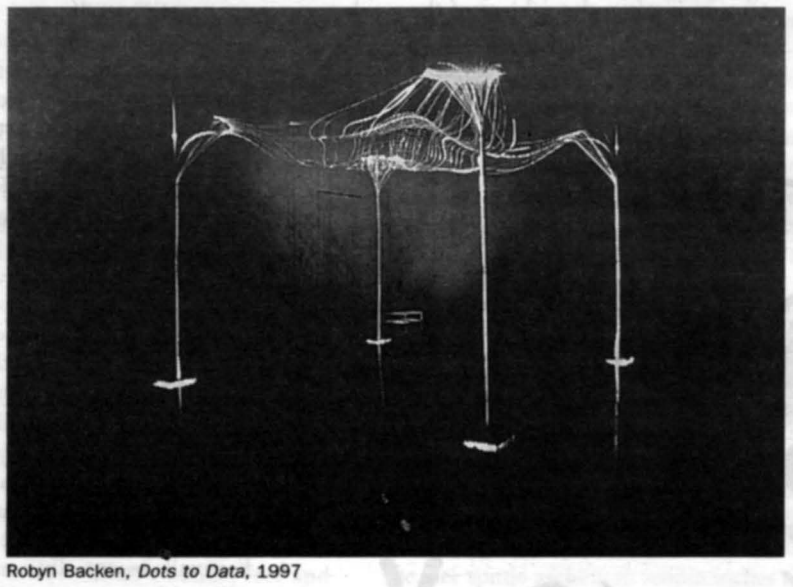
Robyn Backen, *Scales of the Sole*, 1997

Who's afraid of the DNA: Are the humanities afraid of science? was the question being considered last month by a panel at Sydney University. Science is a hot issue in the arts, these days, if still handled with trepidation. Perhaps the many years of poststructuralist pounding at the foundations of the divide between these traditionally opposed disciplines has had some effect; certainly, the perceived impact of the new communications technology, and the urgent need to keep ethical tabs on the momentous research around cloning, genetic engineering and artificial life are key. Penetrating science beyond a pop appreciation can be a daunting prospect without a specialist's track record, daunting enough to keep potential inquiry at bay. However, there are some working in the arts unafraid of specialist discourses and disrespectful of institutional boundaries, trailblazing unique collaborations between disparate disciplines: artists. The Australian contemporary scene harbours a number of practitioners whose work makes complex and profound connections between science and art. Some of these artists featured in last year's Perspecta (Between art and nature), including Joan Brassil, with a long and extraordinary career which has seen her harness cosmic pulses and record radioactivity in her installations, and Robyn Backen.

Backen began her career as a jeweller, although one informed by conceptual concerns, soon bringing her craft-based skills and fine aesthetic sensibility to installation and public art projects. A fascination for the language and thematics of science and technology appears early in her work, with the beautiful living miniature eco-system created from fibre optic cable, fern fronds and copper bed-springs in *Sprung* (1990, exhibited in Perspecta 1991). Backen continues her use of fibre optics in later works, intrigued as much by their symbolic power as the harbingers of the information revolution as by their glass-like beauty. Of particular significance is the quality of fibre optics as a technology of vision, of imaging.

Backen's work betrays a sustained investigation of technologies of vision, and their relationship to perception. As writers such as Jonathan Crary have observed, dominant technologies of vision have historically shaped our notions of subjectivity and our place in the world, with the current impact of global telecommunications perhaps more radical than the shift from a medieval to a Renaissance world view. Backen's research has led her to consider the development of innovative means to improve meagre human vision, such as periscopes, microscopes and fibre optics, and in a lateral tangent to this, to consider the use of Braille as a means to 'counter' blindness. In *Blindfold* (1996), one of the artist's numerous public projects, Backen has used her jeweller's skill to embed small metal buttons in the jarrah handrail of Liverpool library to spell out a description of the work in Braille. It is a quiet, thoughtful work which resonates with the closure of certain senses and the activation of others, such as the silence of the library, the tactility of books.

This preoccupation with technologies of vision has also entailed looking at the animal world's natural advantages over human vision. *Pronto: Compounded Garden* (1993) involved rephotographing, with the help of a research biologist, an original image of a garden through the lens of a fly's eye, thereby radically bringing into doubt the capacity of human vision to categorically represent the world. In *Azolla* (1991), Backen constructed a periscope, a deceptively simple apparatus which uses ingenious angles, mirrors and light to bring the otherwise unseen unexpectedly into view.



Robyn Backen, *Dots to Data*, 1997

The periscope returns in one of Backen's most recent works, the charmingly titled *Scales of the Sole* (1997). Five metal structures of varying heights stand against the walls of the gallery, each with a small platform attached at the base bearing the outline of two feet. A subtle invitation? (Perhaps reinforced by an at first enigmatic sign at the gallery's entrance: a shoe with a cross through it.) As we climb, barefoot, onto the platform (not unlike bathroom scales), our weight triggers a light to emanate from underneath. We crane our necks or lean over to see what is figured in the eye panel, but it is difficult to make out, and we are not sure what to expect. All at once the various clues fall into place and we realise we are indeed looking at the underside of our feet, and it is a vertiginous and disorientating experience. Deceptively simple, but conceptually very rich, as we ponder the anchors of perception we take for granted.

Backen continues to shake up the ground of perception and tease the limits of vision and representation in her recent work for Perspecta 1997. *Dots to Data*, Backen's beautiful manipulations of optic fibre light filaments, invokes that inscrutable wonder of technology not unlike the awe inspired by the so-called mysteries of nature. In a darkened room and stretched over four head-high poles is a veritable firmament of optic cable, glinting with a million tiny bursts of light. We are drawn, as if stargazing, upwards, to the heights of speculation about our heavenly inheritance, only to be pulled down to the source of the mystery, for Backen has cleverly cut a peephole into the bowels of the building to reveal the cables bursting through the earth. In curious resonance with *Scales of the Sole*, I'm reminded of the gloriously funny essay by scatological surrealist Georges Bataille, *The Big Toe*, and his argument to affirm the base materialism inherent to the human subject: "Blind, but tranquil and strangely despising his obscure baseness, a given person, ready to call to mind the grandeurs of human history as when his glance ascends a monument, is stopped in mid-flight by an atrocious pain in his big toe, because, though the most noble of animals, he still has corns on his feet".

In *Dots to Data*, the machinations might be exposed, yet the wonder remains, technology still works its 'magic'. These fibre optics harbour an inscrutable power, some form of potential energy which we can only guess at in the tiny glimmers they emit. It is an energy not with exclusively positive allure, but also with sinister connotations. Fibre optics hold the key to realising the dream of the digital revolution, of living in fabricated visual spaces where the perspective of a body in a real observable world may become increasingly irrelevant. These new models of vision and perception may promise us 'absolute' and instantaneous knowledge, but they are also intimately tied with the exigencies of military, medical and security systems.

Backen has at times expressed concern that the aesthetic allure of her works might interfere with their conceptual complexity. Yet, this attention to formal intricacies and emphasis on craftsmanship seduce the viewer into spending time with her work, time essential to make the many possible connections between science, art and philosophy which her oeuvre evokes.

February 6 1998

Dear Editors

I feel I should correct one very small point in Jacqueline Millner's report on the National Art Publishing Forum (RT#23). Jacqueline indicates that the project was "principally funded by the VACF (Visual Arts and Crafts Fund)". In fact, the project was supported by two grants from the Australia Council, one from the VACF, the other from Audience Development and Advocacy. However, the initial funding for this national project—and the largest grant—actually came from The Arts Office of the Queensland government.

Yours sincerely
Peter Anderson
Project Co-ordinator
National Art Publishing Forum

Selling the uncertain product

Peter Anderson detects tensions in the work of Craig Walsh that reflect wider developments in the role of the artist

In the last few years we seem to have been seeing the emergence of a couple of trends in the contemporary art world that, at least on the surface, seem to be pulling in quite opposite directions.

On the one hand we see increasing pressure for artists to become more professional in the way they conduct their practice—to consider themselves as small businesses, providing unique products for niche markets. This involves artists tackling issues such as promotion and marketing, as well as the investigation of new distribution strategies for their cultural product. Within this framework artists are being treated like any other small manufacturer.

Then, on the other hand, we have an increasing interest in the development of modes of practice that tend towards the ephemeral and the temporary—art practice without a solid material product for sale.

In this context, practices such as installation or performance have come to dominate, and the only material that might ever be directly available for purchase is either the residue of the installation or performance (a detail of the work, if you like), or some form of documentation. Strangely, there actually seem to be very few artists who make an active effort to earn income by selling such materials, and it is probable that there are only a few collectors in this area. Thus, while the object-making artist—the painter, print maker, sculptor—may have an explicit product for sale, the installation artist is left with something far more uncertain.

Craig Walsh, *Self Promotion*

It is this uncertainty about the product that continues to emerge in the practice of Craig Walsh. By this I do not mean that it presents itself as a difficulty or tension in the way Walsh considers or conducts his practice—the "I really want to make temporary installations, but I need to sell work to survive" problem—instead, this tension is often the subject of the work itself. The art he has produced over the past few years has been very ephemeral, and yet most of it seems to play off the materiality of the art object, or the traditional gallery viewing environment. It is also work that straddles a number of fairly awkward boundaries, not only in terms of the contexts in which it is exhibited, but also in relation to the cultural and economic forces that drive the art practice itself.

To be blunt about the work I would have to say that individual pieces, or projects, can slide uneasily between complex interrogations of the art system to the fairly spectacular, but somewhat less challenging, realm of the festival AV display. But perhaps this is more a recognition of the different contextual demands of particular exhibition environments, than an unevenness in the work itself. In other words, rather than blindly placing the same object in any context and expecting the audience to adjust, Walsh finds a way to engage different audiences in different ways—and at different levels.

For example, over the last few years Walsh has exhibited a series of projection pieces at the annual Woodford Folk Festival—essentially computer manipulated stills of faces projected onto trees on the site. While at one level these have a certain "wow" factor—you know, trees with faces—the images themselves are actually carefully constructed from archival photographs. In other words, there's something going on that isn't necessarily obvious on the surface, the sort of thing that a viewer might find out from a hint in a work's title, or a comment in a catalogue. Significantly, the work is paid for by the viewers, or at least Walsh is paid to produce it by the festival organisers—it's just another part of the (ephemeral) event.

In other pieces Walsh has more clearly pushed the relationship between public art (work exhibited outside the gallery) and the gallery system. In fact, there is a strong thread that runs through his work that engages both the issue of the frame, and the portrait. This can be seen very clearly as far back as 1993, in the *Queensland Country Life Collection* installation, a work produced as part of the Pacific Fringe Festival in Brisbane. In this work a semi-demolished building site was used, with frames installed to reconstruct the battered walls as large abstract paintings.

More recently Walsh used a similar format in *The Brunswick Street Collection*, with large framed mirrors located on a crash wall at Brisbane's Brunswick Street Station. Waiting passengers found themselves reflected as the "subject" of the work. This piece was part of a larger project—*Art On Line*—which Walsh initiated and co-ordinated. In this context, the artist works not just as object producer, but as project manager. Significantly, this role now seems to be one which is integrated into the artist's professional repertoire, involving not only practical management of the project, but also the massaging of public or corporate sponsors to get the project off the ground in the first place. These days, this organisational work has to be seen as an integral part of contemporary art practice, rather than a peripheral add-on.

Walsh's other major project of recent times also demands that we consider such issues. Titled *Self Promotion*, the project has been operating since 1995 when elements were first shown at the Cairns Regional Gallery. Last year the work toured south to Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide, before finally being shown at the IMA in Brisbane. Significantly, the work is not just on show when it is "on show", as the images are always visible even when the work is in transit. The core components—the objects—are touring crates (similar to those that are used to carry paintings) with a perspex side that reveals Cibachrome images of both the artist (in the box) and materials associated with his practice. Both the ephemera, and the image of the artist—naked under a blanket—have a discarded feel about them. Walsh's self portraits signal artist as homeless person living in a box, while the other box hints at a career which leaves nothing but ephemeral dross—slides, old catalogues, videos, reviews.

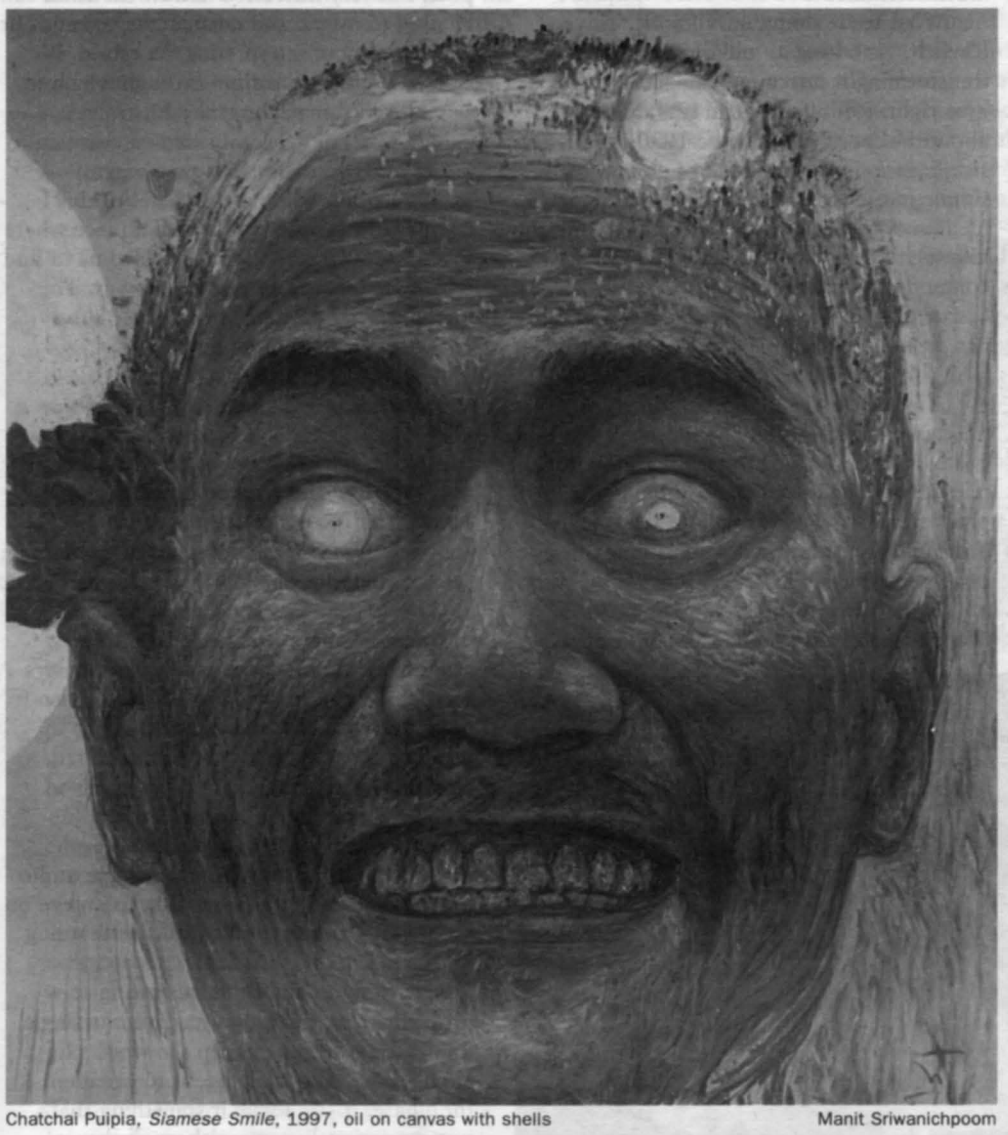
The travel crates have always been installed in window spaces, and in the recent showings have been accompanied by the project's brochure. This is not quite a catalogue, and not quite a straight promotional brochure, but something in between, and its slick production values contrast quite dramatically with the feel of the travel crate images. It also carries another vital component of the project, the internet address—*www.selfpromotion.thehub.com.au*—inviting viewers to down-load, print, and reconstruct small copies of the crates. In a sense this is a "give-away", a case of make your own art work (and of course, a neat play on the cut and paste culture of www itself, and the free gifts of the world of PR).

Self Promotion is a self portrait, but one that is concerned to explore the construction of an artist within the contemporary system, rather than setting out to exhume a personality or psychology. It is a work that is aware of the changing nature of art practice, and the tensions between the artist as maker of objects, and the artist as service provider. At one level the work is site specific, but at another it moves beyond any particular site. It is on show all the time—both the brochure and the catalogue produced for the IMA showing make a point of including images of the crates being loaded or unloaded. Similarly, whenever someone prints the images from the internet site, and reconstructs the crates, they add another number of an unlimited edition of small desk-top sculptures that are, no doubt, located all over the world, and are also part of the work. So, go on...log on, down load, print out, cut up, stick together, collect the whole set.

Craig Walsh, Self Promotion*; Sydney, Artspace offsite at St James Station July 3 - Aug 3 1997; Adelaide, EAF Aug - Sept 1997; Melbourne, Install 97, Grand Central Art, Sept 29 - Oct 30 1997; Brisbane, IMA, Nov 27 - Jan 31 1998*

Across the chasms

Christopher Crouch on cross cultural negotiations at the Art Gallery of Western Australia



Chatchai Puipia, *Siamese Smile*, 1997, oil on canvas with shells Manit Sriwanichpoom

Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions and Tensions is an exhibition organised by the Asia Society, New York and curated by Thai academic Apinan Poshyananda. Its only Australian showing is at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, having previously been exhibited in New York and Vancouver. It is an important show that attempts to construct an overview of the variety of current art practices in a selection of South East Asian and East Asian countries. Like all shows of this nature that aspire to authoritative status, there are problems in the curator's inclusion and exclusion of cultures and artists, but the exhibition does create an investigative aesthetic environment that is stimulating and enlightening both conceptually and visually. A *Symposium on Urban Dynamism in Asian Art* was convened by AGWA, held in conjunction with the exhibition. The intention was—with the participation of a number of the exhibition's artists, and with the contribution of authorities in the field of Asian art practice—to stimulate discussion around the issues raised by the show's paintings, sculptures and installations.

This was the first hurdle, because the issue of *Urban Dynamism* was not coherently or consistently addressed. How could it be with speakers from the Philippines, India, Indonesia, Thailand, South Korea and Australia? Rather, what was presented was a potpourri of views on artistic practice, cultural history and politics. In the event, this was the best thing that could happen because the ruptures in the assumed coherence of the project were exposed in a variety of constructive ways. Had the theme—with its indexical subtext of city, technology, progress—been consistently addressed by speakers then an illusory veil of modernist ideas of global universalism would have been drawn across the yawning cultural chasms that separated artist from artist, culture from culture and speakers from audience. There is much in the *Traditions and Tensions* exhibition that can be grasped intuitively by an audience, but there is also much that relies upon a sophisticated and developed understanding of the processes of cross-culture negotiation.

The many views expressed by speakers created a bricolage of often contradictory ideological positions that reflected the problems of trying to create a coherent cultural structure that could encompass the different contexts of production and consumption of the works in the show. Some artist/speakers remained blissfully unaware of the complexities their work might hold in attempts to locate or to transcend their cultural specificity—the pros and cons of re-locating Brechtian imagery rooted in 1920s Germany to 1990s India via an English language transcription of a Hindi translation of a German text provoked no interest from the audience, whilst the formal aspects of the work did. Other artists were astutely aware of the difference in reading that the cultural context of their works' physical cultural location and their audience's ideological location might effect.

The use of moderators from the artistic community in Perth to act as facilitators for the discussion between the audience and artist was a useful device. They provided a telling commentary on the issues at stake in understanding the work in the show. As the weekend wore on, it became a tale of Old Australia slipping back into the comfy slippers of formalist pictorial evaluations of work—in avoidance of the increasingly clear problems emerging in cross-culturally interpreting imagery—while the New Australia's well contoured plurality enabled a constructive cross cultural dialogue to take place.

In the plotting of the incontrovertible logic of the cultural geography and politics of global modernist culture, the complex reality of the *contemporary* was often overlooked in discussion. At the end of the symposium it was becoming increasingly clear that whilst there are many points of contact to be made in the cross-cultural encounter there is much, that in Homi Bhabha's term, is incommensurable. The idea of an ingenious hybridity of culture and style that might at first seem attractive as a more realistic successor to the utopianism of universalising Modernism, does no more than obscure the real issue. That is, to go beyond the simplistic essentialising of other cultures, a process of continual cultural contestation must take place. This critique of the producer and the consumer of the work of art, as well as the object itself, is necessary if the struggle for meaning is to be valuable. For all its odd, ramshackle moments the symposium provided glimpses of the sophisticated cultural contexts that make the act of critical engagement worthwhile, and ultimately reaffirmed the importance of such dialogues.

Symposium on Urban Dynamism in Asian Art, *Art Gallery of Western Australia, February 7 - 8*

Dr Christopher Crouch lectures in Art Theory at the Western Australian School of Visual Arts, Edith Cowan University, Perth. His new book, Modernism in Art, Design and Architecture, *will be published by Macmillan this year.*

A sound victory

Gretchen Miller celebrates 10 years of *The Listening Room*

Tap-tap, tap-tap-tap, tap tap tapping. A train echoes by. Sing these notes: E-A-D-G
Vanishing Point, Ion Pearce

In the world of radio, where sound (and funding) is as ephemeral as the moment, making things last, keeping score, creating a history, is not easy.

But the internationally unique and award-winning ABC Classic FM program *The Listening Room*, despite cutbacks and a growing radio culture of conservatism, has just celebrated its 10th birthday and is part of a small but energetic set of international radio programs that keep alive one of the original functions of radio as an artistic medium. The love child of two programs, the "infamous" *Surface Tension* of Radio National and *Images* on ABC FM, *The Listening Room* may no longer be experimental of itself, but it has at the very least, survived, and is no longer seen as a difficult and unapproachable offspring.

Rose Ertler, David Hewitt, Ion Pearce, Natasha Rumiz, performers of Pearce's *Vanishing Point*

"It started out as a hybrid, literally," says Robyn Ravlich, TLR executive producer. "It brought together staff and resources from *Surface Tension* on Radio National—an absolutely wild, wonderful, inventive program that included Martin Harrison, Andrew McLennan, Tony MacGregor, Paul Charlier, Virginia Madsen and Robyn Ravlich, and *Images*, a stereophonic series on ABC FM—Roz Cheney, Jane Ulman and Martin Harrison.

"The experiment of *Surface Tension* was too much for the ABC, it was very playful. And *Images* was where some of the really superlative stereo work was being gathered—layers of sound, breaking the boundaries between forms". Combining the conceptual approach of both programs, *TLR* was broadcast on both ABC FM and AM, although in 1993 it lost its AM slot.

Now, because of financial constraint, unable to be as often involved in the large-scale projects of its youth, the program's work falls into three main genres, says producer Tony Macgregor.

The mainstay of the program is its *ars acoustica* work—sound-based as opposed to text-based, developing from a composition or a performance. Then there are the slightly straighter, although by no means traditional, documentary works, recorded on location and/or performed in the studio, and finally, the environmental soundscapes. "Those three genres and their attendant hybrids sit alongside each other in a fairly interesting mix," he says.

But the experimentation that used to be the definition of *TLR* itself, has settled. Ten years old and established now to the point where in February, ABC Classic FM disrupted its schedule to give the program a celebratory week of broadcasts, in practice *TLR* has changed.

"I think it started off with a [question about] what we do with radio space, how we manipulate it, how we put this beside this. But over time, as people have changed, as the amount of work available has grown, as our back catalogue has grown so we can endlessly bring things forward that are five years old, three, two...there's an accumulation," Macgregor says. "The sense that the program is an ongoing experiment with radio time and space has shifted to the prerogatives of the individual artist. The program itself is a bit like a gallery. The gallery is not an experimental space. It's a space in which experimentation might occur but the space itself is no longer primarily engaged in rattling the bars". There is now a respectability, both institutional and in a solid audience base, about the program. "On balance it is a very positive thing but what you might lose is a frisson of danger for the producer," he says.

Paul Carter, academic, writer and radiomaker, says in the days of the soundbite and the celebrity radio jock *TLR* maintains a connection with radio as it was first practiced. "[In Germany] after the [second world] war regional radio stations were set up, [starting a] well-funded tradition in radio drama. It's drama that uses the voice in an almost musical way to create the radio presence and it's quite different from the radio-style theatre, which is all 'doors closing'.

"The one place where you can find this is at the forefront of European avant-garde art, in West German radio—except for *The Listening Room*. There's no place in the much vaunted BBC for example, there's much resistance".

"What we're doing in radio art," says Ravlich, "is taking an old medium and transforming it into a new media art in its own right. Rudolf Arnheim was talking about the art of radio in the 1930s and it got swept away in this babble of talk and really simple music formats. The art of radio, it's a medium like film or anything in its own right although not in a meaningless, indulgent, contentless way."

For the individual producers, both on staff and freelance, the space opens up new genres in which to play, and is showing up some of the limitations of contemporary instrumental musical practices. Radiophonic composers and producers are working in areas that are both relevant to today's cultural and theoretical practice, and are contextualised across artforms, says John Davies, managing director of the Australian Music Centre, although they are marginalised by what composer Martin Wesley-Smith calls "serious art musicians".

"Part of that is the way musicians are trained...musicians by their nature, if they're closed in a room mastering the technique of their instrument, don't necessarily relate to other [artists]. In terms of cultural understanding of where music fits in they tend to get left behind a bit," Davies says. It's about making sense of the 20th century.

Says Wesley-Smith: "In the world of so called serious art music almost everything is about itself. Whereas the radiophonic pieces can deal with external subjects—political subjects, personal subjects, things to do with places and experience...in such a way that it has extra musical meaning and just as much musical meaning as anything else.

"It's maybe even more valuable for what it is...than sometimes what it does. A lot of stuff that they do is pretty weird and doesn't suit every taste. But it's a place where you don't necessarily have to be a composer, you don't have to have been trained...it's a place where people come up with some interesting things that if you've been trained you don't even think of. It can cross-fertilise back into composition". It is arguable whether Paul Carter, a mainstay of, and regular contributor to the program, would have developed his work in quite the way he has without *TLR*, says McGregor. "In a way it's created a market I think. Small as it may be it gives a place to go".

Says Carter: "Like a lot of people my work does not fit into established categories. I've not been attracted to conventional theatre but on the other hand I'm not a lyric poet. I'm very interested in how the voice ca be used to mimic and create...the voice is ou primary way of interpreting the world. It's created a unique medium through which to say a lot of things about the Australian experience. For a migrant like me wanting to create his own dialect, his own way of expressing himself and the voices of this country, the ABC has provided a place where I can find a voice...and it's enabled us to find our own voices in an Australian way. The long term significance of that can't be underestimated".

An African man's voice echoes across a wide open space, while drum beats are truncated and feel out of phase. Someone is breathing, deeply, women cry a synthesised song.

World Beat and Song
Sonata for Sampler No.4, Cathy Peters

The challenges for the next ten years, aside from avoiding the budget knife, says Ravlich, are to survive but of course also to move forward. To keep the focus on producing quality work in difficult circumstances, to try to remain involved with big cross-media events. To keep up with technological change, having been though the huge shift from analogue audio production to digital, and to keep an eye on the possibilities offered by audiostreaming on the net.

Carter says one of the frustrating problems with the program, given its single hour each week, is to keep the work circulating. "The challenge is to broaden the...base. If you make it something that's just mysteriously coming through the ether...being in Australia you very quickly get into the elitism talk. It's very boring...the thing is it could be less so if it was in the schools and being taught in university as part of our contemporary arts [culture]. They've not been well served by ABC Enterprises. What we're producing here is a whole new generation of poetry. It's a pity we have no way of getting that out [into the mainstream]. It's made it very difficult to establish its popularity".

But Davies points out that at the Australian Music Centre at least there has been some documentation of the new work inspired by the program. "There's been a growing relationship there...since the early 90s we've been trying to embrace those people working in non-score-based mediums...radio, jazz, improvisers...the way that work is documented is different to the way instrumentalists have collected material".

For two years the Centre has collected each program on CD and archived it. "It provides an access point for a greater understanding of that work. It opens up the commercial product possibilities and research. It's for broader dissemination and better understanding—this is about a living thing".

A flickering of angelic pulses scratched out by short wave grinding fades away, until only a trace is left in your memory .

The Robert Armstrong Overture
Robert Iolini

Double Exposure, *including works by Robert Iolini, Cathy Peters, Ion Pearce, Ros Bandt, Shaun Rigney and Elwyn Dennis, has been produced by* The Listening Room *to celebrate its 10th birthday. Available at ABC shops.* Double Exposure, The Listening Room, *EMI/ABC Music 2 CD set, 7243 8 23471 2 5, $29.95.*

Gretchen Miller is a composer, radiomaker, writer, journalist and performer, interested in the Australian landscape and ways of listening to it. Her recently completed work Drive *will be broadcast on* The Listening Room *in June.*

Virtual architecture

Diana Klaosen takes a sound journey through urban space

Sound Mapping, Hobart Wharves — Simon Cuthbert

Sound Mapping is a participatory work of sound art made specifically for the Sullivan's Cove district of Hobart in collaboration with the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Participants wheel four movement-sensitive, sound-producing suitcases around the district to realise a composition which spans space as well as time. The suitcases play "music" in response to the geographical location and movements of participants.

The prime mover behind the project is Hobart-based musician Ian Mott. Mott holds a BSc from the University of Queensland and a Graduate Diploma of Contemporary Music Technology from La Trobe University. His prime artistic activity is designing, developing, building and composing for public interactive sound sculptures—currently in collaboration with visual designer Marc Raszewski and engineer Jim Sosnin. Ian is also a specialist in real-time sound spatialisation and the real-time gestural control of music synthesis and interactive algorithmic environments.

"*Sound Mapping*", as Mott explains, "creates an environment in which the public can make music as a collaborative exercise, with each other and with the artists. In a sense the music is only semi-composed; it requires that participants travel through urban space, moving creatively and cooperatively to produce a final musical exposition. Music produced through this interaction is designed to reflect the environment in which it is produced as well as the personal involvement of the participants".

Sound Mapping uses a system of satellite and motion sensing equipment in combination with sound generating equipment and computer control. Its aim is to explore a sense of place, physicality and engagement to reaffirm the relationship between art and the everyday activities of life. For Mott, "Digital technology, for all its virtues as a precise tool for analysis, articulation of data, communication and control, is propelling society towards a detachment from physicality".

For music, the introduction of the recording techniques and radio in the early 20th century broke the physical relationship between performer and listener entirely, so that musicians began to be denied direct interaction with their audience (and vice versa). *Sound Mapping* addresses this dilemma, for Mott believes that "while artists must engage with the contemporary state of society, they must also be aware of the aesthetic implications of pursuing digital technologies and should consider exploring avenues that connect individuals to the constructs and responsibilities of physical existence".

The *Sound Mapping* communications system incorporates a single hub case and three standard cases. All the cases contain battery power, a public address system, an odometer and two piezoelectric gyroscopes. The standard cases contain a data radio transmitter for transmission to the hub and an audio radio device to receive a single distinct channel of music broadcast from the hub.

Prior to the project's commencement, Mott anticipated that "the interaction between onlookers and participants will be intense due to the very public nature of the space. The interaction will be musical, visual, and verbal as well as social in confronting participants with taboos relating to exhibitionism. This situation is likely to deter many people from participating but nonetheless it is hoped the element of performance will contribute to the power of the experience for both participants and onlookers". From my observation, these are precisely the reactions that the project did receive.

There is some precedent for *Sound Mapping*. Mott explains: "Participant exploratory works employing diffuse sound fields in architectural space have been explored by sound artists such as Michael Brewster (1994) and Christina Kubisch in her 'sound architectures' installations (1990). Recently composers such as Gerhard Eckel have embarked on projects employing virtual architecture as means to guide participants through compositions that are defined by the vocabulary of the virtual space (1996)".

As a participant myself, I found three-quarters of an hour of wheeling a quite heavy suitcase rather draining. I think of myself as reasonably fit, but I reached the stage where just dragging the case was as much as I could do, despite Mott's repeated urgings to swing and *swerve* the trolleys through space in more creative patterns, so as to generate more varied sounds. Not an activity for the frail.

I have to say, however, that I liked the concept of the work very much and was struck by the visual and aural impact of the piece on the several occasions when I encountered groups of engrossed participants making their way around the wharf area. Certainly, well executed public events such as this one enliven the sometimes staid atmosphere around Hobart. It is good to see art-making genuinely getting out into a wider and participating community. The lively nature of Hobart's wharf area over summer—Tall Ships and all this year—made it a good venue for such a project.

Technical details can be found at
http://www.music.utas.edu.au/mott/

Sound Mapping, A Sound Journey through Urban Space, *by Ian Mott with Marc Raszewski and Jim Sosnin, in collaboration with The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, January-February 1998, Hobart*

Sound Mapping, Hobart Wharves — Simon Cuthbert

A digital silence

Martin Walch in bed with *Pillow Songs*

Pillow Songs is amongst the most powerful installations I have experienced. Entering the installation through a light trap I was immediately immersed in a darkened space, an aura of deep blue incandescence emanating from the single light bulbs hovering above three simple beds. As I lay down and my head came to rest on the pillow, an oceanic space rippled by sonic waves rolled out before my closed lids, and began to gently propel me across its textured surface.

I was hearing a subtle blend of the synthesised and the found. Extreme long fades in and out (mostly beyond immediate detection); modulations of pulses and beats, time-signals and thunder; the sounds of a radio tuned to the warbling between stations; a dog barking in the fog of winter dusk; sounds I had not encountered since I lay as a child with my first transistor radio hidden under my pillow long after my family had gone to sleep; drifting in and out of consciousness, hearing a voice, a passage of music, the rain on the roof and the hiss of off-station static.

Aware of the subjective nature of my response, I could also sense the broadly recognisable character of many of these sounds. My dreaming was but a single current stimulated by the stream of the artwork in which I was immersed.

Poonkhin Khut, *Pillow Songs*

Poonkhin Khut has been working with sound, installation and performance since 1987, and graduated from the University of Tasmania in 1993. *Pillow Songs* exemplifies his clean, minimal approach. Significantly, Khut makes conscious use of the space between sounds to define their quality, and to animate the role of silence as a sonic texture in its own right. His use of digital sampling and recording enables him to retain a "digital silence", and this in turn facilitates his manipulation and layering of what he characterises as "wet" and "dry" sounds. Samples are bounced from DAT to computer and back until the right texture is attained, and these tracks are then edited onto CD.

The gallery installation realised an interesting alliance between low and hi-tech in that the computer mastered CDs were played through three conventional CD players programmed to deliver a selection of tracks that were re-mixed each day. These signals were then channelled to each of the three beds. Much of the success of *Pillow Songs* can be attributed to the consistent strength and individuality of these primary tracks, and the generous acoustic space which Khut allows to exist between the combined tertiary elements. The mix manages to maintain a tension between the mysterious and the recognisable whilst remaining open and suggestive.

Pillow Songs, *an audio installation by Poonkhin Khut, Sidespace Gallery, Salamanca Arts Centre, January 16 - 30*

Martin Walch, a photo-media artist working in digital stereoscopic imaging, recently completed a Masters of Fine Art by Research with the University of Tasmania at the Centre for the Arts in Hobart.

In the mix

Keith Gallasch at *Voice Jam & Videotape*, Adelaide Festival

This is a strange experience; not weird, not wild, but odd. The odd opportunity to see one video several times and to read it differently (or not) each time because its soundtrack changes, each video voiced in a new way. I say voice, because voice, sung and spoken, is pivotal in this performance. Onstage three female singers, sometimes four, synch into spare soundtracks, adding to instrumental and/or vocal lines, or going it on their impressive own. As a music concert it's mostly great, and gets better as it goes.

Often we don't 'hear' soundtracks (even when moved by them), unless they're as obtuse as the *Titanic*'s or packed with favorite tunes, unless we're soundtrack addicts. In *Voice Jam & Videotape* image and music are almost in equal partnership. "Almost" because it's the films in this performance which are repeated, not the musical compositions. Each video enjoys the benefit of two or three accompaniments. Although this is a Contemporary Music Events' gig, it's still a matter of music servicing the videos. (CME *has* produced a show where you sit in a cinema and listen to music without film.) Kosky tries to keep the balance by placing his singers next to the screen. By the last screening, I know what I'm inclined to look at.

Tyrone Landau, Rae Marcellino, Elena Kats-Chernin and Deborah Conway have created compositions that warrant multiple hearings. This could not be said of the viewing of most of the videos. Elena Kats-Chernin's score for Judy Horacek's animated *The Thinkers*, about The Stolen Children, was exemplary, matching this artist's whimsical style with a musical cartoon language just serious enough to sustain the message. It markedly improved my still limited appreciation of the video, amplifying its moments of magic—especially the images of flight. David Bridie's score for the same video, including the voice of Paul Keating, while politically pertinent, laboured the point, making the cartoon curiously twee, not up to the weight of the soundtrack. Deborah Conway's composition for Lawrence Johnston's *Night*, a Sydney Opera House reverie built from close ups of roof-shell details (tiles, edges etc.), added an aural density and a sense of the architectural space dealt with—many voices inside the Opera House, spare visual detail on the outside. Conway appeared (discreetly in the dark) adding her own voice to the multitude, the musical quality not dissimilar from that she helped create in the marvellous soundtrack for Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books*.

Lawrence Johnston, *Night*

The one video that worked for me and that worked at me with the help of its composers, was Donna Swann's *dis-family-function*. I'm usually not fond of narrative short films, but the almost silent movie, family-movie innocence of the work with its blunt edits and nervy close-ups (and none of these over-played), is engaging and I was more than happy to watch it twice. A gathering for a birthday party for an ageing mother starts from several points until the characters converge for a backyard party and the giving of gifts. Landau's reading is relatively dark, male voice and piano, other male voices added, finally joined by the live voices of the onstage women singers. There's something faintly disturbing about the score, a kind of restrained (almost Brittenish) poignancy, an inevitable unravelling of feeling and never a literal response. The onscreen image of the mother sinking into herself after the giving of gifts (dog bookends, dog statue, dog pictures, a real new dog—in the presence of her elderly-barely-willing-to-budge old dog) is sad. Rae Marcellino's score is just as good, but much closer to what I imagine the videomaker might have had in mind. Its opening, rapid lines of "ma ma ma" immediately signals a lighter, everyday mood, and you don't go looking for the video's simple seriousness, that just hits you later. But in the choral work, as in the Landau, there's something oddly holy generated as we watch these strangers—the mother, the dog, the son with his Indian girlfriend, the gay couple, and the young parents with baby, lolling in the sunlight, the near-but-never-to-be drama past.

Voice Jam & Videotape, *curated by Barrie Kosky for Contemporary Music Events, Mercury Theatre, Adelaide, March 6 - 8; Salvation Army Temple, Melbourne, March 13 - 15*

Sonic London

John Potts discovers new directions in interactivity in London venues

For a couple of years now, London has been trumpeting itself as "the coolest city on the planet". Art, fashion, design, music: if you want hip, then this is the hippest of the hip, so you'd better get here fast. A more objective appraisal of this fanfare would point to the central role of marketing and PR in the world's biggest industry (tourism)—yet there is no denying the current high level of creative energy in the old city.

The explicit reference point is the "swinging 60s", the last time London was the epicentre of Western culture. However, the derivative nature of 90s Britpop, retro-fashion and shock-art never made for anything more than a simulacrum of the 60s, and ironic quotation is worn out as a cultural gambit. Now that "Cool Britannia" has been appropriated by the Blair government as a policy instrument, any self-respecting cultural practitioner has evacuated the notional "swinging London II", a fantasy built of equal parts nostalgia and hype.

Instead, an underground network has developed, where artists and musicians pursue their interests free of the Cool Britannia imperative. In this network of clubs, galleries, events and websites, electronic art is the form, and sonic arts are at the forefront.

In this, at least, contemporary activity has some resemblance to the 60s. Music—rock, avant garde, a blending of pop and experimental sounds—defined that happening decade; similarly, it is electronic music—a spectrum including dance music, soundscapes, composition and audio arts—that defines the present. But there is no nostalgia, no reference to a golden past; today's artists are too busy exploring the potential of new technologies.

One of the longest-running gathering-spaces for the electro-tribe is the Electronic Lounge, hosted at the ICA by Scanner (Robin Rimbaud). This monthly event, celebrating its fourth birthday in April, draws a crowd of musicians and artists, many of whom take advantage of the ICA's recently unveiled New Media Centre. While the Centre encourages digital artistry in all media, the Electronic Lounge showcases music and sonic experiments. Mostly this entails inventive mixing of percussive, often tuneful, electronic tracks. The March instalment of the Lounge, though, featured Peter Rehberg, who flew in from Vienna with his "infernal digital mixer". He played a set of brooding ambient music which intensified into a prolonged sonic assault. This unrelenting noise-attack threatened to smash glasses and eardrums—but only a few Loungers left. When it subsided, its perpetrator took a bow to applause from the willing victims.

Other gatherings are smaller, and literally underground. The Wireless is a weekly night of eclectic electronica and alternative music held in a tiny cellar bar beneath a bistro in Covent Garden. A nightly venue is the Global Cafe in Soho, which hosts the Global Channel, an "internet pirate radio station". Admission to this cafe is free; six nights a week DJs and mixers provide the techno/drum&bass/electronica which is also sent out "live" on the internet. The Global Channel website (www: theglobalchannel.com) claims 80,000 hits daily, its international virtual audience far outstripping its London non-virtual one.

The Global Cafe is also the venue, once a month, of The Sprawl. Hosted for the last two years by two musician/artists calling themselves Si-(cut).db and Bit Tonic, The Sprawl is an adventurous multimedia gathering. Music naturally leads the way, provided by DJs and live musicians, supplemented by performance art, experimental films and visuals, and internet-based events. There is also a record label, The Sprawl Imprint, with a number of CD releases to its credit. One of these, *The Broken Voice*, is a compilation of tracks by artists whose brief was to mutate the human voice into electronica. The efforts range from the haunting to the celebratory, slivers of voice heavily treated and taking their place in an electronic landscape.

The March chapter of The Sprawl featured a presentation by the multimedia group Audiorom. Their installation work *Trigger Happy* is a round table suggesting a futuristic coffee-table. It glows with images projected from above by video; around its perimeter are 11 light sensors which, when covered by hand, trigger sound samples as well as altering the images. But the primary sense here is aural: with just the basic beat as a given track, up to eleven participants compose the musical event by throwing their hand, rhythmically, into the ring.

Trigger Happy was a great success at The Sprawl; more than a mere novelty or game, it demonstrated the potential of an interface based on sound. The inherently communal nature of sound made for a refreshing break from the solitary screen-based point-and-click interface; here the users, ranged around an electronic round table, interacted as members of a group—and what's more, they loved it.

A week later, Audiorom opened their installation at the ICA. *Trigger Happy* was again a crowd-pleaser, as were two other more subtle works. Each installation engaged multiple users; each also engaged the senses in complex interactions. They are multilevelled works in progress: hand gestures trigger both an unfolding electronic painting and an audio composition. The senses of touch, vision and hearing are in continuous interplay, but as their name implies, Audiorom put the emphasis on sound.

The uncharitable might point to the toylike nature of these works, yet their beauty and sophistication reach beyond the arcade. At any rate, the 10 members of Audiorom describe themselves as a "bunch of playful designers, musicians, technicians and artists"; the sense of play is celebrated, thankfully without irony. Their approach, evident on a newly released CD-ROM with visuals designed by Neville Brody's Research Studios, invites audio-inspired interaction. In a new media art world where interactivity is more often a buzz-word than a reality, Audiorom have found the key to communal interaction: sound.

The Sprawl: www.dfuse.com/sprawl/
Audiorom: www.audiorom.com

March 10 1998

Dear Editors

In her piece on Code Red in your February-March 1998 edition ("Radical re-coding") Kathy Cleland wrote "Also dealing with themes of surveillance and privacy was Australian-based Zina Kaye's *(Humble Under Minded) Psychic Rumble Part 2* which recorded and broadcast over the internet ambient sounds and mutated snatches of conversation from The Performance Space Gallery."

This raises an interesting question about what is "ambient" sound? Does it imply sound which is not constructed or fabricated—'naturally occurring'; or even sound that is 'electronic music' popularised by Brian Eno and interpreted by The Orb et al? Does it refer to something that exists in the background or can it be attributed to a disembodied thing?

In the case of *Psychic Rumble* I would say that yes, I did aim to use ambient sounds, but that they were the raw material re-constructed through an accelerometer measuring the frequency and vibration of the walls of The Performance Space. (An accelorometer only acts as a microphone in that the walls vibrate and it measures this movement). Thus measured vibration was re-fabricated, processed, sold for more etc.

In fact, the sound facilitated a kind of super-natural listening, bionic ears, that could hear beyond the space and tune into airplanes over the west side of Sydney, dogs in the park and so on, as well as the audience's response to Marko Peljhan's work (*178 EAST—ANOTHER OCEAN REGION*), for example. This is the activity of locating a source and magnifying it.

Moreover, the work aimed to examine the subject position within a broadcast context and bring it into the foreground for discussion. Not only is the artist being framed in the performative/gallery space but is also identifying with a political motivation: representation on the air-waves through aesthetic innovation.

I enclose a transcript of a talk I gave for Code Red which outlines my perception of the work. Of course, there is always another reading: a distinguished gentleman had a listen, smiled broadly and said that I had made "instant atmosphere" for lonely browsers.

Yours sincerely,

Zina Kaye

North to tomorrow

Vikki Riley reviews CDs

***The Rough Guide to West Africa, North Africa* series**
RGNET 1002, RGNET 1011
Distributed through New World

The Spirit of Hardesertrance
Compilation, DJ Brian
mm80075-2
Moonshine, distrib. Collossal

Big Noise 2
Another Mambo Inn Compilation
HNCD 1400
Rykodisc, distrib. Festival

Goldie, *Saturnzreturn*
ffrr 828990-2
Polydor, distrib. Polygram

Rik Rue, *Sample/Shuffle/Interplay*
XCD044
Extreme, distrib. Donut

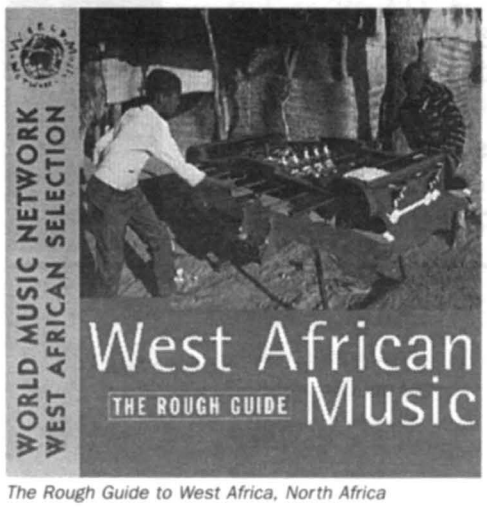
Junkie XL, *Saturday Teenage Kick*
RR8792-2
Roadrunner, distrib. Sony Music

Paul Morley's sleeve notes for New Order's *Best of* from 1994: "Where do they come from? The North; the North of everywhere, Kraftwerk and Sylvester, Eno and the Velvet Underground, anarchy and tackiness, machines and glitter..."

Or recall last year's *Dancing in the Street* with Arthur Baker at the desk bringing up the hand clap and dirty pulse on 'Confusion' and unleashing the cut minutes later at New York's Danceteria. Now, New Order's electro pop seems not so much a vanguard trans Atlantic dialogue between technologised music cultures but a moment when its language of digital effects—the sequencer patterns, samples, beats, volume surges, dissolves and vanishing points—came to the fore as utopian 'express yourself' mediums for the personal to speak, imagine, feel, relate, work out the future. Since then Music's hold on digital outer space has seen the endless soundscaping of *possible* techno futures, a return of the Instrumental with its in-built borderless narratives and overriding sentiments of shared community listening space.

That shared space is, naturally, the dance floor, but the dance floor has moved back to the living room, out to the wilderness; the ascendancy of the DJ as scene changer and sound conductor means that any space can be 'pumped up', made live. There's Techno dance music aplenty out there and instead of becoming monocultural it's turning out to be culturally specific as the remixers search for rare grooves to process.

The Rough Guide series of compilations are, like the books, high quality anthropological takes from Music's more ancient production centres, remastered and collated alongside detailed notes and original LP cover art. Funky Blue Note reissues abound these days, but the raw jazz and soul fusion of the 70s is none heavier than on *West African Music* with its killer Malian



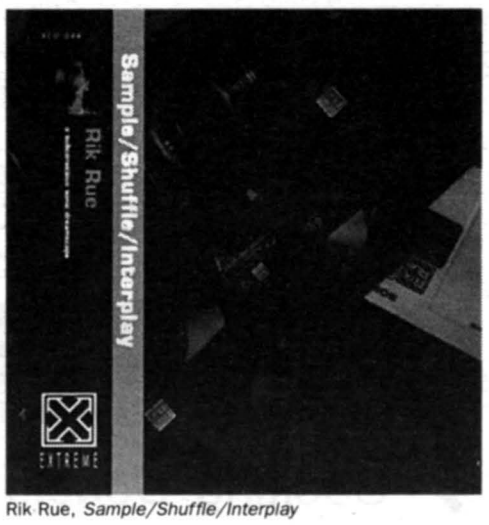
The Rough Guide to West Africa, North Africa

Super Rail Band cut 'Foliba' or Senegal's Orchestra Baobab's Afro-Cuban inspired 'Utru Horas'. *The Music of North Africa* is more contemporary dance, urban disco for the region's underclass with Rai cuts from Cheb Mami and Kader or the Egyptian Nubian bopster Ali Hassan Kuban.

"You need a guide..." is the Rough Guide motto plucked from the old school, but no cultural translators or prestigious event is needed for these fine discs, just a sharp ear to pick up on the minutiae of complexities expanded in the speaker boxes of the home hi-fi; catch the hybrids if you can.

Hardesertrance is Rave culture remixes for, I presume, Southern Californians getting out to the Mojave Desert (or Dream Canyon as it's dubbed here) for serious spiritual business with titles like 'Ohm Sessions' and 'Pulse of Light'. Psychedelia doesn't come more programmed or site-specific than this and what sounds like a didgeridoo put through a dentist drill is just probably that.

For a less neurological destroying meltdown of First and Indigenous mythic worlds the dynamic DJ team headed by Gerry Lyesight from South London's now defunct Mambo Inn have created a second compilation to match the success of *Big Noise 1*. It's a common complaint of those hostile to Womad culture that forcing the village pulse through the synthetic cyphers of speaker reproduction ruins the authenticity label but this disc proves that the wavelengths can run in syncopation, heighten the message, expand the ear's spectrum to take in obscured harmonies, timbres, rhythms that machines just can't create alone without resorting to the Trance button. Carlinhos Brown's Timbalada percussion anthem 'Beija Flor' for example, is the post-Marley fraternity's big beat writ large with a lilting, half spoken vocal hook which uncovers an altogether different, organic ecstasy; Senegalese mbalax rhythms see Africando out-do the Afro Cuban Allstars with a gravelly Latin tropicalia; Jephte Guillame crosses Haitian melodies with New



Rik Rue, *Sample/Shuffle/Interplay*

York house; Jazz Jamaica re-work Duke Ellington's 'Caravan' as techno ska. And while only a chosen few made it to the actual venue, The Mambo Inn 'project' was a rare instance of white folk actually facilitating what will eventually be a seismic shift in just who gets to use new technology—djembe girls down at Bondi, are you listening, your time is nearly up.

There's something freaky though going on in Goldie's space, an abstract, ethereal, almost Jungian zone for identity relocation. Despite its impressive and sophisticated experimentalism (a double album of extreme electronic 'infinities' unheard of since Cluster), *Saturnzreturn* takes us straight back to the stylistic implosions of the self which characterised the fall of the 70s Rock megastar, making for a fresh, predictably leaden but fascinating rehashing of the thematic 'concept' album format. The opening track, 'Mother', begins the opus with a lush, icy topography which recalls the long 'scene' preludes to 'Station to Station', 'Diamond Dogs', 'Warsaw', an androgynous voice emerges, 'I can't be my mother'. Later on Bowie himself lays down a vocal track as blur effect, emanating from some invisible vacuum of the present, likewise Noel Gallagher contributes retro guitar licks. The cover image, an art-brutish mask cum beetle carcass cum Darth Vader brooch describes the terrain, a primitive future in search of origins as well as connections with the unknown 'interiors' of the soul. If you're expecting more drum'n'bass fuelled acceleration and hyper inertia forget those generic 'wired' transit lounges we are used to visiting in that dance genre. Here we land in the beyond—the dusty red orbit of remote planets, the biologically designed Eden, the sci-fi Western, the Caribbean Rim, the Bertolucci East. Like LTJ Bukem's *Atlantis*, it's the post-colonial space where all Afronauts wanna end up, behind the control desk mixing down the master narrative.

It may seem strange that such a radical

Junkie XL, *Saturday Teenage Kick*

sound artist (and goldsmith—he makes gold teeth) like Goldie gets to speak via the corporate mass media while the massive proliferation of home studio recording is rapidly producing unlimited access to electronica's excesses. At some Melbourne music stores Midi systems are being bought up at a rate of 20 a day. Burning your own disc allows for self cataloguing, just add marketing and invent a career status. Sydney sound genie Rik Rue has long operated within this private pleasure dome of manipulating found and environmental sounds, amassing veritable libraries of recordings made in a variety of venues (the bush, the factory, the street, the milk bar) and processing them as collages of atoms, neurons, particles of noise which collide and merge like an unstoppable pyrotechnics demo. Released on the eve of Rue's departure to his next performance venue—the Fascist stadium of Nuremberg—*Sample/Shuffle/Interplay* takes on the mini disc as the sample medium par excellence, allowing him to incorporate his improvisation and jazz sensibilities into a wild and delirious space of multiple tiers and streams, where the cacophonics of grabs and bytes of all kinds are cooked up as a pot of burps, glitches, scratches, stutters, interrupted announcements, a distant cousin of Negativland's *A Big 10-8*. Culture jamming though doesn't seem to be Rue's agenda, there's too much playful irony at work, like the 'borrowed' Sony Disc logo on the cover or titles like 'My Life with Speed'; there's a real embrace of a technological space in which to dream, free associate, test out the subconscious.

Anyone out there remember Chrome, the West Coast duo who in the late seventies dared to suggest that Heavy Metal could be an ideal framework to 'comment' on an encroaching scientific machine age of mutants, androids, wasted flesh and chemically induced states? Queensland (?) based massive Junkie XL excavate the story in full force, metaphors blazing ahead to

Big Noise 2

evoke a *Crash*-like wrecking yard of down-on-the-street powder rage of deftly managed pop genres; hip hop, Euro-electro Rock, LA Deathrock , 'Ardkore Techno, Goth disco, Scandinavian speed Metal. Junkie XL tends to make mainstream downers like The Prodigy look like puppets, their relentless Beastie Boy rantings and chantings of 'Underachievers', 'No remorse' or 'Future in computer hell' is scintillating stuff. Big American underground Rock acts like Nine Inch Nails have trotted out this kind of Bataille meets the apocalypse for ages, Britgoth institutions like the Sisters of Mercy ditto and while the title track hints at a possible Michael Hutchence (yikes!) legacy in singing style, Junkie XL are one of the very few local Rock acts to integrate a passion for the heavy and the dark alongside a futurist manifesto, the North as corrupted streetscape of no exits.

Sport

TEE OFF

with Vivienne Inch

How comforting it is to know that as the nation plays hit and giggle, the keen minds of our sportspeople are on the ball. In a photo opportunity this month Cathy Freeman and Arthur Tunstall buried the hatchet. Though the silly old duffer still refuses to admit he was wrong, Cathy knows that this display of public affection is Mylanta to the nation's indigestion over reconciliation. After all, she was the one who set the PM's 1998 agenda when, accepting her trophy as Australian of the Year, she said she didn't know anything about politics, she only knew how to run fast. We've had Greg Norman doing damage control for the pants man in the White House. In the unseemly business in the Gulf that threatened the Olympics, Richard Butler caddied magnificently for Michael Knight, clearing the way for Kofi Arnan to play through. And what dragged drugs off the headlines at the Commonwealth Games? "Keiran Perkins: What to do about China". So all you cynics who thought the boy wonder was an empty vessel for endorsements, *that's* what he's doing as he ploughs through the chlorine. He's thinking his way through the problems of grafting capitalism onto an agrarian economy, what to do with insurgents besides shooting them. More recently, between laps, Keiran has no doubt paused to consider whether to unhinge new east-west economic relationships by asking Disney how much longer they're going to hold onto all the prints of *Kundun*.