Real Time

free

25

On Screen

DEBRA DAWES, *Unfinished Business*, 1998, acrylic on canvas, 202.5 x 367.5cm

Indigenous culture
New media arts

Hypertexts Wilson and Glass
Richard Flannagan Goodbye 21.C
Elmore Leonard The Bridge
London's ICA Artist run spaces
Synergy Seymour Group
Sea Change or short change?

Australia's innovative arts bi-monthly

June–July 1998 http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/

Indigenous and non-indigenous writers and artists come together in *RealTime* and *OnScreen* to show the powerful conjunction of art and politics in an Indigenous culture's attempts to preserve itself against great odds, whether in Jo Holder's account of joint black and white protest through art, or in Djon Mundine's historical sketch that tells of the Yirrkala interplay of art and political action: "The local people painted a set of small paintings and typed out a set of statements saying, in a sense, God gave this land to us, we've always lived here, so how come someone can take it away from us? The petitions were glued to the centre of three of the barks. One of the visiting committee, Kim Beazley's father, reportedly typed this dictated statement for them. It's in a glass case in Parliament House." Debra Dawe's painting, reproduced (not in its original blue) on our front cover says it all. It says sorry, but the word threatens to evaporate, evokes the difficulty of speaking either because of prejudice, masculine fear of compassion or because of semantic difference—a Wwestern, English language notion of 'sorry' as guilt at odds with an Indigenous, Aboriginal English 'sorry' as compassion and shared grieving. Who would have thought it to be so hard a language barrier to cross.

The launch of the Australia Council's New Media Arts Fund at Melbourne's Open Channel in May signalled the end of a period of uncertainty, at least at the level of policy, over the funding of artists engaged in work with new media and across artforms. Interviewed in this edition of *RealTime*, the New Media Arts Fund Chair, John Rimmer, opens up an area of fruitful debate by declaring, "I have a very strong belief that New Media Arts shouldn't be trying to establish itself as some kind of new artform...I actually see the primary purpose of the New Media Arts fund being research and development..." Sound artists and those working at the deep end of the new technology and those producing the oddest of hybrids might want to argue that they *are* generating new artforms that other funds might not care for, let alone comprehend. This is something more than research and development. That quibble aside, it is great after all this time to have a Fund with a licence to explore, and there is no doubt that it's researching and developing where some traditional artform funds have on occasion feared to tread. After all, there had been a moment of panic a few years ago when some board committees wanted back their dollars that had been re-allocated to the then Hybrid Arts committee (often in fact dollars following artists to a new, more appropriate funding home).

It'll be interesting in several years time to see how the New Media Arts Fund has defined itself through its funding patterns, and how much the traditional artform funds have come to more systematically accommodate what is now regarded as new. The New Media Arts Fund is certainly no slacker when it comes to promoting the work it has supported, its launch grabbed media attention and the fund strongly represented a sampling of its artists at the 3rd Performing Arts Market in Adelaide.

RealTime, a recipient of New Media Arts triennial funding, celebrates the launch of the New Media Arts Fund with a section featuring the John Rimmer interview, a report on new media at the Performing Arts Market, and responses to Theatre of Relativity's *Macbeth*, Company in Space's *Mediated*, the Arts Edge exhibition in Perth, and, in London, the new Philip Glass-Robert Wilson 'digital opera' *Monsters of Grace* and some delirious nights of media ups and downs at London's ICA (see also "Performance worries in Blair's nursery", page 34). As John Rimmer said in his speech at the launch, *RealTime* "is not always the bearer of good news", but he acknowledged it as vital for informed debate. From its inception, *RealTime* has featured the work of artists in new media and across artforms with commitment, passion and constructive criticism, but most of all with a sense of the works as experienced.

Although the Australia Council has achieved a new triennial funding agreement in the recent federal budget, basic funding has stayed flat (ie declining in real terms) and spending on initiatives (emerging artists, regional arts, major festivals and contemporary music export) has not been renewed. However, on Radio National's *Arts Today*, Arts Minister Senator Richard Alston told Australia Council Chair Dr Margaret Seares he would review the initiative spending—a possible election offer? With Senator Alston busy worrying at the 'Sodom and Gomorrah' of television and radio, and bluntly dismissive of GST concerns in the arts community, he doesn't exactly inspire confidence. Nor were budget funds allocated towards arts activities for the Olympics, the Millennium and the Centenary of Federation. All we can expect then is the Cultural Olympiad continuing to piggyback on existing arts ventures, many already relying on Australia Council funding and many more living in (diminishing) expectation of doing so.

We farewell with many thanks our advertising sales manager of the last two years, Sari Järvenpää, and wish her well in her art (sculpture and painting), and we welcome musician and performer Gail Priest as she takes on this challenging role.

With this our 25th edition of *RealTime* we celebrate four years of publication and look to the future with our on-line firsts. Visit our website from Monday June 8 to read articles that will make their first appearance in *RealTime* on-line, and subsequently in print; others will appear exclusively on our website. Next in *RealTime*, our annual survey of the arts in tertiary education and 6 pages celebrating *Next Wave*.

RealTime on-line only features

go to http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/
Kirsten Krauth on the Princess Diana of Cultural Studies
Josephine Wilson on the net effect of net-writing
Virginia Baxter encounters Marina Abramovic at the MCA

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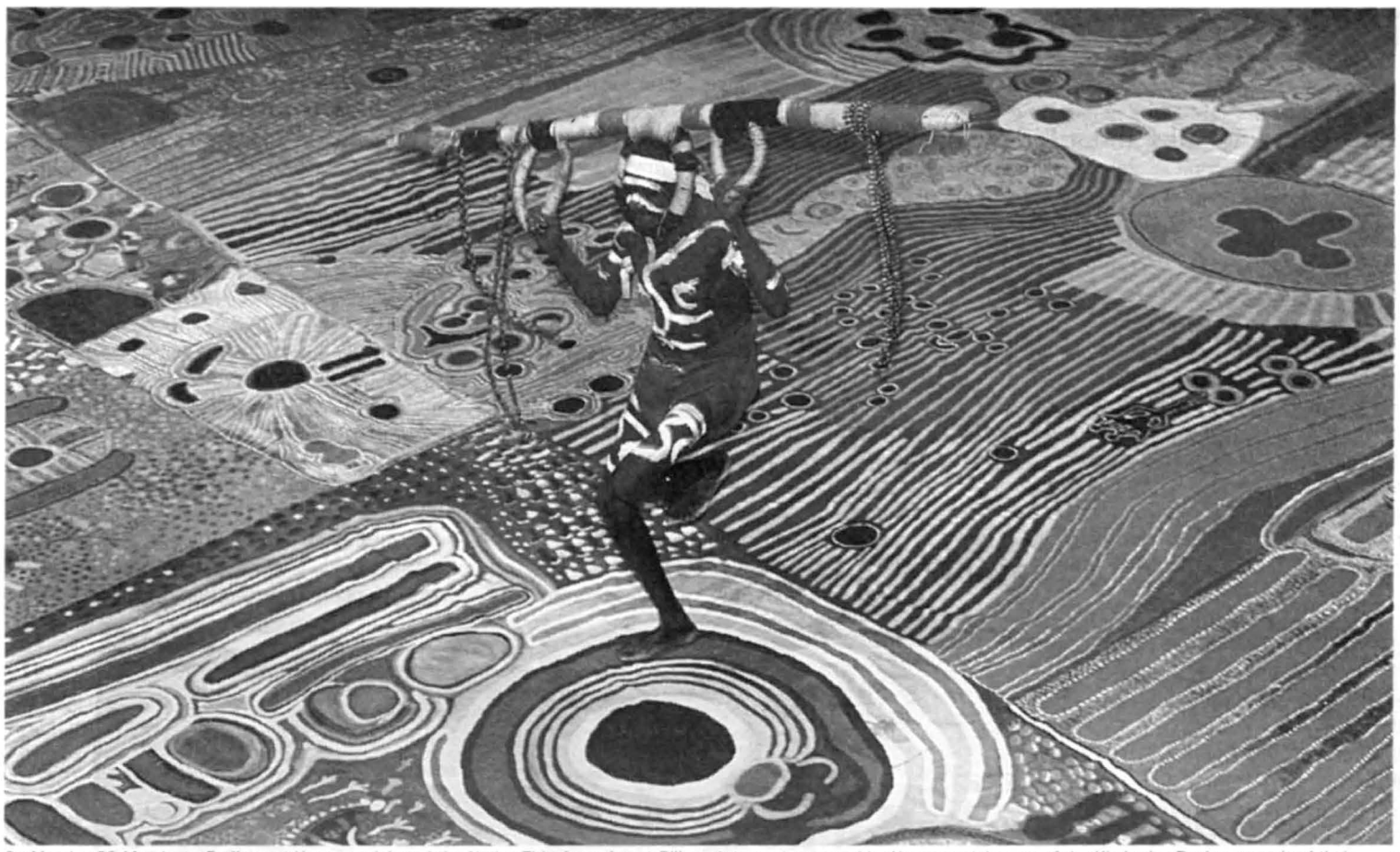
Artists defending Wik

Jo Holder tells the *AAAR!* story



On Monday 30 March, as Parliament House re-debated the Native Title Amendment Bill, a statement prepared by Ngurrara claimants of the Kimberley Region comprised their huge 8m x 10m native title painting, containing the works of 70 artists. The event, *Minyarti Wangki Ngajukura Ngurrarajangka (This is the word from my country)*, was held at the ANU and hosted by the Kimberley Land Council. photo: Richard Briggs, The Canberra Times

"Silence is never golden." This truism was one of 350 plus message sticks sent to Canberra by Australian Artists Against Racism or *AAAR!* (pronounced as a pop-art roar), in support of Multiculturalism, Reconciliation, Native Title and to oppose the Government's overturning of the High Court's Wik decision. "A picture is worth a thousand words" may well have been another. The sticks were the centrepiece to the *Sea of Hands* installed by Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation, in front of Parliament House on Sunday 12 October 1997.

This AIDS Quilt-like panorama symbolised a 'rainbow nation' by rendering a multi-coloured Aboriginal flag. The message sticks added a wealth of detail and invention to reward a meander through the individually signed but nonetheless same-ish hands (some 300,000 have been paid for and signed, a staggering feat of co-ordination). Works ran the gamut. Many were collaborations, such as Hetti Perkins and Ace Bourke's complimentary all-black and all-white numbers, Elinor Pickard and Peter Buckley's text pair 'jannawi: with me' and 'jannawigu: for me', and 3 linked and beautifully crafted Rainbow Serpent sticks (in black, red and yellow) by an inseparable group of La Perouse artists, Tracey Cooley, Connie Brown, Lindsay Holden and Lois. Works like Gunther Hojdyssek's sculpted message incorporating part of the Berlin wall and Christine Cornish's perfectly formed mirror, combined in a display of intellectual diversity that made the point that unless we accept the whole of our heritage, Australian art can never have any real identity.

Many Sydney readers would have seen the 'Wik Sticks' on their spectacular third outing on Bondi Beach. However, their initial launch was by Rhoda Roberts (artistic director, Festival of The Dreaming) and Indigenous curators Hetti Perkins (Venice Biennale) and Doreen Mellor (director, Flinders University Art Museum), as *Field of Dreams: Message Sticks for Native Title*, installed in the grounds outside the S.H. Ervin Gallery to accompany the touring exhibition *Native Titled Now* for Sydney's Festival of The Dreaming. For Roberts, this was part of a bold and successful series of moves to politicise her festival and address the marginalisation of Indigenous and non-Anglo groups and possible ramifications on cultural promotions selling the Olympics. Painted wooden message sticks are a traditional Aboriginal way of relaying vital information. *AAAR!*'s message sticks commemorated the 1988 Long March for Freedom and Justice from the Top End to Point Kurnell, the national focus of Indigenous protests over Bicentennial celebrations. A message stick originating from Elders of the Northern Land Council was delivered thanking other Aboriginal groups for their support in helping the Arnhem Land communities with the land rights movement. As Hetti Perkins pointed out at the time of the launch: "last year the idea of a mob of artists defending the High Court's Wik decision would have seemed laughable. Now it is a necessity."

The Canberra 'painting' did make it to CNN and was syndicated by AAP et al, making appearances in major metropolitan newspapers over Europe. (And possibly elsewhere, but we have no way of knowing.) Quite an achievement for a motley crew.

When Margaret Roberts mooted *AAAR!* with Liz Coates and myself in December 1996, our challenge was to emphasise the fact that art is useful and can make a point quickly, sharply and memorably. Art can be difficult to decipher, but photographs of images have the remarkable facility of passing the 'burden of interpretation' to the viewer, ie of not hectoring people. And in an electoral battle for 'hearts and minds' we hoped to come up with a few schemes that could put this to use (and prove that good politics is compassion, not manipulation).

We were guided by examples from Aboriginal artists who had long been using art as evidence for land claims. The statement prepared by 70 Ngurrara claimants of the Kimberley region, comprising a huge 8m x 10m native title painting and song and dance event, 'Minyarti Wangki Ngajukura Ngurrarajangka', presented on Monday 30 March, as Parliament House re-debated the Native Title Amendment Bill, is only the most recent and spectacular of these revolutionary demonstrations. We were aware also of the Australian tradition of artists' activism from 1930s and 1940s campaigns like the Aborigines Progressive Association, Movement Against War and Fascism, Spanish Relief Committee and the Australian Council for Civil Liberties, through to 'broad left' movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Inspirational recent examples included the Tiananmen Square and Chile protest exhibitions in Sydney, and activities organised by 'Sahmat', an anti-religious fundamentalism initiative by Indian artists (as was Surendran Nair's chronicle of these events).

Our first announcement was a statement of principles paid for by 500 artists, art historians, curators and writers from around the country, and appearing in Murdoch's monstrously expensive *Weekend Australian* (April 26-27, 1997) under the supportive umbrella of the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance and alongside Indigenous Arts Organisations (organised by Chris Bonney). *AAAR!*'s first art was in response to a request from Apunipima Cape York Health Council, who had seen the advert, for artists to add to 300-odd pieces painted by Wik and Thayere schoolkids, for a work heading to the National Reconciliation Convention in Melbourne (May 26-28, 1997). Despite the notice of a week, the response from 50 or so Sydney and Melbourne artists was magnificent and an immense work filled 'Kennett's barn.'

Soon after, a significant 'art summit' comprising Ace Bourke, Jan Batten, Liz Coates, Hetti Perkins, Fiona MacDonald, C. Moore Hardy, Djon Mundine, Michael Riley, Margaret Roberts, Lachlan Warner and myself (apologies for the omission of any names), came up with a creditable list of art happenings. The first idea presented to the National Indigenous Working Group and approved was *Hands* (Fiona MacDonald's idea of representing the positive/negative of cave painting).

Our endgame event is (if all else fails), to request that artists in all major galleries cover their artwork with grey conservators cloth for a specified time (Joan Kerr and Djon Mundine). Hopefully, this won't have to happen.

The exhibition *Co-Existence*, opened by Dr Charles Perkins for National Sorry Day (May 26, 1998), is the final 'gallery version' of these events. As the instigator of the Freedom Ride and passionate advocate of the philosophy of Self-Determination and an author of so much the Howard Government is destroying, we were grateful to have Perkins agree to talk. Like the Freedom Rides, *Co-Existence* will travel and it will be added to (Perkins suggested it should end up in Kings Hall, Parliament House). As Perkins wryly and resonantly remarks in his 1975 autobiography *A Bastard Like Me*, in Australia "the past happens to be just about yesterday."

Jo Holder is a curator, historian and occasional writer. She is the director of the S.H. Ervin Gallery, National Trust NSW.

We are not useless

Djon Mundine talks about Indigenous art, its traditions and influences

This article is an edited version of a talk given by Djon Mundine at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art about the history of the struggle for land rights and identity in relation to Indigenous art. It also depicts the complex, shifting relationship between Aboriginal artists, governments authorities, religious organisations, funding bodies, business and the art market. Not long before Mundine delivered this lunchtime talk to a small audience of gallery-goers, Germaine Greer's comments about the exploitation of allegedly accommodating Indigenous artists by the hungry art market had made the front pages.

As part of its Festival of The Dreaming contribution Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art has mounted two particularly poignant exhibitions—*Bark Paintings from Yirrkala* and *Tiwi Prints: A Commemorative Exhibition 1969-1996*. With the Native Title debate in full swing the exhibition was named *Native Title*.

The whole of this artform—painting on bark, these large bark paintings, the whole history of this place, Yirrkala—is tied up with Native Title. It's about Aboriginal people claiming or, more correctly, reaffirming ownership of their land in various ways. The Tiwi Print show equally displays how identity remains a statement of Indigenous cultural expression.

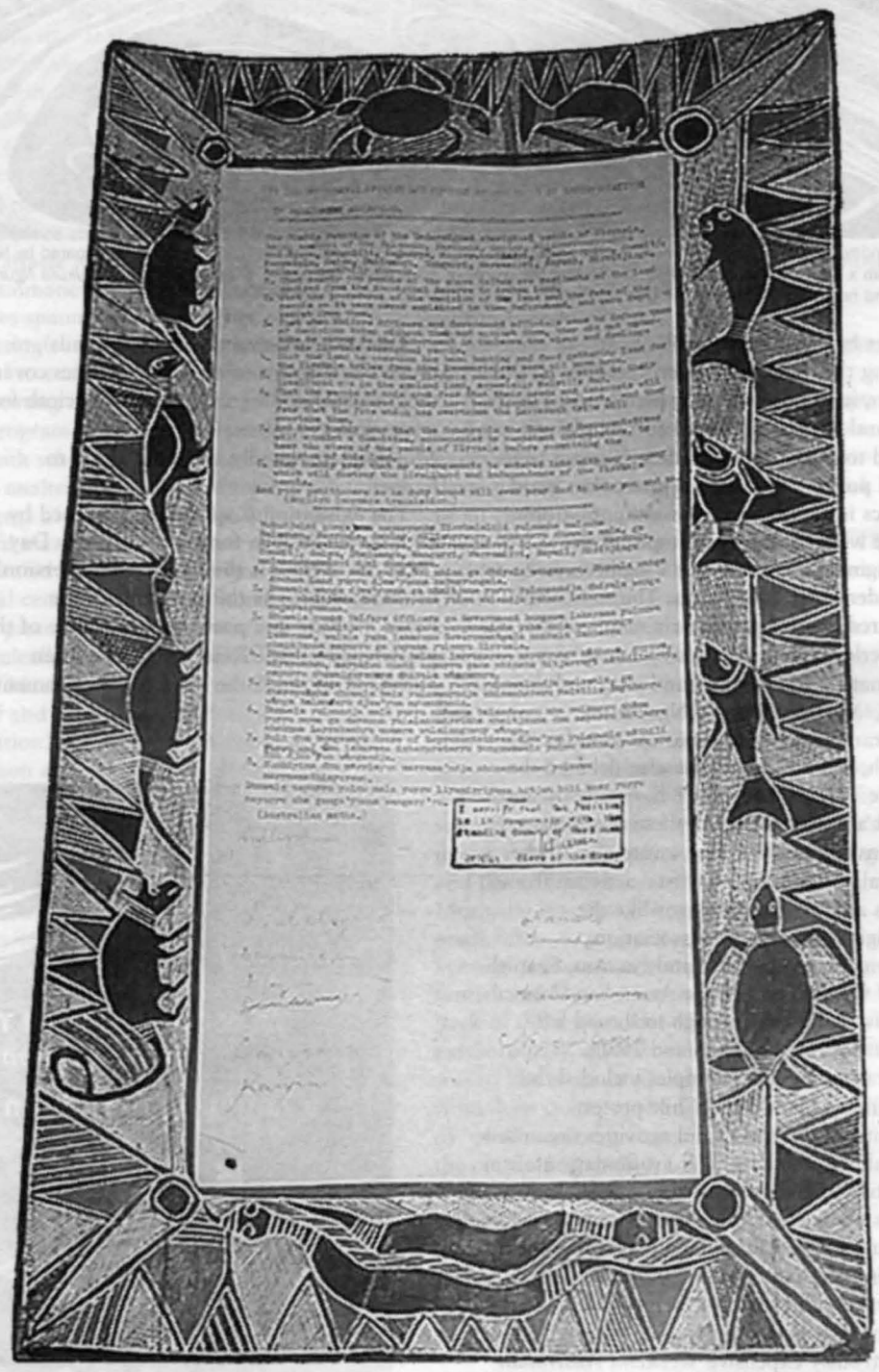
The Yirrkala bark paintings come from North-East Arnhem Land, about 600 miles east of Darwin. It sits right on the Gulf of Carpentaria in a really beautiful tropical setting. Yirrkala is the name of a creek that runs through the town. It's one of the most beautiful places on Earth with this big freshwater creek that runs down to this beach. On one side is *Dhuwa, Rirrarrtjingu*; the other side's *Gumatj* and related to Yirritja clan's land.

In 1932, in 2 separate incidents, Yolngu of this area murdered several Japanese fishermen and white Australian beachcombers on the Arnhem Land coast. A police patrol sent to investigate acted aggressively and this resulted in the Yolngu killing one of the officers. This prompted the Administrator of the Northern Territory to call for "a punitive expedition" to teach the natives of East Arnhem Land a lesson. The irony of this call for a pogrom in liberal democratic Australia at this time of a rise of fascism in Europe should not be lost. In fact, the Administrator's statement was later decried in the press and a more conciliatory approach adopted.

An anthropologist, Donald Thomson, who was sent to investigate the murders was also to write a report. He visited Yirrkala Mission in 1935 and collected bark paintings. He made a number of recommendations, among them that a reserve should be set up called Arnhem Land where Aboriginal people could live. Another suggestion was for a specialist government department to be set up to exclusively look after Aboriginal people. He also recommended that if there were to be Christian missions and missionaries, they should only be allowed to try to convert people, not to actually build towns. So if the Yolngu shifted from this camp to that camp, the missionaries would have to shift with them. Now that would have placed the missionaries in an inferior position.

What followed was the continuation of the station practice where Yolngu gathered for many reasons, first was probably curiosity and then to obtain rations—tobacco, tea, flour, sugar. There were reported instances where you only received your ration if you attended church. This placed the missionaries in a superior position, controlling the supply of these 'gifts of civilisation.' The missions had in a strange way become 'safe' places where disputes and vendettas were kept to a minimum, so many Yolngu also came to be sheltered.

When the first missionary, Reverend Wilbur Chaseling, went there in 1934, he noticed that men were painting on bark, largely on the inside walls of their bark houses but also for ceremonial purposes. And he found there was a market of sorts for these 'curios' or 'antiquities' among ethnographic museums and collectors of primitive art. During the Second World War the mission stations were bombed by the Japanese and an Australian Airforce base was constructed near the mission on the Gove Peninsula. The trade continued at Yirrkala although most of the buyers (mostly servicemen) were more interested in spears, spearthrowers and weavings than paintings.



Yirrkala petition, Parliament House

After the war, successive anthropologists and other groups came to visit, including a group from *National Geographic* and the market in paintings started to develop such that they set up a missionary whose work was entirely devoted to the buying and selling of art. At Yirrkala, missionary workers like Rupert Kentish, Reverend Gordon Symons and later Douglas Tuffin, playing the role of art agent and adviser, started to develop innovations like the sticks at the top of the bark paintings to keep them flat. They got people to mix adhesives into their ochres so that the paint would stay on the bark. These were the sorts of things the customers were looking for.

Tuffin was selling enough that he was able to cover costs and also provide quite a large income for the artists in the community. From the late 50s to early 60s there's a record of these barks being sought by a number of people. Douglas Tuffin is recorded around that time as receiving a letter addressed to Mawalan Marika from Pablo Picasso with a little bit of money saying, "Please send me one of your paintings."

In the early 60s the Aboriginal people started to wake up to what was going on. There were all these survey teams coming in, people starting to build the town of Nhulunbuy, and they realised that very shortly thousands of white people were going to be stuck next door to them. People thought that the whole of their society was about to change and they needed to do something to stem the influence of this outside world. They produced a number of letters to petition the National Parliament in Canberra. As a result, a select committee of Parliamentarians and public servants visited Yirrkala to investigate.

The local people painted a set of small paintings and typed out a set of statements saying, in a sense, God gave this land to us, we've always lived here, so how come someone can take it away from us? The petitions were glued to the centre of three of the barks. One of the visiting committee, Kim Beazley's father, reportedly typed this dictated statement for them. It's in a glass case in Parliament House. As a result of that petition, Parliament set up a court of enquiry which decided against the Aboriginal people. They didn't farm the land, therefore, they couldn't own it. As the judge said at the time, although they could belong to the land, the land did not belong to them—an interesting philosophical twist. That became such a ridiculous stance that there was a second court of enquiry and as a result in 1976 the Land Rights Act passed in the Northern Territory that gives Aboriginal people rights and ownership of land.

What also happened at the time was that all the religious leaders of the Yirrkala area sat down and painted two huge panels. One was the *Dhuwa*, or yin stories, and one was all the *Yirritja*, the yang stories, so to speak—in Aboriginal terms, the complete creation of the world. These were called the Yirrkala Church Panels because they were placed on either side of the altar like stained glass windows. But they were made in an attempt to actually show people the complete story before things changed. They knew that things were going to change dramatically once they had five thousand single white miners living right next door.

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Up until the end of the 60s the government was providing money through a number of welfare programs to the Christian churches in their role of caring for Yolngu. These programs were not really involved with art. The churches were given so many shillings per week at the missions to look after these people because Aboriginal people were wards of the state at that stage. After 1965, technically speaking, Aboriginal people became citizens of this country. In 1967, they actually got counted in the census as human beings instead of dogs or sheep, and there's a policy of self-determination adopted by government agencies. In the 70s a number of boards set up by the Australia Council including an Aboriginal Arts Board took up the role of providing money for the position of a dedicated art and craft adviser. Wandjuk Marika from Yirrkala was the first Chair of this Board. So the role of the missionary used to carrying on buying and selling art becomes a government funded position—though usually they became a paid missionary rather than a paid volunteer.

The Australia Council set up two streams, two ways to get this artwork out to the world. The churches had a person in the community encouraging the work and then they had a number of shops around Sydney, like the Bush Church Aid Society and New Guinea Primitive Art Gallery. They sold all this art and craft work from various missions, not only within Australia but throughout the Pacific and around the world. So when the Australia Council started to fund that position in the community, in a similar strategy, they funded a company called Aboriginal Arts and Crafts, known in the trade as "The Company" based in The Rocks in Sydney. There was The Collectors Gallery and a huge warehouse as well. They used to retail and wholesale to other shops around Australia and to galleries. I started to work for The Company in the 70s.

The idea was that this company would be a regulating body. It would force the whole game of marketing Aboriginal art up into a higher level. What it did was double the prices. They employed an Education Officer and worked very aggressively to get Aboriginal art into schools. The strategy was to get to the next generation. I was good at organising things so I became the Operations Manager which meant that I helped to send things to other shops, galleries and tourist shops. They were trying to lift the game, to get Aboriginal art into a fine art market. Art with a capital A.

They were also meant to make a profit. There was this huge tourist market. But they had big financial problems. These days, you'll read in the papers that there's something like $120 million worth of Aboriginal art leaving the country every year. Most of that, three-quarters of it I'd say, is actually in the tourist area—T shirts with Aboriginal designs and whatever—not quite what we're talking about here.

So up to the 70s all these things were driving people to paint large barks. Then you get a combination of these 2 things happening: this marketing company here that I was working for starts to influence things. You have someone employed full-time. At the marketing end, people are saying, Look, when an American tourist comes here, it costs too much for them to get these paintings home. What we need is smaller

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artworks. So there's a push for people to create what was called "suitcase art." There's a trend to scale down the paintings, to just have the shark, a pair of brolgas or pelicans or a little turtle that someone can take home and put on their mantelpiece. This was going on during the 70s and into the 80s. Then you get a reaction from the art advisers and from curators down here about seeing nothing more than what was basically high tourist art. I mean these were very fine paintings. It was just that they were made to be carried under someone's arm.

So you get the reaction against all that and in the 90s, a return to the scale you see here on the walls. Part of the reason for this is that during the 80s there's a really big lobby from Aboriginal groups and their art organisations for people to spend more money in supporting what they're now calling "an industry" worth millions of dollars. In Yirrkala they extend their art centre (tin shed) with a huge building alongside it which becomes the Buku-Larrngay Museum, opened by Gough Whitlam in 1988. It contains an historical set of paintings by artists who are now dead, also photographs of the area from anthropologists and other people. One of the first things they did was to take the Yirrkala Church Panels from the church and put them in the museum where they now have a special viewing space. These and the Petition in Parliament House are among the most important historical artworks in Australia's history. In fact, the Petition in the House in Canberra is placed alongside other supposedly important constitutional documents—a copy of the Magna Carta and a document signed by Queen Victoria giving her permission for us to become a nation in 1901. The Petition is the only truly Australia document there.

Back to the bark paintings. So you get this return to painting on this scale. Instead of doing only figurative work, there's a return to more "abstract" composition based on body design and covering the whole of the bark. In the 60s and 70s when an outside audience first started to really get into buying Aboriginal art and putting it into an Art context, people were encouraging Aboriginal artists to be more figurative in their work. It's a really ambiguous thing because that was the time when Abstract Expressionism really hit Australian art in a big way. But in the Aboriginal art world, in essence, people are saying, Look, paint the bird, paint the little fish, paint the kangaroo so we know what it is. In the 80s and 90s people are going back to painting in this more abstracted fashion which is really about body design, but in new broad fields of rippling colour and, most probably, you now have a wider and much more sophisticated audience that can accept and read these works.

The first record of paintings on bark in the Bathurst and Melville Island area came from Major Campbell who visited Melville Island in 1834 and wrote in his Geographical Memoir that he saw figures painted in white pipe clay on the walls of the Aboriginal bark shelters and reported one in particular as "being neatly and regularly done all over, resembling the cross-bars of a cell."

The same sorts of patterns can be seen in the Tiwi Prints in the next room. Tony Tuckson and Dr Stuart Scouggal had commissioned a set of ironwood Pukumani burial ceremony poles from this area in 1958 for the collection of the Art Gallery of NSW. You can see them there today in the Yiribana Gallery. Their placement in this institution provoked a debate concerning the modernity of Aboriginal art and its place in the modern fine art museum. The poles are covered in geometric patterns in ochre. These designs mirror the body decorations of Tiwi participant performers. The first prints were done with artist Madeleine Clear who started the print workshop in 1968-69.

The first woodblock prints on paper however are images of butterflies, fish, cranes and so on—different from the body designs which you see on the sculpture work of that decade and the present day. The woodblock project was really the initiative of the Catholic Bishop of Darwin who had been impressed with similar schemes run with the Inuit people in Canada. At first a church-run training program, the workshop attracted Australia Council support several years later. In the 90s when a community survey of lino cuts was completed, nearly all of them were abstract patterns; a return to these body designs.

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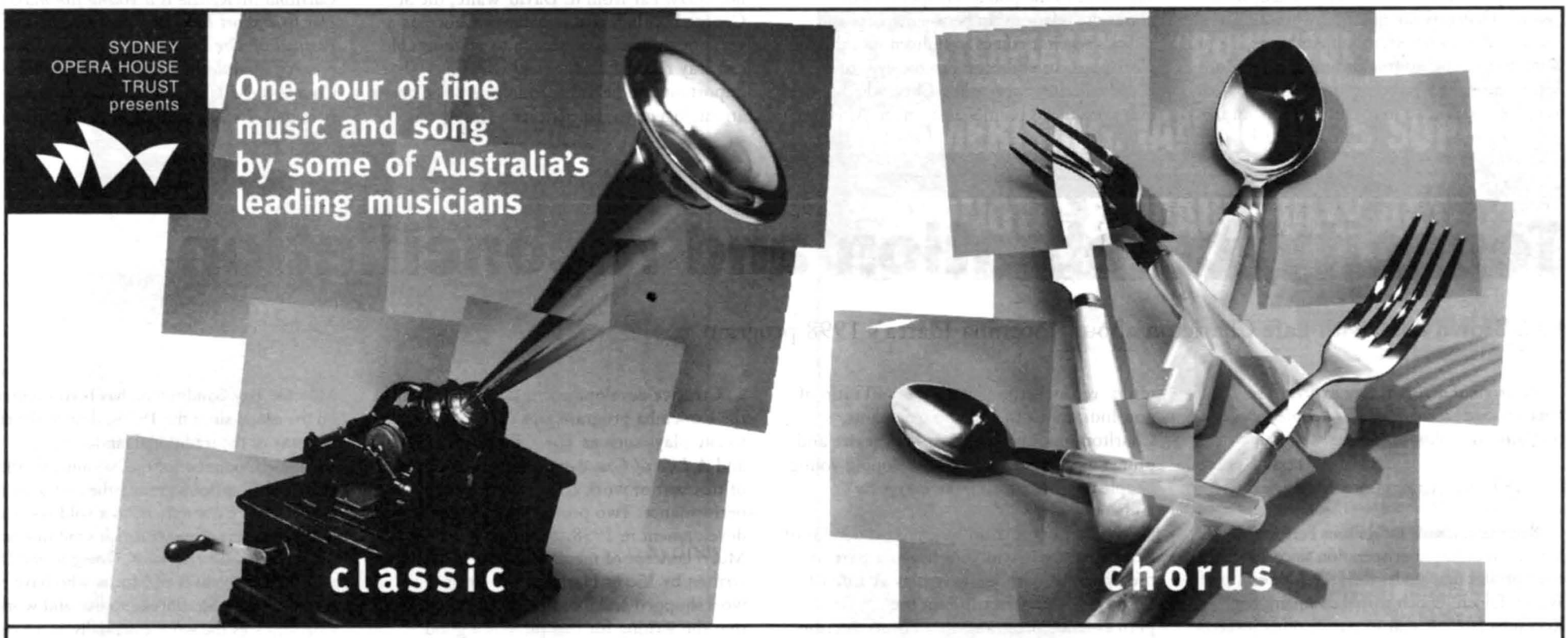
The title for this article was conceived from two statements: the title of an album *You Are Not Useless* by the Kulumindini Band from Elliot in the Northern Territory, and the other, Mick Dodson's opening speech for the *Native Born* exhibition at the MCA in which he spoke out against the negative stereotyping of Indigenous people as burdens on the taxpayer. We need to see the real contribution Indigenous people are making through their art, not only economically (which is considerable) but spiritually. The struggle of the Yirrkala people for land rights and the survival of Tiwi identity through their cultural expression enrich the lives of all of us.

Djon Mundine, formerly Senior Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, is now Curator of Aboriginal Art at the National Museum in Canberra.



Looking after your BUNjE

Director Catriona McKenzie talks about the making of a documentary about Anthony Mundine

Anthony Mundine playing for St George John Veage

Take one 22 year old man, give him 2 million dollars to play football for 3 seasons—roughly 18 months work. He's got the lot. The talent, the looks, the car—you name it. The world is his oyster and he wants to walk away from it all to box professionally. It's a brutal sport. You have to ask yourself, is he insane? That was my question when I started *BUNjE*, the documentary on Anthony Mundine, 'Choc' to friends and family. More apt, what is the psychology of this young man who has aroused so much attention from the media? I quickly found that opinions are definitely split.

At The Sporting Awards last year, Choc gave a speech about the importance of looking after your BUNjE (brother in the Bunjalung language) when you're out on the field. It was short and to the point, but spoke volumes about the relationship between sports and politics when it comes to Indigenous athletes. The speech brought tears to the eyes of Charlie Perkins who asked Choc whether he'd ever considered politics as a career. After politely declining, Choc said he realised the example he can set for young kids, but his eyes are firmly set on boxing. Choc's Mum, Lynn Mundine, recalled how at the age of 6, Choc looked up at his father and said "Dad you're Tony Mundine, and I'm Tony Mundine and I'm going to be better than you." She sighs and adds that she doesn't want Choc to box but she'll support him in whatever he wants to do.

Before we started shooting I had an interesting experience when I asked 2 high profile sporting commentators to consider being involved in the documentary. Their reaction was immediate: there is obviously something clinically wrong with Choc. Why else would he want to walk away from all he has (the money) to become a professional boxer. They said they couldn't possibly be involved, it would be like 2 smart arses putting shit on a sick dog. Pretty strong reaction I thought, maybe I'm onto something here, and kept going.

I spent a lot of time with Choc and he's not crazy. Far from it. David Waite, the St George Football coach, believes Choc has a very tough mental approach to winning. He can stay relaxed on the field which is important and he's able to improvise. Choc is an intelligent young man who simply has goals he wants to achieve, and speaks his mind.

Choc thinks the media have a problem with a young Aboriginal man standing up and articulating what *he* wants to do, not what anyone else thinks he *should* do. In many ways it is an affront to mainstream Australia to see a Koori man doing so well. It flies in the face of every stereotype they have about Indigenous Australians. There's another way of looking at it too. 'Success' becomes a strategy for survival in a country where Land Rights are hampered by the constipated ideology of the Howard government. Choc's Mum says it best: "Choc's not playing football because he's Koori, he's playing because he's one of the best." Some people find that hard to accept.

In terms of the process, *BUNjE* was interesting to make. Apart from the days when we used a crew, we gave Choc a DVC camera and let him run amok with that. The images he shot were great and gave an insight into his life that a crew could never have obtained. We'll use both DVC and SP footage with a thought track which will add to the intimacy of the film. We'll also use the archival material of Choc's father, Tony Mundine, one of the best boxers Australia's ever had, who retired undefeated in the 70s.

The whole experience of making *BUNjE* was great. I felt right at home with Choc's family who were very accepting of the crew. The St George players were also very easy to work with. One of the realisations I had was that sport these days is very much a business and a serious one at that. Choc knows how to play the game but he also knows his heart's desire, and if that flies in the face of convention, so be it.

BUNjE *is one of 10 half hour documentaries in the National Indigenous Documentary Fund 2. The various documentaries, as diverse as Indigenous Australia, will screen on ABC TV, dates to be announced.*

Catriona McKenzie is a young filmmaker. Her first short film, Box *screened at The Festival of The Dreaming last year. She recently completed* Rites of Passage *for* Compass *(ABC TV) which will screen in July, and is currently finishing* BUNjE.

Tenacity, celebration and reconciliation

E.C. Brown talks with Lafe Charleton about Kooemba Jdarra's 1998 program

Aboriginal artists today express the tenacity and strength of the people who bore the brunt of colonisation.

Rhoda Roberts,
1997 Rex Cramphorn Memorial Lecture

Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts have been in full-time operation since 1993, most of that time under the artistic direction of Wesley Enoch. Enoch parted company with Kooemba late last year to pursue other projects and his replacement, Lafe Charlton, is no stranger to the company, having served as actor, director, designer, educationalist and board member since its inception. In collaboration with other Kooemba regulars, including Deborah Mailman, Enoch and Charlton have created and maintained a vigorous and committed profile in Queensland, interstate and overseas—a perfect illustration of Rhoda Roberts' comment.

Kooemba has refined its practise to encompass 4 areas of operation: workshops and training, new works, performance, and touring and regional development. An ongoing component of the company's work, the workshop and training program operates as an outreach facility to schools and community groups to promote cultural awareness through the arts. Charlton says the aim of this self-funded component of the program is to promote that most nebulous of terms, reconciliation. With a 60/40 ratio of non-Indigenous to Murri participants, Charlton sees the workshops in theatre and drama as a means of both developing young people and broadening the company's audience base.

Whilst Enoch is no longer at the helm of Kooemba, he is still very much a part of the program with his new play *A Life of Grace and Piety* headlining the performance program. In a co-production with Just Us Theatre Ensemble (JUTE), this production premiered at the Cairns Civic Theatre before travelling to the Cremorne Theatre in Brisbane. The product of a commission and creative development in 1997, *A Life of Grace and Piety* will also be directed by Enoch.

In 1998, the New Works Program will be showcased in the performance of *Black Shorts*, a season of 3 short plays at the Metro Theatre as part of the Brisbane Festival. With works by Glen Shea, Cathy Craigie (whose play *Murri Love* has already been produced by Kooemba) and an as yet unnamed writer, *Black Shorts* is the first outing for an event which Charlton hopes will become biennial. He believes this aspect of the program is vital to the survival of Murri theatre, as both an avenue to production for writers and a bridge into mainstream theatre.

Creative development is a strong aspect of the Kooemba program and Charlton is keen to cite plays such as *The 7 Stages of Grieving* and *A Life of Grace and Piety* as examples of this sort of work coming to fruition in performance. Two projects are slated for development in 1998. *Business*, based on the Murri concept of men's business, is being written by Victor Hart, yet has been workshopped collaboratively. Charlton says that the writing for this piece is a good example of how Murri work reflects their society, in that hierarchy is not an essential part of the working process. Whilst *Business* is not about to expose any traditional secrets, it will examine the role that Murri men had in traditional society and what has been both lost and gained. The dual focus of *Business* will be the initiation procedures of "turning boys into men" and the different 'hunting' mechanisms in which contemporary Murri men must engage.

The second project in creative development this year, *Going to the Island*, is based on a topic very close to Charlton. As a member of the Goorumpul people of Stradbroke Island, Charlton has witnessed the impact that European settlement and mining has had on his traditional lands. Stradbroke Island is one of the few tribal areas which can claim continuous settlement and a substantial claim has been lodged for most of the area now called Moreton Bay. Sandmining has been occurring on the island since the 1930s, despite the efforts of many of the traditional landowners, including Oodjeroo (of the Noonuccal, another clan) and Charlton's grandfather, who for 6 years led the early miners on a wild goose chase in their pursuit of mineral-rich sand dunes. A multi-faceted development, *Going to the Island* will explore the lives of Murris who have been forced to leave Stradbroke to live and work. Charlton sees the work essentially as a love story, and plans for it to be a celebration of the traditional culture of the island in drama, dance and song.

For the purpose of clarity, Murri *is used as the preferred title for Indigenous people. I acknowledge that terms may differ in other regions.*

A Life of Grace and Piety, *written & directed by Wesley Enoch, JUTE and Kooemba Jdarra, Cairns Civic Theatre, May 20-23; Cremorne Theatre, Brisbane, June 3-20;* Black Shorts, *Metro Theatre, Brisbane Festival, August 28-September 5*

E.C. Brown is a Brisbane-based writer/performer. He is the Chair of Playlab Inc, a support organisation for new work, and is currently undertaking a PhD at the Queensland University of Technology.

Taking up the fight

Karen Pearlman previews *Urban Clan*, Michelle Mahrer's film about Bangarra Dance Theatre's Page brothers

Layers of time, culture, pain, beauty, geology, grit, finance, taste, politics and art all come into play in the layers of imagery, media, and stories in *Urban Clan*, a new hour long film about the Page brothers and Bangarra Dance Theatre. *Urban Clan*, directed by Michelle Mahrer, is about David (composer), Stephen (choreographer) and Russell (dancer) Page. But by being about these 3 it is also about layers—layers of traditional Aboriginal and western cultural expressions, of family and its impact on art and history, of dance and why people do it.

However, even to say *Urban Clan* is a film 'about' something skips a layer of its intention—*Urban Clan* was devised not just as a film about art, but a film which is art. It tries, sometimes quite successfully, to push the line between documentary and artistic filmmaking. Michelle Mahrer is clear that just bunging a camera in front of a dance is actually "putting a barrier between the audience and the dance." A barrier which can be overcome by making use of cinematic technique, and "more adventurousness."

Her adventurousness shows itself in a layering of cinematic source material. The idea of this film, Mahrer says, "was to integrate cinema verite, performance in a cinematic style, and the poetic and spiritual feeling of the Aboriginal world by using a real and poetic interplay all the time." And at the same time to "create a visual style capturing David, Stephen, and Russell as MTV generation young guys."

One of Mahrer's layers is video tape which, she says, the eye perceives as 'real'. She videotaped interviews in a 'verite' documentary style and dance performances in a cinematically conscious style. Then there is archival footage—still photographs and 8mm home movies—which provide some great moments of humour and insight. Worth a few more than a thousand words, the archives show that the Page family has always been close knit, creative, funny, extroverted, and great performers.

Choreographer Stephen Page and director Michelle Mahrer — Michael Bianchino

Video and archives are then mixed with handheld film footage. Mahrer says that film is perceived by the eye as 'artistic' when juxtaposed with video. It is used here for landscape shots which take on a double edge as both real landscape and artistically manipulated image. When analysed at that level it is possible to see this cinematic technique as an apt metaphor for the Page brothers' relationship to the land. As Aboriginal people they are understood to have an important connection to the land. But they are urban Aboriginals and they are in the process of reconciling that real connection which may sometimes only exist as a memory or a hope, with their own urban experience. Through their artistic practice, a process of reconciliation in itself, their feeling for the land becomes an artistically created image.

The artistry of the Page brothers on an aesthetic level is not questioned in this film. While Mahrer is aware that they have been criticised, this, she says, is "missing the point." "Here are 3 Aboriginal people doing something positive which is resonating much beyond their career. Bangarra is not about these bits of choreography, that technique or this phrase...The film focuses on a bigger picture of what Bangarra is doing for culture, and the Pages as role models of what it is possible for a young Aboriginal person."

Urban Clan nonetheless presents a very convincing picture of the dancing, the layer around which all this is centred. Mahrer is quick to credit cinematographer Jane Spring and editor Emma Hay who have both handled the material with sensitivity, skill, and the quality of humility which is the perfect complement to skill—their work draws attention to the dancing, not to itself. The hand held camera moves with the dancing so subtly as to be virtually imperceptible. The edits are silky and wise. The use of montage in some of the dancing scenes may be controversial to dance purists, but I appreciated the intercutting of literal images with the abstract movement. These montage sequences underline the film's effort to focus on the Page brothers' intentions by giving us clear visual cues as to what their intentions are.

Urban Clan with its layers of media, images and personalities crystallises the Page's dance into a mission which comes across as important, interesting, and amazingly pure. In a key moment David Page asks his father "didn't you fight?" referring to the massacre his father's tribe experienced and the consequent loss of home, language, and culture. His father spreads his hands in a gesture so articulate and painful as to make a dance in itself. In one shrug he says it all: 'We fought, we couldn't fight, we lost, we are still fighting, we are still losing, we do the best we can with what we have, it's over to you now'. And his sons have taken up the fight.

Urban Clan, A Portrait of the Page Brothers and Bangarra Dance Theatre *will be broadcast on July 7 1998, at 8:30 pm on ABC-TV as part of the* Inside Story *series of documentaries. It will also be broadcast in the UK in July on the BBC as part of their* Midsummer Dance Series.

Karen Pearlman is a choreographer, filmmaker and writer currently working on projects in all 3 media.

Campfire Group, *Fish and Chips* (detail), 1997

Black Humour showcases Aboriginal artists and filmmakers who use satire and irony to draw attention to painful issues of race and identity. While this topical exhibition was not conceived as a direct response to Pauline Hanson and her cohorts, she has provided some artists with a wealth of source material. The exhibition opened at Darwin's 24HR Art (April) and is currently on show at the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane (June), touring to Canberra Contemporary Art Space (July); Adelaide's Tandanya Gallery (July-August); Boomalli and Art Gallery of NSW (August-September) and Melbourne's Koorie Heritage Trust (March 1999).

Race and the construction of a nation

Georgine Clarsen attends the Fulbright Symposium in Adelaide on tolerance and cultural diversity

Egg-head bashing has been elevated to the status of a national sport in Australia and sometimes it is not difficult to understand the pleasure in it. But old ideas continue to resonate in current public debates, and if they are to be reframed and opened to more productive approaches, then we need new forums to think through old problems.

The Fulbright Symposium held in the Elder Hall at Adelaide University in April was one such opportunity. With the theme of "Tolerance, Cultural Diversity and Pluralism: Reconciliation and Human Rights" it brought together an unusual mix of people to examine the big issues of immigration and native title. Those two issues did not always sit easily together in the discussions, but in the end the lack of fit emerged as a productive tension.

In the case of native title debates, Adelaide was a particularly poignant location, given that the High Court had ruled only days before against the Ngarrindjeri challenge to the Federal Government's Hindmarsh Island Bridge Act. To add to that, the shameful scenes in Canberra as the Government's 10 point Wik plan was debated, and the haste with which it was conducted to fit in with the Easter break, left many of us feeling that the chance for reconciliation was slipping away—perhaps for another generation. That mood was heightened by Cherie Watkins, when she did more than welcome us to Kaurna country, but asked how reconciliation was possible without fundamental respect for Aboriginal knowledge and law.

As for immigration, it is clear that there have been serious cracks in the edifice of official multiculturalism of late. The Oxley result has had a hand in this by showing that there is political mileage in racism—certainly in the short term. The broad bi-partisan support for multiculturalism is clearly under question, and ethnic bodies appear unsure how to react in this new climate.

The academic speakers came from a range of disciplines—history, anthropology, law, geography and political science. It was a surprise to me that many of them had not met before and were looking forward to the chance for face to face discussions. The mix did something to break down the usual division of labour amongst academics, where the 'Indigenous crowd' and the 'immigration crowd' rarely find themselves on the same platform. Two politicians spoke—the State Minister for Education, and the Federal Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs—though they opted for guarded, low-key papers. Churchmen, as well as Kaurna and Ngarrindjerri Elders, and ATSIC members were a strong presence throughout the forum. The symposium ended with a general summary by Sir Ronald Wilson, whose tiny physique only seemed to highlight the moral stature that he carries in these debates.

Papers from Hilary Charlesworth and Henry Reynolds placed the current position of human rights in Australia in an international perspective. While there has been a great deal of discussion about possible challenges in the High Court to the Wik legislation, for example, there has so far been little consideration given to Australia's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, nor the Convention on Racial Discrimination. The possibility that individuals may be able to appeal to the United Nations (as has already been done in relation to gay rights in Tasmania) makes the international legal framework an important one to understand better.

Diane Bell and Rennard Strickland, visitors from the USA, considered the experience of Native Americans using the legal system to secure native title. Marcia Langton provided an historical overview of the notion of race within Western systems of thought, as well as a personal account of the extent to which race is a central idea in Australian construction of nation. It was stressed by many speakers that Australians are dangerously unaware of the degree to which racism underpins popular attitudes, customary expressions and common sense. The fact that conservatives do not believe that they are being racist when they demand race-specific expropriation of property rights indicates how intractable the problem is.

Interestingly, some of the speakers on immigration issues began from a quite different starting point. To them, if we left aside the situation of Aboriginal Australians, post-war Australia was a largely tolerant society where major race conflict had not occurred. Aboriginal members of the conference strongly challenged that view and argued that ethnic relations in Australia across the board are the product of a frontier mentality. The lack of fit between those two common versions of Australian race relations throws out a challenge to think together the issues of invasion and immigration. We need to explore the changing face of modern colonialism, and to embark on a project of 'racing' whites and 'ethnicising' skips.

In spite of the very real setbacks in reconciliation and tolerance at this time—in Diane Bell's terms, "the air is turning sour"—there was general confidence in the long term prospects for justice and the recognition of our common humanity. As Ronald Wilson reminded us, we don't have to wait for governments, we must do it as a people's movement with a commitment to walk together to bring healing. Reconciliation, after all, is not an end (since what is considered reconciliation may change) but a continuing process which needs constant re-assessment and affirmation.

Fulbright Symposium, Adelaide University, April 14 - 16; Papers from the 1998 Fulbright Symposium will be published by Queensland University Press later this year.

Georgine Clarsen is a Postdoctoral Associate at the Adelaide Research Centre for Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Adelaide.

For more on Indigenous culture see:
Archie Weller reviews the Shifting Sand collection of short films (page 19)
Melanie Guiney talks to Shifting Sand director Wesley Enoch (page 20)
Cate Jones looks at the ethics of storytelling (page 20)
Nikki Miller sees *'inei/konei': The Pacific in Photo Art from Aotearoa* at the John Curtin Gallery in Perth (page 45)

Change and balance

Australia Council Theatre Fund Chair Geoff Street's report on 1997-98 funding

Debate over 1997-98 Theatre Fund funding results has been intense. The Fund's decision to make public a detailed account of its actions is welcome, and as a service to its readers, especially those working in the performing arts, RealTime *has decided to reproduce the whole report.*

The Editors

I want to provide an overview of the results of the Theatre Fund's decisions for 1997-98, marking the completion of the first year of the Australia Council's new Triennial Grants strategy. Although it may take some years for the full effect of the results to become evident, I am pleased that we have been able to balance assured support for 10 organisations with support for many other organisations, individual artists and groups, including some who were working with little or no Australia Council funding in the past. These positive results are often overlooked.

All of these comments must be seen in the light of the current funding environment. For 1996-97 the Theatre Fund had $8.24 million in support for the arts. This was an increase over the previous budget, though it did include new responsibilities and some activities formerly assessed by other committees or boards. For 1997-98 the Theatre Fund has had a total of $7.68 million, a nearly 7% reduction in available funds. (These figures relate only to the Theatre Fund's budget: other areas of Council provide direct and indirect support to theatre artists.)

The point of explaining our budget position is to make it clear that the Fund has had to make reductions regardless of any policy changes. We continually develop arguments for increased support for theatre, but we also recognise that theatre is not the only arts sector facing the pressure of increasing demand and decreasing resources.

Our changing support for organisations has been one of the most contentious issues facing the Theatre Fund for at least the past 18 months. Council agreed we were facing too many expectations of ongoing funding as financial resources decreased and so strictly limited budgets for recurring organisational support were set. The fund also wanted to ensure that it was able to respond effectively to individuals and new initiatives. In theatre this has meant shifting $2 million out of the previous funding for companies in the Program Grants category (the former category of support for organisations' annual programs), leaving $4.5 million in the new Triennial Grants category for organisations.

Some in the arts community have suggested that shifting this amount of money out of Program Grants would signal "the end" for companies not getting Triennial Grants funding. To a small degree this has occurred. There were 72 companies receiving Program grants last year, most (though not all) were formally or informally 'recurring'. This year, one did not apply, while 14 of these 72 companies applied for but received no theatre funding; 4 of them have now closed. The other 10 companies which got no funding this year appear to be developing ways to continue to operate—tailoring their programs to fit their State support, co-presenting works, seeking more local and corporate support. It's also possible they may receive Australia Council support in future.

On the more positive side, 57 of these 72 companies have been supported through a mixture of Triennial and project funding. Twenty-three of the companies have received a funding increase of between $1,000 and $32,000 compared to last year. To phase in Triennial Grants, we set a budget for the first year of Triennial offers at $1.3 million. The amount supported 10 companies, 9 of which were given increases as well as an assurance of support for 3 years. We will be offering another 10-15 companies 3-year grants in October this year.

I don't argue that even this increased support is sufficient to meet all of the companies' artistic objectives. With due concern for those we have not been able to support, I believe the Fund has maintained its aim of supporting outstanding organisations to succeed, while encouraging diverse forms of performance.

Given our real disappointment at receiving no increases through the recent Federal budget allocation, Council will be looking at Triennial Grants targets again in our May meeting. I believe we should maintain the current balance of support for organisations and for projects and individuals.

The Australia Council definition of 'regional' includes all centres of fewer than 100,000 residents and all parts of Far North Queensland. By this definition there has been a 7% actual *increase* in funding for regional arts activity compared to last year: a great result in light of the available funds. The Theatre Fund has been aware of regional arts concerns for some years and there have been specific statements in the last three Grants Handbooks which address these concerns.

However, once the areas more popularly defined as regional are included (ie Newcastle, Wollongong, Hobart and Canberra), we have not maintained support at last year's levels. The total Theatre Fund support both for truly regional activity *and* these non-major metropolitan areas has in fact decreased 8.4%—slightly more than the 7% reduction in available funds. This is neither a planned nor a desirable outcome.

There are changing needs within these communities and there is now a wider network of regional touring supported by Playing Australia and other agencies. However, the Theatre Fund is aware its own decisions have ramifications for the development of artists in these areas. There is also $6 million from the Commonwealth Regional Arts Fund, originally provided to the Australia Council but passed on in 1997-98 and 1998-99 through the States and Territories.

Council has a long track record of support for work involving young people and theatre, a part of the development of an international profile for Australian youth theatre and theatre for young audiences. We have kept these practices at the forefront of our policy discussions in the development of new grants programs.

Our support for youth arts now has a larger share of our budget. Youth theatre funding has increased significantly over last year, though support for professional theatre for young audiences has decreased, along the lines of our budget reduction. Altogether, though, our support for work in both these areas has been held at over $2 million, representing over a quarter of our total funding.

Clearly, by giving increases to some of the continuing companies as well as supporting new groups, we have not funded all of the groups which were supported in the past. There have been changes in our patterns of support as well as in the aims and target audiences of some youth theatre and theatre for young people companies. At this stage, I cannot predict where these changes coming from the field will lead, though these changes may prove to be invaluable for the development of new forms of theatre.

The Theatre Fund has set out to foster the development of Australian theatre and Council has aimed to establish a more viable structure for the arts in the future. Both of these aims acknowledge artform specific issues as well as overarching needs of contemporary Australian arts practice. I respect the concerns of those artists and groups which have not gained our funding support. I hope that debate about the development of theatre and about our role in its development can be based on the best information available. I welcome widespread contribution to the debate.

As Triennial funding in Theatre is phased in, it is essential that we maintain a clear understanding of the purposes of our funding and of the needs of theatre artists across the broad range of practices in the artform.

I look forward to changes that are continually being generated by artists and will work with the Fund to develop the best means to respond. Change is often both the nature and the aim of contemporary theatre.

Responses welcome: Manager, Theatre Fund, Australia Council, PO Box 788, Strawberry Hills, NSW 2012 theatre@ozco.gov.au

Sea Change or short change?

The second Olympic Arts Festival looks good on the page, but is it anything more than virtual?

Artistic director Andrea Stretton is rolling out purposeful sounding metaphors for this the second Olympic Arts Festival. There's the title, *A Sea Change* ("deep cultural changes"), there's the "unique snapshot of Australian culture at the end of the 20th century", and then there's the "Olympic time-capsule for all Australians". The blandly corporate poster merges sea with camera, with lighthouse, blurring the potential for iconic power. As in her speech at the launch of the festival, there's a flailing about, a struggle to say exactly what the event is. Is it a festival or an act of labelling? Round up every act, local festival and exhibition and conference related to the broadest possible interpretation of the title and stamp it "A Sea Change, Sydney 2000". Of course, *The Festival of The Dreaming* drew heavily on extant works, but with $4m, twice the budget of *A Sea Change*, *Dreaming* could commission works, be more selective, more focussed, and, working in one city, it could provide something like a unique snapshot for the many who attended. *A Sea Change*, with its apparently democratic sweep will offer odd glimpses, occasional encounters, curiosity perhaps about what is happening the other side of the continent, and the opportunity to see shows and events that would have been on offer anyway.

Some remarkable ideas for shows and events were offered the *Sea Change* management, occasionally there were protracted negotiations, but invariably the response was that the festival could not collaborate financially with the artist or company—by and large commissions were not on. Not a few artists found the process depressing and exhausting. For those who did commit, what was offered was the *Sea Change* label and the 'free' publicity that goes with the festival, and perhaps a small dollar amount in addition. Doubtless there are shows and tours receiving more support financially and organisationally, but for many it's not the case. This is a festival piggybacking on artists' goodwill. Of course, artists didn't have to buy into it, many were only too keen and several were frank enough to admit pragmatism—the hope that *A Sea Change* will generate media and entrepreneurial attention. Regional artists were happy just to be asked.

'Festival' connotes a sharing, a feast, in one place, a table, a sacred site. Stretton's right, *A Sea Change* is not a festival. On the page it looks tempting. But you know you'll never get to taste most of it, never get to share it, except at a remove, a newspaper report, a snapshot in an ever diminishing TV arts coverage; it's a virtual festival at best. One alternative would have been to locate it in Sydney, the Olympic City, for a palpable sharing. But the point of *A Sea Change* is a sharing across Australia, as a prelude to (an even more challenging) *Reaching the World*. Touring is part of the solution and there are some notable tours (mostly from the capitals to the regions) and there are significant exchanges across borders (though, unlike other festival programs there's no indication who's providing the funding). Perhaps a more concerted touring program might have been the answer, focussing on capital cities and regional centres, involving fewer artists and companies but making a real artistic decision about what epitomises this moment culturally and politically and taking it across the continent. If only we could see some of the regional works in capital cities and elsewhere, then we might feel that we were enjoying a festival of sharing at a critical time in our history. Stretton has made many fine choices (and not a few bizarre ones) but the shape of her 'festival' is nebulous and its meanings, like the images she conjures, though politically potent, are blurry. An opportunity sadly lost. An illusion of sharing. KG

Raising the bar

Sarah Miller's take on the recent Australia Council Arts in Focus forum

Are there too many artists? Are there too many graduates? Is it possible to have too much education? Are there too many unemployed? It's possible to keep trying on titles the way you might try on pairs of shoes. Do they fit? Do they match? Something about this question of "too many arts graduates" doesn't seem to be quite right. As Ted Snell queried, "too many art school graduates for what?" So, off I trotted to the Hyatt Regency Ballroom for the first of the Australia Council's Arts in Focus discussion series, which took place as part of the Arts on the Edge conference put together by the WA Academy of Performing Arts.

This forum differed markedly from previous Australia Council forums. Australia Council Chair Dr Margaret Seares' rationale, as outlined in her introduction, noted the decline in public debate on the arts in Australia and further, given the constant changes, upheavals and restructurings of the past 10 years, that it was perhaps time to reflect. Indeed.

Consequently, this forum was designed as discussive as opposed to the previously instructive (sic) forums undertaken by her predecessor. Keynote speakers were Carla Delfos, Executive Director of the European League of the Institute of the Arts, Dr Geoffrey Gibbs, the recently retired Director of the WA Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), Professor Ted Snell, Head of the School of Art (Visual), at Curtin University and Robyn Archer, Director of the Telstra Adelaide Festival, and the forum was chaired by Terri-ann White.

As always, the calibre of any forum is determined by the participating speakers. In this context it would have to be said that Carla Delfos was not particularly well primed for the forum and her contribution didn't have much relevance to domestic issues. She and Geoff Gibbs tended to focus solely on actor training for an 'industry' context.

Dr Gibbs took the line that it wasn't so much a matter of too many arts graduates as too many graduates emerging from the *wrong* institutions. The *right* institutions are apparently NIDA, WAAPA and the VCA. Gibbs was primarily concerned to address the necessity for equal resourcing and status between the *elite* (real?) vocational and therefore necessarily performing arts institutions. His main beef was that through an accident of history, NIDA is directly funded by the Department of Communication and the Arts whereas WAAPA isn't. Whilst there are arguably good reasons to rationalise the way tertiary arts training institutions are funded and to examine the more equitable resourcing of university art schools, Gibbs' argument that art schools are about imagination whereas universities are about the intellect—and never the twain shall meet—seemed a terrifyingly simplistic response to a complex situation.

Ted Snell took an infinitely more considered approach, noting the growth in enrolments in both schools of visual and performing arts. Enrolments have increased by 45% when the growth rate in other tertiary education sectors is only 26%. Why this should be so when conventional wisdom states that their aspirations—creative or fiscal—are unlikely to be realised is certainly a question worth pondering. He noted that whilst the community is well served by its artists who sponsor the vast amount of cultural activity in this country and do so willingly on an income that would make any other professional bodies splutter and squirm, there is little evidence of reciprocal support.

Robyn Archer spoke as a practitioner rather than an educator and furthermore, as someone whose formal education was in the liberal arts rather than through a vocational art school. She utilised her own experience both as entertainer and English Lit major to argue the case for a broadly based liberal arts education. She also argued that a too narrowly based vocational training is shortsighted and that we should be training for creativity in all fields. Given some recent experiences in the tertiary arts education sector, I have to confess that I couldn't agree more. In some instances, the motto seems to be 'keep 'em stupid' and as academic and writer, Lesley Stern once commented, "what the world really doesn't need is another dumb actor."

Whilst of course, no one person's experience can be taken as emblematic, there is no doubt that Robyn's professional life offers a radically different model to that offered by most arts training institutions and of course she is not the only significant practitioner in this country to have taken an alternative route. As she pointed out, even without a conventional arts education, she now sits in one of the most desirable arts jobs in the country. This aroused ire in certain sections of the audience and applause from others. I must admit to enjoying Robyn's presentation enormously. Put some air into the discussion.

Whilst this could not be said to have been the most intellectually stimulating or challenging of events, it was after all, the first of such forums. It will be interesting to see, if in the future, Dr Seares' aim of looking to the "formation of a strong policy community within the cultural community" can in fact move beyond conventional parameters to inspire, stimulate and provoke some rather more sophisticated discussion and debate. Having said that, the recent Federal Budget suggests, that the best of intentions are likely to be frustrated by further funding cuts and already Seares has said that Council will have no choice but to "raise the bar" for artists and arts organisations applying for funding. Plus ça change...!

"Are there too many arts graduates?", Australia Council Arts in Focus Forum, Hyatt Regency Hotel Ballroom, Perth, April 2, 1998.

Key player

Keith Gallasch interviews New Media Arts Fund Chair John Rimmer at the launch of the fund at Melbourne's Open Channel

This interview took place shortly after Senator Richard Alston formally launched the Australia Council's New Media Arts Fund. Until the launch, the Fund had had a provisional but nonetheless ground-breaking impact. It was formerly the Hybrid Arts committee, and represents the outcome of long term debate and, sometimes, struggle about the relationships between artforms (going back at least a decade) and the funding of new media arts. The crowded launch duly celebrated the breakthrough decision (late last year not a few of us were anxious that the would-be fund might end up a mere advisory committee) with new media spectacle from Jon McCormack, Ian de Gruchy and Arena Theatre along with champagne and ample goodwill. All the New Media Arts Fund needs now is the funds to meet the increasing activity across artforms and in new media arts.

JR The main thing I've been doing for the last 5 or 6 years is looking at the strategic impact that technology change has on the strategies of large organisations and governments and so on. I've got an old and withered musical root in the arts.

KG Classical?

JR I'm a classically trained musician.

KG What instrument?

JR Piano.

KG You left that behind?

JR I did some recordings for the ABC in Queensland and then when I first came to Melbourne in the early 70s, but it's the sort of thing you can't do part time. Playing the piano is a skill which requires full time attention to maintenance.

KG What took over from the piano?

JR Essentially, being a bureaucrat. Strategic policy analysis and planning.

KG When did the interest in technology start to manifest itself?

JR I've always been interested I suppose but I got to play with one of the early Sinclair computers which were about the size of the little Casios now, miniaturised. I guess the angle that I've always come at it is what does this actually do for us. So I'm not actually a technologist. My attention has always been on what's the result, how is this a tool that you can use. That's very much the perspective I bring to it. I think that technology in an arts and cultural context or in a more general economic application context, should be transparent. What can you do with it? How can you speak through it? What sort of vocabulary does it use? Technology as an enabler for new forms of communication and interactivity.

KG It's not always transparent in the first instance. Isn't it an act of faith to say well this might *have an outcome but...?*

JR I think that operates in 2 ways. Firstly, with the development of the technology itself, often the early implementations are very clunky. A bit like hi-fi sound systems when you had lots of valves and wires and chords. Now it's all integrated in one piece, it looks a lot easier. But it's also a matter of learning how to use it. The skill of using technology has to be learned so that you can communicate through it. That's not wildly different from facing the piano as a piece of technology. Only when you've got through that first clunky opaque period can you actually speak with the instrument being almost transparent between you and an audience.

KG Nonetheless, I suppose you must say to governments and organisations, yes this is worth pursuing, even though they might think some aspect of the technology is difficult. Do you find yourself in that prophetic role?

JR Yes. The difficulty is that the sorts of new technologies which are in the pipeline and will be available over the next 5 to 10 years will be much much more responsive to a human being using it. It is sometimes, as you say, a bit of a leap of faith that it's going to be worth pursuing, for example you get a (techno-art) group like nervous objects struggling with the latency time on the internet and the narrow bandwidth and all those things. So I don't see myself as a techno-utopian but I do have hope.

New Media Arts Fund Chair John Rimmer with Senator Richard Alston — Matthew Sleeth

KG So you do spend time reading about it and get plenty of hands-on experience?

JR I am an avid cruiser of the new arts and culture net sites. Many are, quite frankly, disappointing. Some you can see, yes there's an idea here, but where will it go?

KG Is there a difference between on the one hand, the arts and cultural stuff and on the other hand, business expectations of technology? Is the arts area inherently freer? Is there more play in this terrain?

JR Certainly. I would have it as an economic criticism of Australian business that it is generally very risk-averse, whereas a lot of artists are prepared to take risks and they believe that it will come off. But if it collapses in a heap, they can turn round and start again.

KG New media art is not quite driven in the same way that, say in theatre funding, you're expected to get bums on seats and box office has to have a palpable effect on your budget. I'm not saying it's licensed to fail but perhaps there is a little bit more room to say that this is new technology and it's bound to be difficult.

JR I have a very strong belief that new media arts shouldn't be trying to establish itself as some kind of new artform, thinking that if only a group from the new media academy can get together and then define the canon you'll have a new artform which can stand alongside the others. I actually see the primary purpose of the New Media Arts Fund being research and development and in that sense I suppose there is a licence to fail. But I also believe that people in the new media arts need to engage with audiences.

KG You're going to get a range though, aren't you. You'll get skadada at one end who will play to many and at the other you'll get a digital sound work which will be significantly innovative and might only play to a small number of people—but you might say that innovation is going to be worth an audience later on. There must be long term and short term goals.

JR Sound work is the most difficult because of the costs of staging. It often needs to be done as an installation and while you can make hi-fi recordings of it or try to reproduce something like that it's not easily done. And a lot of good performance art is in the same category. Performance can be captured in memory in various ways either on video or people remembering how they saw it or the script of it. It's hard to get an audience and a venue which will agree to put it on.

KG One of the interesting things about the net is the improving quality of sound reproduction and transmission. There's the possibility of quite a large audience for sound works. Equally one of the interesting things about the New Media Arts Fund has been its support for sound artists, an acknowledgment that there are other media than those of screen culture.

JR I keep stressing that the New Media Fund is using the word "media" in a broader sense than in conventional computing and communications interpretations of the word. It's much more like media in the sense that you might call an artist's paint the medium of their work. So we are interested in exploring new media that emerge from other slants on technological development.

KG Today the New Media Arts Fund is officially a formal fund rather than an ad hoc or advisory committee. Has this been a difficult process? Have you played a particular role in convincing the Australia Council that it should stand on its own?

JR It's interesting to speculate that if the Performing Arts Board hadn't existed then Hybrid Arts might never have developed because it was the PAB that offered the opportunity to consider forms coming together. What's been difficult to identify and communicate to people, is that there is a core of activity that is not faddish, which is soundly based, has criteria of evaluation which can be identified and discussed and debated and generally is an activity of substance. You know that often the artists who have been experimenting on the edges of traditional artforms have been regarded within those artforms as turncoats or truants and I don't think it's been until recently that people have started to say, look some of this work is actually of significance and we have to pay attention to it. Similarly, within the broader policy community the New Media Arts Fund just sounds like an art and technology committee. So it's been quite a struggle in one sense but also a learning process. But we've arrived at something where you can say, well there are criteria of evaluation.

KG And it's not just a stop-gap for things that other committees wouldn't do in the past?

JR The most damaging criticism of a fund like this one is to say, well, your best funded stuff would never get within the top 10% of the list of any of the other funds, so in some ways it's second rate or it's easier. We've had to work hard to counter that perception and show the people involved in other forms examples of the works which are being done. And also to clarify that this isn't just a fund where if you've got a good idea and you'd like to try it out on a computer you can go along and ask for money, that it is serious work.

KG Sometimes artists create for an audience, other times they're creating for themselves and their work is taken up by an audience. With the internet, you can get to know your audience—how many hits, where they are coming from. Is the net dominant in all of this because it's the thing we can read most? Is it a centre in the way that CD-ROM perhaps hasn't been?

JR I think the internet is incredibly important but I think it's becoming important in a different way. People started off talking about how we needed a content industry—high quality content for these new forms of communication. What seems to be important is that people value interactivity far more than they value the visual quality. The fact that video streaming is slightly clunky is less important to people than the fact that you can interact with other people. At the same time as some of the very expensive, video quality broadband network experiments have ground to a halt because customers weren't sufficient to pay for it, the number of emails circulating in the world at the moment is into the trillions. That's why the sort of work that groups like nervous objects and some of the other artists are doing in exploring interactivity are so important. I think that's also what the younger users of the internet will be looking for from their experience of art and culture.

KG What about New Media Arts relationship say with the AFC and DOCA? More than any other fund in the Australia Council, is there a need for New Media Arts to have direct connections with those organisations?

JR We certainly see a real need to work closely with the screen culture organisations to be clear, for artists and for us, about the right place to go for particular projects. In practice, the sort of work we support is often quite different but lots of the applications we receive look the same and maybe should have gone to the other place. This is one of the things which the recent evaluation of the New Media Arts Fund threw up and we'll be following up with a lot more interaction with screen culture organisations.

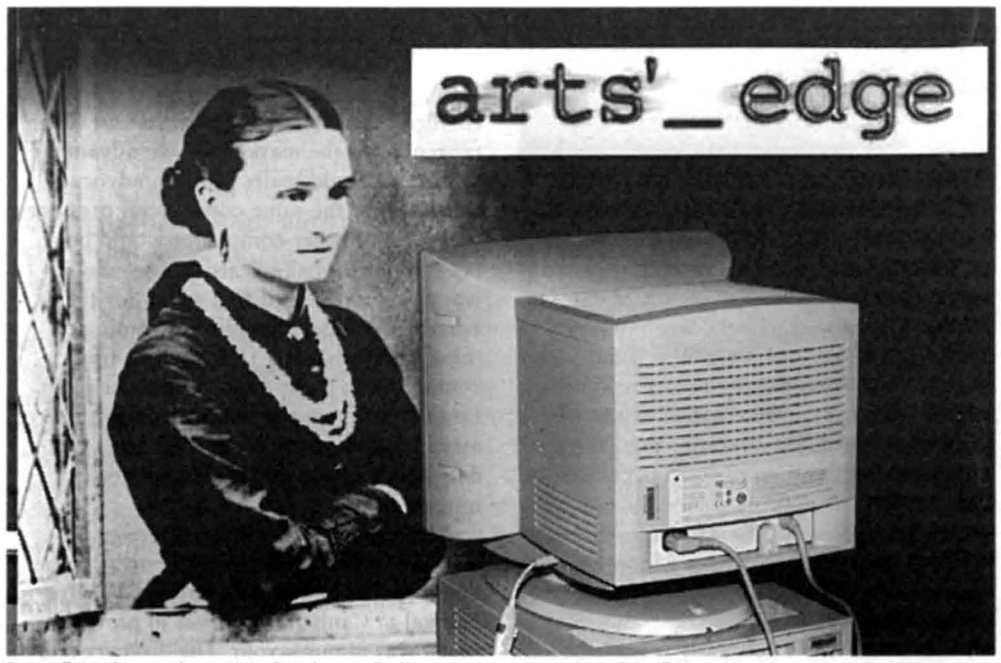
KG So that evaluation process proved more valuable than just saying whether or not this committee should be a fund?

JR Oh yes, lots came out of it and that was one of the key elements. With ArtsInfo and the Australian Cultural Network we see a very exciting relationship developing because we will be the advocates for contemporary artists doing art, interacting in real time with their audiences on networks, whereas most of the other material in the Cultural Network is very much either catalogue art, online galleries, or ways of projecting relatively static work to a wider audience. We see lots of opportunities for developing the notion of interactivity. For the Australian Cultural Network to really live and breathe, it has to have that element.

John Rimmer holds a Masters Degree in Public Policy (University of Melbourne), is a consultant to the Victorian Government through Multimedia Victoria (he was its Executive Director until 1997), a part-time member of the Australian Broadcasting Authority, a member of the Australia Council and Chair of its New Media Arts Fund, and member of the Library Board of Victoria. Until 1995 John Rimmer was Deputy Secretary in the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victoria.

Archiving the digital

Sarah Miller spends time with *Arts_Edge* at the Art Gallery of WA



Dame Edith Cowan, Australia's first female Parliamentarian, checks out *Arts_Edge*

Unusual to see an exhibition of web-based and CD-ROM work in a State collecting institution. Their particular digital obsession—not surprisingly—is digitisation of their various collections. So it was great to see *Arts_Edge* at the Art Gallery of WA in March, beautifully installed in the central atrium space of the gallery. It certainly found a very different kind of audience to that at your typical (sic) contemporary or screen-based art space/event: lots of school kids, families and senior citizens. The only problem I could discern, was to do with the number of stations and headsets available. It meant queues.

Arts_Edge was an integral component of Arts on the Edge, the conference on arts and education hosted by the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, Edith Cowan University. Co-ordinated by Derek Kreckler from the Academy of Performing Arts, this project was developed with a particular commitment to the necessity of creating an archive of these kinds of works before their particular techno-historical and creative 15 minutes has passed.

The exhibition came with a $5,000 cash prize and an Apple computer donated by Westech Computers. The cash was divided between Sally Pryor (AUS) for *Postcard from Tunis* and Perry Hoberman (USA) for *The Sub-Division of Electric Light*. Francesca da Rimini and Michael Grimm (AUS) are still working out how to carve up the dual processor Apple 7220 awarded for *dollspace*.

A much smaller exhibition than, say, *Burning the Interface* or *techne*, it was great to actually feel you could spend time with the individual works without needing an entire lifetime to do so. Aside from the excellent winning entries, I particularly enjoyed Melinda Rackham's *Line* (web-based) and Dieter Kiessling's cute CD-ROM *Continue*, which suggests a parodic link to Minimalism and the Fluxus wit of the 60s and 70s. Rather than attempting to fool us into accepting the 'false infinities' that the hype around CD-ROM would have us believe in, *Continue* takes us to the other end—or perhaps the beginning—to the binary code degree zero. *Continue* and *The Sub Division of Electric Light* are just 2 of the works exhibited in the witty ZKM Artintact series (See John Conomos' report on ZKM on page 28).

Many will be familiar with Canadian Luc Courchesne's *Portrait One* also screened in *Burning the Interface*. *Portrait One* is a witty virtual dialogue between the viewer and a 'slyly amicable girl.' Image association determines *Slippery Traces: The Postcard Trail*, a collaboration between George Legrady (CAN) and Rosemary Comella (USA). The viewer navigates a maze of about 200 interconnected postcards, snapping on hot spots which take you to other images through literal, semiotic, psychoanalytic, metaphoric or other links. Speaking of slippery, Brad Miller and McKenzie Wark's *Planet of Noise* occupied a machine of its own and chasing the hot spots to move through the ROM provided hours of family fun. Great graphics and sound.

A coherent and enjoyable exhibition with an excellent catalogue essay by the McKenzie Wark, an important outcome from this event is the archiving—by the WA Academy of Performing Arts—of all the works exhibited: 4 web-based and 10 CD-ROM works. The archive is intended to be developed over a 10 year period.

Exhibiting Artists: web works: Line, *Melinda Rackham (AUS)*; The Error *by John Duncan (Italy)*; Maintenance Web *by Kevin and Jennifer McCoy and Torsten Burns (AUS)*; dollspace *by Francesca da Rimini and Michael Grimm (AUS). CD-ROMs:* Shock in the Ear *by Norie Neumark (AUS)*; Slippery traces: the postcard trail *by George Legrady (USA)*; Portrait One *by Luc Courchesne (Canada)*; Manuscript *by Eric Lanz (GER)*; Troubles with Sex, Theory and History *by Marina Grzinic and Aina Smid (Slovenia)*; Cyber Underground Poetry *by Komninos Zervos, (AUS)*; Postcards from Tunis *by Sally Pryor (AUS)*; The Subdivision of Electric Light *by Perry Hoberman (USA)*; Continue *by Dieter Kiessling (Germany) and* Planet of Noise *by Brad Miler and McKenzie Wark (AUS).*

Arts_Edge, *coordinated by Derek Kreckler, Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts and Imago Multimedia Centre at the Art Gallery of WA, March 27 - April 8.*

Sarah Miller was a member of the Arts_Edge *selection committee along with Mark Amerika, Trevor Smith, Rick Mason, Cam Merton and Vikki Wilson. Tibor von Karlowitz Apple Computers (WA) and Peder Kristensen (Westech).*

Digitalising opera

John Potts sees the latest Philip Glass-Robert Wilson collaboration in London

Monsters Of Grace by Philip Glass and Robert Wilson came to the Barbican in London in late May, following its April world premiere in Los Angeles. Coming 22 years after their extraordinary collaboration on *Einstein On The Beach*, expectations were high, but not as high as the hype. "The new digital opera", "21st century theatre": these were some of the claims and advance notices for this ambitious new work. So how does it measure up?

First, a few facts and details. The title comes from Wilson's misreading of a line in his one-man *Hamlet* production. "Ministers of grace" became "monsters of grace", a phrase Glass liked as an encapsulation of the human (monsters) and the divine (grace). The score, performed live by the Philip Glass Ensemble with 4 vocalists, is built around the 13th century mystical poetry of Jalaluddin Rumi, credited as the original whirling dervish. Performed by a mix of woodwind and electronics, including sampled Persian string and percussion instruments, the score consists of 13 pieces, duration 70 minutes.

These 13 musical sections provide the audio component of the multimedia event. Six of the scenes are performed as live action, characterised by Wilson's lean, enigmatic staging. The other 7 scenes are 3D digital: 70mm stereoscopic film segments viewed through 3D spectacles. This is the high-end technology component, inciting talk of the 21st century. Designed by Silicon Graphics, the films include computer-generated characters known as Synthespians, while other visual elements swim slowly towards or away from the viewer's eye. The relation between audio and visual is obscure throughout: Glass and Wilson insist on "meaning through association", rather than literal connection. The audience is left to ponder possible links between incongruous elements—or, more likely, give up the search for easy meaning altogether.

If this accounts for the form of the opera, and its technology, what of the content? The score is probably the most successful element of *Monsters Of Grace*. Without the epic duration of operas like *Einstein*, this much shorter work concentrates instead on subtleties of colour and rhythm. Detractors of Glass' music overlook the shifting of metre which is the foundation of his approach. His inspiration in the 60s was Indian and other Eastern musics, which allowed many of his generation to rebel against the orthodoxy of academic serialism. The most impressive parts of *Monsters* involve melodic figures, played by sampled Persian instruments, constantly switching between time-signatures as they build. The familiar entrancing effect of Glass' music is evident—but as several pieces are 3 minutes, and the longest is only 12, the emphasis is less on hypnotic repetition than on rhythmic variation, spiced with quasi-Arabian harmonies.

As for the visual components, there is no narrative, and very little in the way of coherent structure. This is as Wilson wants it, as he advises the audience: "I'm not giving you puzzles to solve, only pictures to hear…you go to our opera like you go to a museum…look at the music, listen to the pictures." The opening staged scene involves a small boy entering from the left as a booth descends on the right. The boy enters the booth, which then ascends, leaving a glow beneath it. Wilson's other scenes are similarly mysterious: a woman dangling her hand in a tank of water; a male dancing, sparingly, with a sword; a flame; a blindfolded woman; the boy pointing off-stage as large crumpled white masses move slowly towards him. The most striking scene has a woman move slowly across the stage, drawing an immensely long white train behind her; then a giant comes on, carrying a staff. All of these scenes are captivating, due to their enigmatic nature and to Wilson's economical staging, which accentuates their mythical, unfathomable dimension. This results in a series of unpredictable scenes—although the churlish might argue that the unexpected is what you come to expect, particularly from Wilson.

But it's the high-tech imagery that's the calling-card of this opera—and on this plane *Monsters Of Grace* is only a mixed success. The 3D effect is used in a number of ways, incorporating large computer-generated landscapes, middle-distance tableaux, and close-up floating images. Here's a roll-call of the digital imagery: a rural scene with a boy riding a bike towards the viewer; a falling boot; a severed hand; geometric figures of light; male and female figures with port-holes into space; eagles and helicopters zooming across mountain-tops; a dematerialising table. The tone is more surreal than mystical, especially given the deliberate juxtaposition of incongruous elements. One of the best sequences is the first, during which the perspective slowly shifts on the rural landscape, and the boy rides into the foreground space. But just as he comes up to our noses, the scene suddenly cuts to the aforementioned falling boot. It has suddenly become cinema, with the most wrenching of edits, but nothing is achieved by the juxtaposition. The most mesmerising sequence involves the severed hand, spinning slowly before our eyes while it is cut into by a scalpel. The fusion of this powerful image with Glass' slowly rising music results in a strange, compelling beauty. But as this scene has no connection with any of the others, this effect is contained within that scene, and constricted.

The other debilitating aspect of this opera comes from the necessity of wearing the 3D spectacles. The audience is constantly putting them on and off, as the film sequences alternate with the staged scenes. The old 3D specs, first sighted in the 50s, unfortunately highlight the gimmicky facet of the opera; perhaps a better idea would be one long 3D sequence followed by the staged segments.

The more enduring impression of *Monsters Of Grace*, though, is of enormous potential not yet realised. The intersection of all these elements does work, if only sporadically. Glass and Wilson acknowledge that this opera is a work in progress: this performance was "Version 1.2." My major reservation with *Monsters* concerns Wilson's wilful non-linear approach: in effect, he is imposing a typical 20th century montage system, tried and true since Dada and Surrealism, onto the performing arts technology of the future. The 21st century will probably want narrative.

Monsters of Grace, *Philip Glass and Robert Wilson, Barbican, London, May 19 - 23*

Editors' email to John Potts: "There's a new organicism in performance (evident in the Adelaide Festival in a heap of shows) that partly draws narrative back into the frame, but only partly. The result is a powerful dialectic between image and 'story', but it's not simply a matter of narrative. It's pretty glib to say that Wilson "is imposing a typical 20th century montage system, tried and true since Dada and Surrealism onto the performing arts and technology of the future." Tried and true in a minority of art forms over the century maybe, but not applied to theatre and opera in such a way or on such a scale or so distinctively. It's all too easy to reduce the century to a 'Dada to now' sweep. As for imposing montage on the technology of the future you may well be right, but to claim narrative as the future, narrative which has so persistently and often deadeningly dominated 20th century culture and against which performance has battled to create a different time and space in the theatre, seems as cosily conservative as glib."

John Pott's email to RealTime editors: "I thought Monsters *would work better with just a teensy bit of narrative. In the reviewing context...*The Guardian *and* The Times *both panned it, finding it boring, unmoving etc.* The Independent *gave it a glowing response, with the same reservations as I raised…*Monsters of Grace *is an opera, and a new media one at that. I remain excited about the potential of this kind of work and its postmodern hybrid of elements. I welcome such hybrids, which may include elements of narrative. My slight frustration with* Monsters…*was its resolutely modernist stance in eschewing any narrative: this seems to me old fashioned, paradoxically enough."*

New media performs

New Media Arts at the 1998 Performing Arts Market: Lisa Colley, Linda Wallace and Susan Charlton tell Keith Gallasch about how and why

If the addition of music to this the third Australia Council Performing Arts Market was welcome but predictable, the presence of new media arts came as a very pleasant surprise. Of course, an expanding number of performing artists work with the new media but expectations are usually of sound and screen works unmediated by any presence other than the viewer/interactor. As New Media Arts Fund Manager Lisa Colley reminds us later in this article, the fund is about this and much more.

Linda Wallace, director of the machine hunger company which won the tender to present new media arts at the Performing Arts Market, told me in a telephone interview she had proposed the "production of a set of useful information tools for the market." She described the market as "an event which I viewed as an initial gateway to the Australia Council's ongoing, long-term strategy for marketing new media arts." She was also mindful that the market audience might not necessarily know much about the new media arts area, so the tools needed to be simple and accessible. machine hunger produced a publication, a video and organised the exhibition which also featured a range of CD-ROM works.

"The publication was cost-effective at A5 size, 24 pages, enabling space for 20 artists, companies or projects, one per page. I was project manager and editor, and Susan Charlton joined machine hunger as deputy editor of the publication, which we titled *Embodying the Information Age*."

How did Linda go about selecting the artists? "From a list of New Media Arts fundees I curated the final group. I saw it as both a curatorial and a marketing project, primarily for new media arts, and secondly for the Fund and the Australia Council. So I didn't curate on the basis of how much money different artists had received from the Fund, instead, the artists selected were diverse in their approach to new media arts, and also had a professionalism which could be relied upon to 'deliver the goods.' There are performance groups, digital/installation artists and crossmedia projects like Metabody. I put emphasis on the potential of the internet as both a medium for art and also as an information medium for festivals—it's critical for festivals to understand how the internet can extend their reach, and the reach of featured art projects, to a global audience. Some of the festival directors at the market seemed to understand this."

What was your prime aim? "To get the publication into delegates' hands and later onto their bookshelves. It was something I felt that overseas and local delegates would want to take home with them, as it is a stylishly presented, useful object covering a number of areas and artists, and with email contacts. I was keen to avoid the paperfarm approach of stacks of ugly brochures and junk, and also the busy pop 'multimedia' aesthetic. In terms of design our exhibition, or stand, was minimal, with the eyecatching, jewel-like publication, a jumbo monitor showing either a CD-ROM work or the videotape which featured a larger range of new media artworks."

I emailed Lisa Colley at the Australia Council for her account of the fund's venture and asked, "Why New Media Arts at a performing arts market?" Lisa wrote back, "New media arts are broader than sound and screen cultures. We need to keep in mind the purpose of the fund which is based on interdisciplinary, collaborative work that crosses art form boundaries. Many of the artists supported by New Media Arts see themselves as performing artists, so we wanted to ensure a showcase for their work within the Performing Arts Market. A number of the shows, including *Burn Sonata*, *Hungry* and *Masterkey* in the Adelaide Festival and the market had their genesis with the current fund's precursor, Hybrid Arts. As well, we wanted to ensure that works difficult to show as part of the Showcase [a set of half hour performances of excerpts from larger works—ed.] because of technical requirements were given an opportunity as well.

"Also, we knew that international visitors to the market were interested in looking at work that was outside of the international festival performance circuit. This could provide a broader range of opportunities for artists here in terms of residencies, exhibitions and so on. Many festivals have programs that cross over into exhibition and installation work. This proved to be true and we had substantial interest from overseas presenters who want to commission work, pick up existing work and, in longer term relationships, develop exchange opportunities."

I asked Lisa about the value of the booklet, *Embodying the Information Age*. "We wanted to produce something that had a life beyond the market. It is critical that we can inform people about the work that is supported by the fund. Of course it only reveals a small number of the artists in this area, but they are representative of a much bigger movement. We have also put excerpts from the booklet up on the web pages that we developed to coincide with the recent launch of the New Media Arts Fund and we hope to add to this over time. As more work supported by the fund is created we hope we can inform people about the outcomes. This is something we are constantly being asked for, and is a way of value-adding to the grants process. The spread of information can be expanded by hyperlinking to artists' sites as well as organisations like *RealTime* and exhibition sites currently being developed. As with the booklet, we're not acting as agents for these artists—they have their own email and web sites and can be contacted directly about their work."

What kind of response was there to the presence of New Media Arts at the market? "There was a very positive response from international delegates who thought it was a natural and timely addition to the market. I have now established contact with a small group of presenters and producers and we are in email contact and hopefully we should see some results. The artists so far have experienced a very positive response to the booklet with many of them having been contacted about work both nationally and internationally. It has proven a very useful tool for their own marketing and promotion. We have now circulated it to all our Australian diplomatic posts and have plans for further circulation nationally and internationally. It represents part of a broader advocacy and marketing strategy for the work of new media artists which we hope to develop further. The fund now having a more secure position within the Council will allow us to develop this approach more comprehensively and with a long term view."

I asked Susan Charlton about responses to the New Media Arts fund initiative. She emailed back that, "The fact that we were tangential to the market was an advantage in that we could really fulfil an advocacy role without the same commercial pressures that a lot of other companies would have been under to make deals. In this way it was a well conceived first step—for the Fund and for delegates just beginning to think about the area. At the same time, contacts didn't just dissolve into the ether. Lisa Colley from the Fund was also there to assist possible connections between delegates and the artists they expressed interest in.

"Also the fact that the market was associated with the Adelaide Festival, rather than being linked to the National Theatre Festival in Canberra as it was in previous years, was in our favour. The diversity and multidisciplinary nature of the festival program enhanced dialogue about the possibilities of artists of various sorts using new technologies in their work. Delegates were not just locked into a theatre mindset.

"Many were already familiar with new media arts, but there were several who weren't. Those new to the area seemed to be propelled by forces greater than themselves. They recognised that there was a demand for new media arts from their audiences and they had to get up to speed to be able to create programs. The New Media Arts stall allowed them to take the first steps of inquiry without feeling foolish. Most attention came in the first days, but once the showcase program began everyone was very committed and focussed on that. However many purposely revisited us in the closing days to make sure they had everything they needed."

Invariably the benefits of the Performing Arts Market are long term. It'll be interesting to see how the new media arts figure in the next market in 2000 as more artists and performers generate more possibilities from their engagements with technology. In a forthcoming report we'll look at the work of the various agencies involved in the promotion of new media arts.

New Media Arts at the 3rd Performing Arts Market was a project of the Audience Development and Advocacy Division of the Australia Council in association with the New Media Arts Fund, February 1998.

Vertical hold

Keith Gallasch and Virginia Baxter give a cautious welcome to *New Narratives*

In the introduction to her essay "The Carbon Unit in the Silicon Domain" in *Writings on Dance* 17 (*Dance on Screen*) Susan Kozel says "Dance is no longer the still point of the turning world...As the art world—from music to visual arts to architecture—increasingly turns to new digital technologies, the physical arts are not being left behind."

In some areas of the digital arts there has been a curious reluctance to admit artists working in live performance except in the traditional role of content providers. For some purists it's either performance or it's new media—it can't be both. Meanwhile the "talent" has been taking a lively interest in the interface. For many years and in different ways, performance and dance companies like skadada (Perth), Company in Space (Melbourne), Brink Theatre (Brisbane), Sidetrack, Open City, The Party Line (Sydney) and individual artists like Dina Panozzo, Lyndal Jones, William Yang, Sue-ellen Kohler (with Mahalya Middlemist), Margie Medlin and many others have been at play with the relationship between bodies and images in performance. In other words, they've been working with interplay between performers and various kinds of projections of images. What is becoming really interesting is the means (including the performers themselves) of triggering the projected images and the treating and transforming of them with various softwares by digital artists.

Outside Australia, the work is proliferating too. The August 97 issue of *Ballet Tanz* features a range of artists working with dance and technology (including major artists: William Forsythe, Meg Stuart and Gary Hill, Jan Fabre). *Ballet Tanz* reports an interactive choreography "boom" in Montreal in companies like PPS Danse (Isabelle Choiniere, Marie Chounard and Michel Lemineux) and Robert Lepage's Ex Machina. In the US, among many others, George Coates (*Twisted Pairs, Wittgenstein on Mars*) intersects live theatrical performance with internet-mediated image projections ("Twisted Pairs: George Coates Interviewed by His Virtual Audience," *Theatre Forum*, Issue 9, Summer/Fall 1996).

The entry of theatre artists in Australia into this arena has been more tentative. In the 80s Rex Cramphorne's experiment with live performance and video in the Performance Syndicate's production of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* was greeted with reserve and in the 90s there's still some sense of battle lines drawn. The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance organised a conference in 1996 (*Performance and the New Media*) to settle the nerves of theatre practitioners seeing themselves going under to Steven Spielberg's 'synthumans'.

In this context the Australia Council's New Media Arts Fund (still firmly committed to hybridity—it was originally titled the Hybrid Arts committee) has supported a welcome series of collaborations negotiated between The Performance Space and Metro TV in Sydney titled *New Narratives*. The project is a 3 phase one, the first 2 works premiering at The Performance Space in Sydney on April 22. *United Voices* is a web site created by designer Juanni Iocco, filmmaker Jacqui North and poet Romaine Moreton to publish poetry, art and writing by Indigenous and queer artists. *The Macbeth Project* by Theatre of Relativity is a collaboration between theatre and digital artists.

Theatre of Relativity's objective is "to generate ideas by pitting one of the oldest artforms in the world—the theatre—against some of the most complex digital technology available today. By doing this we generate questions which provoke us into considering the ways in which we participate in the media which surround us." In a half hour presentation, they assemble a collection of

Mark Kilmurry, Linda Cropper, *The Macbeth Project* Stewart Spence

possibilities for an ongoing project. We get a taste of the technology in Mic and Tim Gruchy's digital media and interactive video design which ranges from Peter Greenaway-type text projection in the letter scene, video images offering 2 points of view (performers live and on screen), and treated image in Macbeth's soliloquy with David Field on stage fronting a large image of himself split down the middle into, yes, negative and positive. While Lady Macbeth (Linda Cropper) speaks to Duncan, her husband (huge on the screen behind) voyeuristically eyes them. In one scene a walk-on servant is pre-recorded. There's no question what Macbeth sees before him in the dagger scene—an animated dagger appears on the screen, the movement of the actor triggering the movement of the knife (on the screen well behind him). The witches are aggregated into an eery, constantly mutating visage manufactured from the faces and voices of a number of performers—one of the presentation's strongest moments (and limited to the screen).

This is an ambitious project involving a talented group of artists. However, the work highlighted some of the key problems inherent in theatre's engagement with technology. Although any of the ideas on show could have been interesting in themselves, Theatre of Relativity created not so much a dynamic interplay as a blur of old and new, a mere list of possibilities. Director Patrick Nolan generated no overall aesthetic for the performance or the imagery's interplay with it. In Genevieve Blanchett's unchallenging design the audience was separated from the screen-as-flat by a rectangle of earth, sparely lit by Nigel Levings. The acting was conventional, the delivery of the text mostly angst-loaded and making little allowance for the possibilities for intimacy offered by the screen (or the proximity of the audience). David Field showed occasional restraint while Linda Cropper projected mightily adding a sort of jerky choreography to Lady Macbeth's "Unsex me here..." Stephen Philip's soundscape functioned as it usually does in theatre, as background mood enhancer (who knows, a performer might have been triggering it).

The Macbeth Project is nonetheless instructive for the problems it poses. Do you need the live performer and his projected selves both onstage at once? If you do, then you better work at making the relationship dynamic rather than creating a distracting backdrop or being very literally illustrative. This might require an adventurous even surreal sensibility—what if the performer were to witness himself, address himself, dialogue with himself, pummel or caress the screen? What if you had to undo the play a little to find out what its new media possibilities were instead of hanging on to the sacredness of the text? Without a visual drama entailing elements like these, the audience endure the mundane experience of choosing between live actor and screen image—and when the latter is many times bigger than the former, you can guess which they go for, and who would blame them. And you can't lay claim to Brechtian distanciation here—not when the actors are giving it their psychological best.

Equally, common theatre props suddenly seem out of place. Why bother to give Lady Macbeth a real letter when she could read from the screen, especially when the screen letter scrolls open line by line, as if being read. And especially given that Lady Macbeth's pre-recorded servant walks into the middle of the projected page—as if to break the reverie the letter generates. In the dagger scene we are clumsily presented with a real knife and a digital one. Here the awkwardness of the technology kills the power of this scene which lies in its interiority; it's important for the audience to enter the character of Macbeth through language rather than seeing what he's actually imagining. This version belongs in the movies—B movies at that.

In a real engagement with technology, space too needs to be reconfigured—it is poorly conceived here with literal theatre blocking occasionally adapted to fit the equipment. There's no exploitation of the relationship between performance and screen—it's no good the performers pretending there isn't a screen, or that it's just there for the audience. Technology becomes a mere modern tool for illusion. In this scenario, the result is an unwieldy mix of the filmic and the stagey.

In *The Macbeth Project*, a conservative medium bolsters itself with new technology. In this version of the future, directors will keep blocking, set designers will remain unchallenged treating screens like flats to be painted with projections, actors will keep acting at us and use screens to disappear backstage. And what happened to the new media artists in the collaboration? Mic and Tim Gruchy are well-known for their mandala technology but there was very little sign of the interactive possibilities they have exploited in performances. The old narrativity was left safely in tact. If the project is to develop from this work-in-progress stage, then at the very least the creative team need exposure to works and ideas that will take them beyond the obvious and the reductive.

United Voices is a modest work and of a very different kind. It's a simple website where you get complete poems performed with a percussion track. In one of the first works on-line *My Genocide* you can call up a word or phrase from one of Romaine Moreton's poems and get information on, say, media responses to an event like the killings at Port Arthur and their implicit erasure of black history. The site is still in development. It exploits existing formats on the net such as the 60-second rock clip and uses hypertext for good political ends. As for narrativity, it simply offers options: poem as visual text, as performed, as something to search. It will be interesting to see where it goes from here. Online it's already promoting and selling copies of the associated video and the book of performance poems. Once bandwidths are better there's no reason why this kind of political performance poetry should not reach much wider audiences. What's clear is that the technology of the net is not yet able to convey the power of the live performer. Romaine Moreton performed 3 of her poems at the launch with percussionist Jan Goldfedder. She's a dynamic performer who needs technology to match. (*www.united-voices.com*).

For all the limitations of the venture so far (the title alone is worth debate), *New Narratives* is ideal terrain for The Performance Space, Metro TV and the New Media Arts Fund to offer artists. The third project will be realised later this year and features artists (Anna Sabiel, Brad Miller, Sarah Waterson, Heather Grace Jones) who are bound to put a more suggestive slant on form and technology...and narrative.

New Narratives; My Genocide *and* The Macbeth Project, *The Performance Space Sydney, April 22 - 24*

I @ Here. You @ There

Virginia Baxter and Keith Gallasch at Company in Space's performance installation for Next Wave

The virtual attaches itself to the body to assuage its fears. The virtual is constantly reiterating: here is something, where actually there is nothing. The virtual is an appendage to life, the interface with life. The virtual belongs to the establishment of reality, not to what the virtual is accused of—unreality, immateriality

William Forsythe, Frankfurt Ballet

In this work dancers Hellen Sky and Louise Taube perform a series of playful meditations on the body mediated by technology. As in their earlier work *The Pool is Damned*, though highly sophisticated and proficient in its use of technology, there's still some sense in the company's work of the poignancy of early experiments.

"What does the weight of my flesh and bones have on this conversation?" the recorded voice in *Mediated* persistently asks.

The work is installed in Gallery 101 in Collins Street, Melbourne, an hermetic white studio with a set of experiments in progress. Aluminium frames form mirrors, frames, screens, trays. The audience moves to each of the installations as the dancers animate them. They lie in the tray of sand at the rear of the room, 2 dancers of almost identical stature, spooning, shifting as in sleep. As the bodies move, the sand makes a space for the lacy projections of bodies on the screen nearby. As often throughout the performance, the audience focus is largely on the dancers until they gradually notice the projected images. They tap one another on the shoulders and point to screens. Gradually they take in the 2 at once, the mode mostly required of them in *Mediated* which seems less interested with the possibilities of delays and disjunctions, occasional dominations, than the experience of simultaneity.

The dancers move to a standing frame and dance in tandem against their own captured images from the sand. The image of the bodies is amorphous, then all edge. Its shape confined to a smaller frame, the shape of the choreography blurs. We look at the real dancers, glean the shape of their dancing and compare it with its vapour trail in the virtual. There's less sense of the technology intersecting the dance or attempts at creating a choreography of the screen.

A large central screen. On blue squares the dancers perform a mirror dance at its most interesting when their separation moves them out of synch. Their live images vie with projections of another body. A series of spots on the screen trigger lighting and Garth Paine's interactive sound environment.

Then something quite distinctive happens. At the other end of the room suspended horizontally less than a metre above the floor is a large tray full of water, another aluminium frame but with a glass bottom. A camera underneath the tray looks up through the water at the ceiling. High above is a screen. As Hellen Sky moves over the water, Louise Taube pushes the tray from side to side. Sky's projected image above is sharper than we've seen up to now, then screen and body turn to water. A filter emphasising facial planes, the live body is transformed, becomes radiant, golden. The ceiling of air conditioning ducts becomes painterly. The audience gaze goes from the real body, through the water to the ceiling. Our fears are temporarily dispelled. Suddenly the screen is a liquid space, the body breaks the membrane momentarily fulfilling our desires for something more than mediation. Soon one dancer operates the camera to look at the other and there's a sense of the two creating something in real time, at play with the technology. The performers' action agreeably shapes the audience's attention.

The final sequence occurs in a corridor broken up by small red laser lights. At the end of the space a monitor relays recorded images of a dancer's body—like architectural drawings of hips and thighs and feet. The dancers moving through the lights trigger this sensual cycle of body images on CD-ROM.

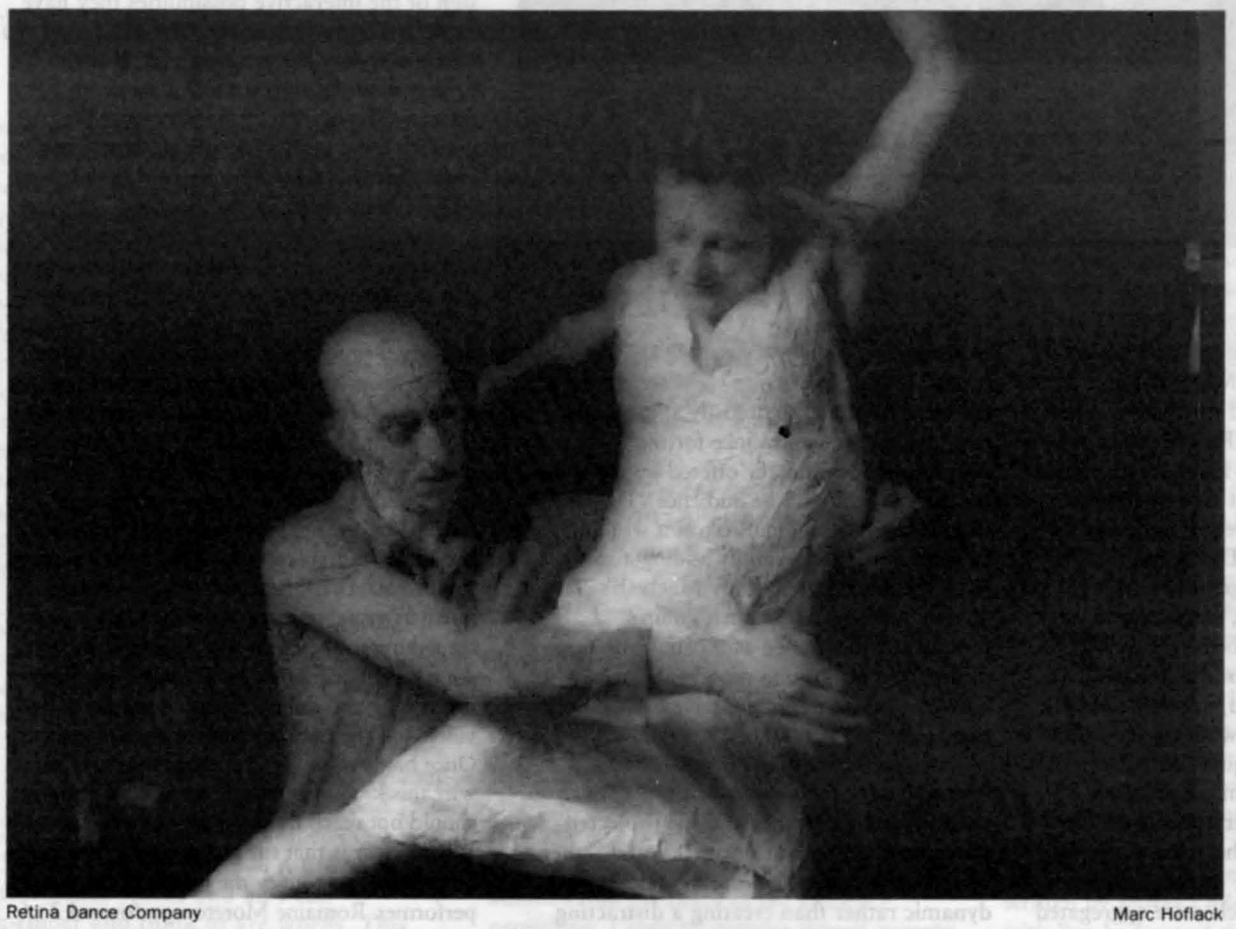
Later we go backstage to see John McCormick's own 'installation'. Along one wall, a set of vintage Amiga computers and the odd Apple, cords, plugs and keyboards balanced precariously. He tells us that some of the technology is so old now you can't get it fixed. He's had to take to it with a soldering iron.

The scale of Company in Space's investigation is as impressive as we've seen in interactive dance in Australia. In concentrating on the interplay between the technology and the dancers, Company in Space are well on the way to creating a work of significance. At this moment, the projected bodies are so different from the live ones that an act of dissociation occurs, the audience giving each a different kind of focus. The technology searches for its aesthetic and we look for the live and screen bodies to begin a more equal conversation with the audience, but the sense of an emerging hybrid fascinates.

Mediated, *Company in Space, Gallery 101, Collins Street, Melbourne for Next Wave Festival, May 2, 9, 16, 23*

Looking for the golden needle

Sophie Hansen has mixed feelings about mixed-up media at the ICA



Retina Dance Company Marc Hoflack

The Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) used to be one of the most progressive live art venues in Britain, featuring international artists and nurturing national talent on the peripheries of performance culture. Inexplicably the programming department recently closed and the live art offer of this excellently resourced centre has dwindled to the ad hoc hire of space to visiting groups such as the Lust contingent who presented the multimedia festival, *Strange Fruits, Nature's Mutations*, March 25-28. Links nevertheless remain between previous performance programming, current activity in the gallery, the cinematheque and media arts centre and externally curated events, for Lustfest mixed its media so thoroughly that that old ICA feeling of disorientation and sensory overload remained.

Lust are a cliquey London-based collective of multi-disciplined European artists, "umbilically linked by a network of creative relationships." Founded in 1992, Lust has annually presented a showcase of experimental performance art with a plethora of premieres and an edgy degree of "it'll be alright on the night" improvisation.

This year's festival took advantage of the ICA Bar (regular host to DJs and projectionists) by presenting a series of eclectic musical partnerships to loosen up the punters for the main events in the theatre.

On the opening night, Fabienne Audeoud and L'Orange screeched and swooned respectively, offering the A to Z of female vocal tactics to bewildered boozers. ICA members, in for a quick pre-commute pint, were hurried homeward by Audeoud's operatic improvisations.
In the theatre, Malcolm Boyle's one man *Mission for the Millennium* introduced the fearsome faith and fantasy of evangelical revivalist Reverend Anal Hornchurch. Bose and Ficarra's experimental film *last june-4.30am* provided respite in its fuzzy evocation of fleeting internal landscapes and the German quintet, Obst Obscure, entered still shadowier realms with their ghostly *Kino Concert*, incorporating filmic imagery into a Kafka inspired soundscape.

This same spaced out vibe coloured Thursday's *Trance Magic* set by Polish vocalist/pianist/composer Jarmilia Xymena Gorna whose wild, echoey arpeggios bewitched the urbane drinkers. In the theatre Jane Chapman's harpsichord found startling contemporary resonances, in dialogue with Daniel Biro's Fender, Rhodes' piano and Peter Lockett's percussion. Two short films failed to impress amidst these sonic assaults and it was only the concluding performance of *Tweeling* by Retina Dance Company which reasserted the earlier intensity. Filip van Huffel and Sacha Lee's demotic twins were all id as they forged the naked will to separate and dance their raw new selves into life. This act of creation, to Jules Maxwell's evocative score, drew a cohesive conclusion to an epic evening.

Friday focused on a real-time ISDN linked jam with musicians in Nice, however a shamefaced Luc Martinez communicated the first anticlimax of the festival, announcing the failure of the video link. The audio connection to audiences and artists gathered at CIRM (Centre International pour Recherche de la Musique) left much to the imagination. As Martinez manipulated photo-sensitive instruments through a jazzy improvisation, it was unclear whether the intervening noises were his distant colleagues or simply another sample from his own computer. And yet the loss of raison d'etre did not entirely deflate this event as the bilingual apologies were followed by a ghostly, obscurely enchanting exchange with the ether. It is ironic that the much fanfared New Media Centre of the ICA cannot overcome an obstacle as concrete and foreseeable as the two incompatible national ISDN networks which undermined this event. Blame lies both with the venue's lack of support for visiting artists and with the artists themselves, inadequately prepared, as ever, for the age-old technical hitch.

In more controlled circumstances, the festival drew to a close in the safe hands of saxophonist Evan Parker, in conversation with Lawrence Casserley's diabolical deck of sound processors. Repeating her anomalous intervention with another disappointing dance/film, Jane Turner's company presented *Hybrid*, a work as uninspiring as Friday's solo, *Compost*, demonstrating that multiple media can confound artists and confuse audiences, with distracting results.

The enduring value of Lustfest, like most multimedia ventures, lies in its ambition. The disjunction between rhetoric and reality, ideals and outcomes, is typical of such progressive initiatives. Artists inspired by the multiple opportunities of cross-cultural, cross artform creativity, facilitated by new technologies will never be thorough or pragmatic. The outcome of all this abundance is almost by necessity erratic. Audiences, forearmed with tolerance, tempered expectations and a capacity to spot the golden needle in the haystack, will doubtless return to the ICA for Lustfest '99, if either organisation remains.

Strange Fruits, Nature's Mutations, Lust, *Institute of Contemporary Art, London, March 25 - 28*

Surprising even the body that makes it

Philipa Rothfield on improvised dance works in Melbourne

Sitting in the darkness, audience and performers alike wait for Ros Warby's *Enso* to begin. We are forced to listen—to the rustles and coughs of others, whilst we open ourselves to the moment. Sometimes it is hard to identify an improvised work but listening is often one of its telltale signs. *Enso* moves between 3 performers, dancer (Ros Warby), cellist (Helen Mountfort) and singer (Jeannie Van de Velde). The flow of material throughout the piece is punctuated with spaces where each performer listens, waiting for each other to begin.

We are told that the structure of the work is set but that its content is open. There is a sense that the performers know who will begin a section. Eyes flicker towards Mountfort's cello, ears strain towards Van de Velde's voice, bodies lean to where Warby is waiting to move. But, and this is another of improvisation's telltale signs, there is an episodic character to the flow of the piece. At one point, Warby's movements are driven to the wall by Van de Valde's vocal crescendo. Then a waiting for the next interaction to occur. A little later, Warby develops a most beautiful, intricate spinning motion across the room, then stops. More listening. A fan of Warby's dancing, I want more from her. I don't want her to wait for the others, to do nothing while allowing their contribution. But I have to accept the equity of the situation, its play between leading, listening, following, playing solo, making duets, forming trios.

There is scintillation to Warby's movement, an exquisite attention to detail—the curlicue of her fingers, the twisted line of an arm—which speak of the moment. The attention permeating Warby's body fills the most minute of spaces in a glorious detail; a dimly lit arm, curling and shaping itself, the length of a back spiralling into the turn of a head. One of Warby's distinctive qualities is her ability to vary her speed with little apparent effort. Her work is textured by a subtle variety of velocities. A contemplation of fingers, wrist, and arm becomes a fast moving checkerboard of movement without notice.

Although set choreography can admit of any amount of depth and detail, there is a perceptual awareness which resonates in some improvisational work. One senses that the performer is utterly engaged in the moment, discovering and perceiving the work as it occurs. This distinguishes improvisation from set choreography, for the performer is making the work as it is being performed. Here, the performer, like audience, apprehends the unfolding of the work within the temporality of the performance itself. That makes for a certain degree of excitement.

Seasoned performers, Peter Trotman and Andrew Morrish, exploit that excitement for their own and other's amusement. Their latest work, *The Charlatan's Web*, is full of very funny moments where one performer invents a brazen complication which the other partner must incorporate. We the audience are invited to gloat over the sudden landscape which improvisation is able to thrust upon its subjects. *The Charlatan's Web* was developed over 4 performances into an epic tale of character and intrigue. A man without qualities is banished from a religious cloister for the mortal sin of knowledge. He sails away to avoid execution, ultimately jumping ship in order to spin a web of chicanery and deceit. Andrew Morrish plays the hapless novice-cum-artful trickster, and Peter Trotman the feverish priest, who devours his books with a carnal lust.

The work begins with a duet, where Trotman and Morrish move simply from the back of the stage to the front. This enables them to establish a play of timing and rapport. Once established, the duo moves apart. A good deal of the tale is told by one performer moving and the other providing narrative, whether on stage or off. The work has a gem-like quality, of candle-lit cameos such as Trotman's intense portrayal of the priest huddled over his books, sucking out their contents; the main character is himself a man of many faces; and the narrative just a series of fragments.

This is largely a play between word and movement. Neither performer exhibits a dancerly technique. Their panache comes from their energy and timing. They are utterly committed to their performance and to each other, such that the work as a whole and the contribution of each is seamless. I think the longevity of the Trotman-Morrish partnership—16 years—enables this duo to comfortably risk the narrative flow of their work for the greater good of the piece. Trotman and Morrish have just returned from the 1997 New York Improvisational Festival, where Deborah Jowitt of the *Village Voice* described them as "two extremely wily, full throttle performers whose nutty dancing and subtle timing elevate verbal wit into inspired madness" (December 1997).

Enso and *The Charlatan's Web* are ultimately distinguished by the technical skills that each performer brings to the

Ros Warby Anna Warby

improvisational moment. Despite the indeterminacy of improvisation, the history of people's work inevitably speaks though their performance. Though the work itself may be fresh, the skills that make it possible are not gained so easily. It seems like a contradiction in terms to prepare for improvisation, but it takes some dexterity to produce work which surprises even the body making it.

Enso, A Choreography between Movement and Sound, *Ros Warby, Helen Mountfort, and Jeannie Van de Velde, Danceworks, Melbourne, March 27 - April 5;* The Charlatan's Web, *Peter Trotman and Andrew Morrish, Dancehouse, Melbourne, March 29 - April 5*

Philipa Rothfield is a Melbourne academic (Philosophy, La Trobe University) and sometime performer. Her next work, Logic, *will be shown at* Mixed Metaphor, *Dancehouse, July 2 - 5*

Angie Pötsch Graham Farr

Dancehouse's *Mixed Metaphor* season of multimedia movement works will launch the MAP (Movement and Performance) season of dance events across Melbourne throughout June and July. Presented annually by Dancehouse, *Mixed Metaphor* provides a crucial platform for experienced choreographers and artists creating works which aim to push conceptual and kinetic attitudes and blur the boundaries between dance, text, sound, image, design, physical theatre and technology. The first week of *Mixed Metaphor 98* features: an internet link-up between San Francisco and Melbourne, where text and body converge through a digital dialogue in *Heliograph*, devised and performed by Sarah Neville with Matt Thomas, Becky Jenkin, Nic Mollison, Nik Gaffney; an exploration of suburban architecture and secrets, *Blindness*, choreographed and performed by Gretel Taylor with Telford Scully, Renee Whitehouse, James Welch; a surreal mapping of the myth of St Sebastian inspired by the writings of Yukio Mishima in *Out of the Schoolroom Window* by MIXED COMPANY directed by Tony Yap. In week two, Margaret Trail performs *'Hi, it's me'*, an investigation of the body's relationship with transmitted sound; Christos Linou performs his portrait of addiction and the AIDS virus, *FIDDLE-DE-DIE*; Philipa Rothfield, with Elizabeth Keen, creates a conversation between logic and the body in *Logic*, and Angie Potsch paints and dances with light in *temporal*. The *Mixed Metaphor* season also features a number of site-specific installations: a collection of red books, *Red herring*, by Charles Russell; photographs of urban architecture by James Welch; *Kitesend*, a 'moving' installation employing paper sculptures, by Hanna Hoyne and Lou Duckett. At an open forum entitled *metaphorically speaking* on Sunday July 5 at 2pm, issues and ideas arising from the works in the season will be discussed. Contact: Louisa Ragas (03) 9347 2860. *Mixed Metaphor*, Dancehouse, June 25-27 at 8pm & June 28 at 5pm; July 2-4 at 8pm & July 5 at 5pm RT

Changing partners

Julia Postle talks to Paige Gordon about a change of city and direction

After receiving relatively small amounts of support (nominally 'program grants') from the Australia Council in 1996 and 1997, the Paige Gordon Company failed to receive subsequent funding towards a new work Raising the Standard. *Arts ACT, the company's main funder did support the creation of the work. However...*

JP What made you want to leave Canberra?

PG Although we didn't receive Australia Council funding, we have been pretty well-funded by Arts ACT—the second best funded company here. However, dollars funding is one thing, support in terms of ongoing administration is another altogether. They fund you to a point and then expect you to survive. So no company in the ACT ever gets a chance to grow. In terms of a full-time dance company, $80,000 just doesn't cut it. It's crazy. And they have an expectation that you'll do the work for free, and you'll keep on doing it for free. And that's 'quote-unquote' what they've said to me. There's no valuing or comprehension of what a full time contemporary dance company means. It's happened to a few companies, dance companies in particular—Meryl Tankard going, Vis a Vis going, and then Padma Menon going. So if my skills are going to be better rewarded somewhere else in the marketplace, then I'm going to seek out that opportunity. That's exactly what I did.

JP Is it also more difficult now with the presence of The Choreographic Centre?

PG I guess as soon as that was set up and well-funded, it was going to be knock out competition. The Centre gives little bits of support to lots of artists and so, in terms of grants, they're actually pleasing a lot of people. And I've spoken to the artists who have been there and they say it's a great opportunity. But in terms of development of their craft, I don't know how much it contributes. And the Centre doesn't have to build audiences—they've got a capacity of 60 in their theatre, and they'll get that anyway because people are interested in dance. It *is* a good place to have a choreographic centre because Canberra is a transient place, everyone comes and goes. But in terms of follow-up for the artists, I'm not sure it meets a need.

Canberra's a great place but people would love to have a dance company they could call their own. There are lots of people who don't want The Choreographic Centre. And there are lots of people that, yes, they like seeing performances there but they don't feel a sense of ownership. And whilst I think it is really true that The Choreographic Centre is fantastic *nationally*—where else could it really be other than the national capital—it's a shame that things can't be considered equally in funding terms. I think there is enough room for the centre and for a company and I think the funding bodies should recognise that.

JP How did you carve out your own niche in the context of bigger companies visiting more frequently and presenting work on a larger scale?

PG We've visited all the high schools in Canberra to help them with their rock eisteddfod performances; we do corporate gigs (like the opening of the Canberra museum and gallery); and we did the opening of Playhouse. I see dance as being a really vital part of living—not just on stage. And a place like Canberra is fantastic for that. It's also great that Meryl Tankard and Chunky Move and the Australian Ballet and Bangarra come and do that big stuff, which then enables me to do work on the fringe and outside the mainstream.

JP What does the new position with Buzz Dance Theatre in Perth hold for you?

PG Well my work is going to develop—while I'm on salary, which is wild! And the dancers will be on salary and the studio is going to be heated and we won't have splinters in our feet and we're going to have administrative support and a production person. And I'm going to have a chance to be in the studio every day. I'm walking in big shoes—Philippa Clarke has been there for 8 years so there is really quite a high standard. The company also does a lot of regional touring, and a lot of school work, which is important for developing the next generational audience. As well I want to bring to Buzz the national network of contacts that I have.

JP Have you been happy with what you've done here?

PG Well it's always easier to assess your work in hindsight. I think that most of the pieces that I've done, I've been happy with. I like to put a work on and then 6 months later look at it again, that's part of the choreographic learning process. It does take years and I'm quite happy to spend my life learning the craft. I want to be able to say when I'm 60, 'Yeah, I think I got about five shows right.' I really want to keep evolving.

JP Are you leaving with any negative feelings?

PG The reason why I sought out the job in Perth was related to just knowing that after 7 years of going 'please, please, please' I couldn't do it anymore. I knew that while we were going to be up for triennial funding next year from Arts ACT, we were also told that it was going to be the same amount of money. What did they want, my blood? So while I'm not leaving with any really negative feelings, I think Arts ACT do need to realise that if they want to nurture a professional dance company—or theatre company, or opera company—they actually need to look at how they're structuring the grant applications for those organisations. With the Australia Council, they funded us for 2 years running, and then they changed their policy so it was project-related funding. So, Made to Move for instance, who are quite interested in touring my work, are not going to take us on just the possibility that we may get funding for next year. So they take on the companies that have guaranteed funding for next year. So it's a bit of a bad situation that dance has got itself into. I don't know how, but it has.

The Paige Gordon Company production Party Party Party *has received the support of Playing Australia and Health Pact and will tour in August.*

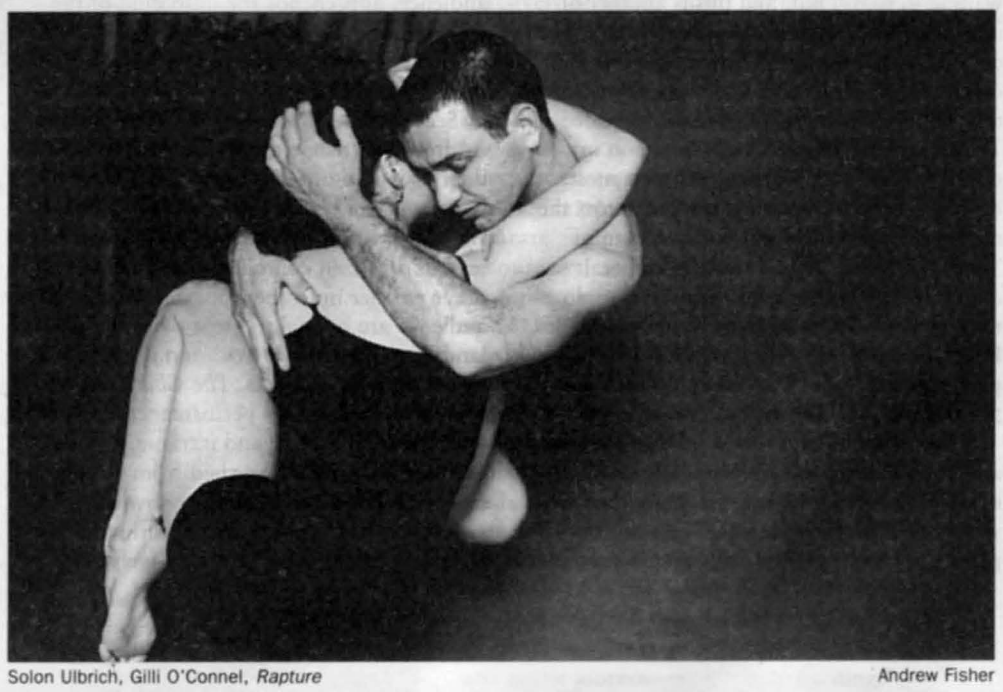
For more on dance:
The Bangarra documentary (page 7)
Company in Space's new work for Next Wave, *Mediated* (page 14)
The High Beam Festival (page 35)

Longing, loneliness, late night radio

Eleanor Brickhill reviews One Extra's latest show

Moving hastily past the title *Indepen/dance* for this new triple-bill production, curated by One Extra at the Seymour Theatre Centre, I quickly realised that what was implied by the title had less to do with the artists' aesthetic concerns than with their economic status.

Such a conventional format, and the equally conventional proscenium arch provided by the venue, the Everest Theatre, didn't allow much room for the choreographers to play and presented staging problems, not least because of the load of theatrical, aesthetic and technical values and expectations that come with that territory. And if the artists are inexperienced, young, or lack cohesive artistic direction, any divergence from those expectations, intended or otherwise, is not well served. In this environment, work tends to look as if it's aspiring to the same aesthetic values as, say, Sydney Dance Company, regardless of what the original concerns might have been, and if it fails to compare favourably on that level, then other choreographic ideas become reduced.



Solon Ulbrich, Gilli O'Connel, *Rapture* Andrew Fisher

But the first of the 3 works was most successful, drawing for its effect on the choreographer's colourful imagination. *h.t.d.a.p.h.* (or *how to draw a perfect heart*), is really a duet rather than a solo, choreographed by performer Lisa Ffrench, with DJ Jad McAdam's quiet chat-style vocal design setting the ambient mood. We are invited to attend lightly to love, longing, loneliness and late-night radio, as well as Lisa's obsession with drawing hearts and finding fate in their artistry.

Opening her heart-rending story with a fake-blood-on-the-shower-curtain *Psycho* routine, she describes further how she has drawn hearts on misted shower glass, on foggy windows, on telephone memo pads. Once again wearing her now infamous rubber gloves—don't ask me why—Ffrench tells us the story of her obsession with lurve.

Surprisingly enough, before leaving for the theatre that night, a friend suddenly asked, "Do you believe in love?" Startled, I went, "Um, well, um, yes. What an odd question." When it was revealed that she meant mainly the undying eros variety, I gave it all away by saying, "Oh, that? No, not these days. People over 40 don't, do they?" And then, having said that, to be confronted as if with a continuation of that odd conversation in Lisa Ffrench's material! It must be in the air. So I could have thought, oh, dear, I'm all wrong, everybody is thinking about it. Or, I might also ask, why do choreographers mostly deal with issues of interest to people predominantly under 30?

As the program unfolded, it was increasingly the second question which leapt to mind; and it's not the material necessarily, but its treatment which creates problems. For instance, the last work, *Rapture*, choreographed by Rosetta Cook and performed by her company of 10 or so dancers, seemed to be a work made for young children. It opened with all the dancers carrying on tiny kiddie suitcases which they fiercely and possessively clasped to their breasts in parody of sulky 2-year olds protecting their favourite toys. While the performers are undoubtedly serious in their intent to depict various aspects of erotic rapture, in the end, the effect is unintended and unfortunate parody: the 'drama', the 'passion', the 'pathos' of young storybook love sends itself up with empty style, little social commentary or exploration, and little contemporary relevance.

The work itself was given depth mostly by the musical design, a collection of schmalzy classics, predominantly romantic, and violin-based, splendidly passionate and love-lorn, played at an overpowering volume. Around this hung the dance material, and some of the duets I remembered seeing in prior performances, set apart and more delicately focused than seemed possible in this longer work. Here, the ensembles and never-ending twining, lifting, pleading, sitting, sulking, running, chasing, throwing, smiling etc, developed an overall blander texture, adding little to the overwhelmingly strong imagery created firstly by the familiar and much-loved romance of the music.

The middle work, *dear carrie*, choreographed by Marilyn Miller, was as it said, a work in progress, again not well served by the venue. The story is ambitious and personal, dealing with the tragedy of an Aboriginal woman, Carrie, whose life was ruined by the cruelty of displacement, and the spiritual and physical oppression and degradation she experienced at the hands of religious do-gooders. The dance, while simultaneously caught in the net of 70s modern, studded with iconic 90s Aboriginal dance images, structured with its strange anti-climactic ending, and laced with a raw, histrionic soundtrack, had a straightforwardness which might have been simple naivety, but which insisted on its dignity. Even so, while such tragedy is obviously deep, compelling and passionately felt, a quieter, more understated, arm's length realisation might have allowed space for the audience's compassion, and communicated the choreographer's intent better than it otherwise did.

Indepen/dance: h.t.d.a.p.h. *choreographer-performer Lisa Ffrench;* Rapture, *choreographer Rosetta Cook;* dear carrie, choreographer Marilyn Miller; *curated by One Extra Dance Company, Seymour Theatre Centre, May 15*

write sites

Kirsten Krauth reads the litweb

http://student.uq.edu.au/~s271502/

Komninos' cyberpoetry site, "poetry that moves in time and space, poetry that requires new ways of reading" is a good introduction to his online works. Animated text poems, deceptively simple. He has written poetry for children and it shows. The words move as examples of what they are, do the actions they describe...sunrise comes up from the horizon, sunset into obscurity. Innovative and memorable, fun and playful, you are forced to consider the possibilities of words, their nature as visual building blocks. The potential of poetry that moves is exciting. I like to imagine putting all these bouncing, shooting, running, jitterbugging words together in a riotous assault. C in quick pursuit of *hasing* off the screen. Who says the computer means the death of literacy. Spike Milligan-esque, can you imagine what you could do with *On the ning nang nong*. There are other examples of cyberpoetry featured: interactive, where words change at random and you hit stop to make a poem. As interactive as pokies I guess. Spoken word heard jukebox, where you can hear Komninos reading "faster than a squirt of vinegar." I like the sensuality of reading poems online, imagining how the poet sounds, the nuance in the work and then hearing the poet's own voice... interpretation. Java Animated Poems. QuickTime Virtual Reality Poetry. Genres of poetry become poems themselves.

http://www.deadreal.com.au

http://www.altx.com

"Black Ice—Fiction for a Wired Nation." At first glance this section of the site seems male dominated, austere, techno-cold but not so. Good and bad short erotic fiction. Soft core, sometimes cliched and I've never been into magic realism. Scoops of techno, which, when it's good, it's very very good. According to blurb, Black Ice is modelled on avant-garde literary writing of the past and aims to publish offensive, sexy and formally adventurous works. Commendable ideals and some interesting techno-experiments but nothing really turned me on and I didn't leave feeling violated.

Amerika Online—Mark Amerika's column (he recently toured here to mixed reaction)—offers opinion and interviews with legendaries like Allen Ginsberg. He tends to overwrite, very I-driven, which becomes boring, first person, this-happened-then-that—perhaps the internet column format could be played with a little more? Revolutionary hype: *Alt X* aims to challenge contemporary writing establishments and produce electronic novellas which "experiment in narrative and language" and fight the "oppressive forces of social and literary authority." Literary terrorism, drive-by-haiku. Yawn.

http://sysx.apana.org.au/~gashgirl/arc/index.html

Alt X needs to take some lessons from gashgirl in the offensive department. Anything you want, you got it. Feminist speakings—"saboteurs of big daddy mainframe"—lots of cunts, both literal and figurative. Gashgirl likes the smell of blood, the depth of wounds, stomach churning sickening puns. It gets a reaction but then I get bored with self-destruction; I hang around with enough artists. There's lots of going down, down down down into dreamland, violent fairytales; Little Red Riding Hood's revenge. Sweet success and the art of killing online. The blinking and blending of technology with words are great and gruesome. Da Rimini knows her machine and rages against it:

She weeps tears of code.
Her thoughts are classified. She has forgotten her own password.
She is corrupt.
Unrecoverable icon.

http://www.ins.gu.edu/eda/text/journal.html

The serious site. TEXT. Articles by teachers of creative writing. For all those writing students trying to suck up, click here. Basic layout and design and no pics, hence the name. Creative pieces and writing about writing. Hypertext as bibliographical tool is utilised effectively as a way of referencing. See Susan Hawthorne's "Topographies of Creativity: Writing and Publishing" for digital resources. For writers interested in critical theory about writing, especially on the net.

http://www.netlink.com.au/~beth

OK, it's semi promotional but it's an example of what the net offers to writers: a haven for their work. Produce a web page that reflects you, show off your best stuff, do a striptease but not down to bare skin. Beth Spencer's first book *How to Conceive of a Girl* was published last year. Click on parts of Spencer's cover to reveal juicy excerpts and contemporary short fiction, poetry and essays. The bitter sweet *A Blue Mountains Coin-in-the-slot Telescopic Poem*, full of masculinity and mud and feminist footy fever, is even better than its title.

http://www.deadreal.com.au

Online road novel. Episodic and intertextual, an idea well suited to the nowhereness of the cyberhighway. Beautifully designed, film noirish—no True-Love-and-Chaos-desert-scenes here—street signs direct the way and if you're tired and need a driver reviver, Kit Kat and weak white coffee, meaningful messages are signposted throughout. Strong and narrative-driven, you take various roots/routes as a man and a woman hit the road, Jack, and newcomers arrive on the scene to look at the carnage. For Drifters Only: "You start the wipers' rhythmic dirge. Lo-ner Lo-ner."

http://writers.ngapartji.com.au

Ngapartji's Virtual Writers in Residence: ngapartji = exchange, the act of giving or receiving (Pitjantjatjara language). The best interactive collection of fiction I've seen, divided by genre, which encourages the reader to submit versions, reviews and even a rating.

Electronica/multimedia with a wide range of writers/practitioners: John Crouch's erotic babble, *Gibberish*, rolls on the tongue like a well-sucked Malteser, while gc beaton's *tangling with artificial intelligence* introduces me to someone who I'm sure will become a lifelong friend. Eliza. At last someone who truly understands me. Talk to her—*www.ai.ijs.si/eliza-cgi-bin/eliza_script*—if you need some TLC.

http://www.ozemail.com.au/~rmclean/arts/liftk2.htm

The K Assignment: a serial cybernovel during a writer's festival, a chapter per day by different writers. With the opening line by Dean Kiley, "Helen Garner's just finished fucking Patrick White", I'm hooked. The writing explodes off the screen and into the next millennium, into the psychology of the future. A sci-fi thriller, hilariously subversive, a world where poems only appear as computer viruses and "rhetoric was outlawed after the infamous 21st century scandal involving PP McGuiness, Ray Martin and the use of unauthorised E-motion gravitators", full of imagination and irony, techno-savvy brilliance and belly laughs. A must for struggling writers hoping to get an arts grant. Will the Rogues Gallery of Minor Poets overpower the Niche Warriors? It's now your assignment...

For quick access to any of the above sites, go to RealTime 25 on the net
http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/

Have you seen any websites that feature innovative or experimental writing? Email Kirsten at RealTime *with details:*
opencity@rtimearts.com

For more hypertext:
Visit http://www.rtimearts/~opencity/
for Josephine Wilson's "Dear Reader"
or read it in RealTime 26 (August/September)

OnScreen
film, media and techno-arts

Feature review

The way home

Archie Weller reviews *Shifting Sands*, six Indigenous films

The first image we see in this collection of 6 short films is that of the wind blowing away the sand. The second image is of children's footprints and children's laughter, then of the mother calling out and her footprints coming for the child.

So it is in all these films: the image of wind, air, water, earth, the love—and need—of family and how we protect and look out for each other. Three of the films (*Grace*, *Tears*, *My Colour Your Kind*) touch on Missionary or controlled life while the other 3 (*Promises*, *Passing Through*, *My Bed, Your Bed*) relate to settlements or town life. Every one of them is based in the country so we see images of shimmering heat waves, flat desolate landscapes, sweeping cane fields, craggy mountains. The places these characters live in are easily forgotten small towns or lonely communities. But, above all and despite everything, it is home, and whether the characters are trying to escape it (as in *Tears*) or find it (as in *My Colour Your Kind*) or are happy in it (as in *Promises*) it will, in the end, always be home.

Wesley Enoch's *Grace* is a powerful film with the metaphor of earth very strong. We see images of dirt-encrusted jeans and thongs encroaching upon an urban white world. The dirt on Grace's hands after the funeral and as she kicks off her shoes getting out of the taxi and the moving scene at the end when Aunt and Niece are entwined—and yet separate—in their grief are part of the story as well. The other lasting image is the 2 hands clasped together with the necklace—the necklace Grace finds in her sister's belongings and which, in memory, they later exchange...she having lost hers long ago, it seems.

This appears a story of loss and coming to terms with it. Losing all touch with her family she faces a hostile reception when she returns. Cleverly, even the weather helps build up the tension as storm clouds brew in the background finally to break as Grace's reserve also breaks and there is sense of a resolution being made. For rain also rejuvenates and we sense family and friendship will prevail. This story is about finding a home and family again, which the images tell well. Justine Saunders as Grace and Roxanne McDonald as Lorretta are wonderful antagonists at the very heart of the film.

As with *Grace* there is a storm on the horizon in Ivan Sen's *Tears*. But it seems as though it has passed this isolated piece of the world. Every image in this film is of old rusted signs, empty towns, dead sheep, annoying flies—a sad environment the various vehicles can't wait to shoot past and away from. Only the 2 characters' faces are young and vibrant, shown to us in a clever use of close-ups. This makes the story very personal as the audience too can follow the characters' dreams.

A nice scene is the car pulling up as Vaughn's mate talks to him. They talk about police trouble while Lena observes the sad baby, eyes covered in flies, and the stoic mother. The male passenger watches her through the mirror, sizing her up. These are all reasons for her to leave. So much is said and yet not a word is spoken. This happens in all the stories and is one of the wonders of film. There is a very clever image of making the bus disappear with just a swirl of dust left behind. Luke Carroll and Jamila Frail are two promising young actors who hopefully will find lots more work.

Daniella McLean's *My Colour Your Kind* deals with the unusual phenomenon of an albino Aboriginal. This is a story about a journey too—one of knowing who you are and not what others want you to be. In fact she doesn't speak the whole movie, leaving that up to the pious nun and the truck-driver who won't pick up a blackfellah but probably thinks she is a white girl. It is a wonderful scene when the nun reads out of the Bible about the good of being light.

Here again is the image of wind blowing the curtain and earth being used as a symbol of home, of belonging. Water also falls, not as rain, but from a tap used to wash away her dirt thus making her white again. Later on she has a drink from a natural spring, the image being one of peace.

Mark Olive's *Passing Through* contrasts the flat country outside that appears to be waiting for something/someone and the noisy car with radio and argumentative children fighting over computer games. It is a spirit story so there are a lot of images that aren't really what they seem. Again, wind as an image is very important—as is rain. And a storm plays a special part in the story. An old fashioned radio plays an old song, an old phone gets dusty.

The last scene is another example of the magic of film and it is interesting to note in passing that the dress the woman wears is almost the same colour as the one she wore as a girl, further enhancing the mystique of the movie.

The last 2 films are journeys also, but more journeys of love since both deal with traditional marriage. Michelle Torres takes us to Broome for her story told in typical Broome lingo and *Promise* is probably the film that relies more on the telling of the story than the seeing. The wind comes in here as well, blowing the sheets (as white as the young girls' dresses). But the most cleverly used image is that of the damper making as Gilladi herself was taught by her Auntie and the way she now teaches her grand-daughter: the oven as opposed to the old drum full of coals, the plastic dish as opposed to the wooden coolamon. The old camp ways and traditions are being forgotten by the new generation. And even though Gilladi has no illusions about love as a white woman might see it, and even though life was hard, she got on well with Waamba. He was her mate and she misses him. This is a gentle tale of being mates and also the importance of family. Sylvia Clarke plays her part competently as usual, with Robert Wilson and Ali Torres among others backing her up.

Sabrina Sabaan, *Promise*

The last film is *My Bed Your Bed* by Erica Glynn. This is wonderfully acted by Ursula Yovich and Trevor Jamieson who also composed 2 of the lovely songs used. All of the films use Aboriginal humour and, importantly, look at things from an Indigenous point of view but this film does it the best of all. The laughter and looks from the old women in the beginning who have been there before, and the scene when the relatives arrive and they must pretend everything is going well, are good examples of this.

Again we have an empty environment and the clash of traditional versus modern. Alvin appears more interested in playing his guitar than settling down to a life on the settlement. But this is mainly a love story and that is the thread throughout—will they consummate what has been ordained for them? And all of this done with few words but only gestures and facial expressions.

Indeed there are moments in all these films when silence says a whole lot. There are beautiful images of proud, funny, handsome or gorgeous blackfellahs living their lives. They aren't the token black on the outskirts of white society nor are they the skippy skin parade. These stories invite non-Indigenous people to step into Aboriginal Australia and follow the footprints on the sand. They are all quiet, thought-provoking scenarios.

A mention must be made here of the musical content as well for the soundtracks complement the stories in every way. David Page in *Grace*, the Elektra String Quartet in *Tears*, David Bridie and John Phillips in *My Colour Your Kind* , David Page and Stephen Francis in *Passing Through*, Rima Tamou and Leroy Cummins in *Promise* and Frank Yama as well the traditional singers in *My Bed Your Bed.*

A character in *Passing Through* says to Margie "This is your roots...you belong around here...Land here claims their own..." This is a recurring theme through all these films. We have not gone away. The land awaits us and like a threatening storm we are coming over the horizon. As Wesley Enoch mentions at the end of *Grace*—"to those who believe in the dream." I, for one, hope this dream carries onward like the wind, blowing out the old stereotypes and bringing to life on screen a whole new world.

Shifting Sands, *second program of the Indigenous Drama Initiative of the Indigenous Branch, AFC;* Tears, *writer/director Ivan Sen;* My Colour Your Kind, *writer/director Danielle Maclean;* Passing Through, *writer/director Mark Olive;* Grace, *writer/director Wesley Enoch;* Promise, *writer/director Michelle Torres;* My Bed Your Bed, *writer/director Erica Glynne. These films will be screening on SBS in July.*

Archie Weller is currently completing Boodjera, *a novel. He is also involved in making films with Sally Riley and another novel set in Sydney's Pyrmont, Newtown and Coogee.*

Interview

Diverse faces of Aboriginality

Melanie Guiney speaks to Wesley Enoch, director of one of the short films in *Shifting Sands*.

Shifting Sands directors: l. to r. front row Cynthia Mann (Distribution Manager, AFI), Erica Glynn, Danielle MacLean, Michelle Torres; back row Mark Olive, Wesley Enoch, Wal Saunders (Director, Indigenous Films, AFI), and Ivan Sen
Jenny Hearder

Shifting Sands is currently screening in a national tour to enthusiastic audiences. These 6 short films comprise the second stage of the Indigenous Drama Initiative supported by the Australian Film Commission, SBS Independent and various state film agencies.

Wesley Enoch, writer, director and founder of Kooemba Jdarra in Brisbane, Australia's leading Indigenous theatre company, has written and directed *Grace*, an accomplished debut film. It depicts the moving story of an Aboriginal woman returning home for her estranged sister's funeral to confront strained relationships with the family and the heavy burden of loss.

"The film had its genesis when I was creating a piece for the stage, *The Seven Stages of Grieving*. There is much talk of reconciliation in Australia, but I am trying to say that this isn't possible until there is reconciling within Indigenous Australia. *Grace* is a conventional story of someone from the outside coming in but it's given more impact because she's an Aboriginal person and we expect Aboriginal families to be open and caring and sharing and loving and all embracing all that kind of stuff, and in fact they're not, in this case anyway. They're hard and bitter and they reject her. What this film is ultimately about is this final image of this woman crying beside the grave of her dead sister."

With a rich background of theatrical experience, Enoch found the transition to film involved major differences of style and approach in realising the story. "At one stage with extras and everybody, there were about 50 people, and you're trying to shoot this intimate little moment, and they're all looking, and in theatre that just doesn't happen. The relationship between the actor and director is just so intense that nothing else matters. What I found in this film project was that the technical requirements of capturing that one moment of performance create another presence, another strain on the actor, on me as a director."

In spite of constraints in the filming process, the capacity to directly concentrate the attention of the viewer was liberating, even without the use of strictly technical language for communicating with key crew members. "I think what I've always known but am now able to articulate is that theatre does highly stylised, sometimes strangely poetic, quite lateral leaps all over the shop, and that's not how I could tell the story in this medium. In film I can say 'I want the audience to see that bracelet on that person's hand.' I lacked the ability to articulate the exact thing I wanted...so I had to go on feelings. I found that I tried to use an emotional language that then had to be interpreted in a technical way. DOPs know what they're doing and as long as they can interpret that feel, that's what it's all about. In the end I think people go on the journey. There's got to be a sense that the film is somehow important, that the story is somehow transformative, there's a reason an audience should see it, not just that it's a technically good film."

And the business of post-production, being able to rearrange and shift focus to various elements of the story? "As long as you have the coverage, you can tell the story from any perspective...it could be shaped or manipulated to go in a totally different direction if you wanted it to. The whole idea of watching the film over and over again in lots of different ways, realising that one small change in the beginning means big things at the end, just by using this shot or that shot, was great. Whereas in theatre, there's really only one way you can see it."

Inevitably, there will be comparisons made with the first series, *From Sand to Celluloid*. Enoch believes both series stand alone and have done a great deal to broaden perceptions about Indigenous Australia. "I think in *Shifting Sands* there was more of a sense of people's stories, connections with family and landscape and environment. But what I think both series do well is provide diverse faces of Aboriginality in this country. There's something special about having black people doing it, that in a deep seated sort of way is unique about the voice. And because *From Sand to Celluloid* happened it's created an environment where we can tell a different sort of story, and by the end of the century we'll have a collection of stories that are as diverse as we are as people anyway."

Shifting Sands *is presently touring capital cities and regional centres. For further information contact the AFI on (03) 9696 1844.*

Melanie Guiney is a Brisbane-based producer/director.

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International Index to Film/TV, FIAF Periodical Indexing Project, 6 Nottingham St, London W1M 3RB, Great Britain;
APAIS, National Bibliographic publications, National Library of Australia, Canberra ACT, Australia 2600

Report

Ethical narrating

Cate Jones reports on the *Telling Our Stories* forum

On March 24, in association with the AFI and the SAFC, the Media Resource Centre in Adelaide hosted a national screening and forum program exploring representation and identity politics in Australia, *Telling Our Stories*, subtitled, "does who you are affect what you make and does what we see affect who we are?" Panel members included Bridget Ikin, General Manager of SBS Independent, local Adelaide filmmaker Heather Croall, Eva Wunderman from Canada and Kate Hampel, a Melbourne filmmaker.

The screenings included Heather Croall and Eva Wunderman's showreel, *Fa'fafines in Paradise*, a vividly coloured, lusty flash of what is to come. The film aims to explore the effects of cultural influences from the West on the fa'fafine tradition, represented in this film as Samoan, but common to Polynesian societies. A son is reared as a daughter to help the mother of the family with her domestic chores, and according to this tradition, pursues womanly interests and pleasures, like doing women's hair and sewing. In this film, the homosexual relationship to the role of fa'fafines is explored in terms of the survival of the tradition in contemporary Samoa. Contact with the western gay scene is creating a flamboyant, nightclubbing, overtly homosexual Danny La Rue sort of fa'fafine. The homosexual expression of this tradition, which missionaries and anthropologists like Margaret Mead chose to downplay or completely ignore, is emerging as its most powerful one.

Temple on the Hill made by Kay Rasool tells the story of a banana growing, Sikh community living in a country town, Woolgoolga. This film describes the impact of Western culture on a displaced society by exploring the perspectives of individuals belonging to the collective. The sexist nature of the community is exposed when Rasool compares male and female perceptions of the community's social and ritual organisation. A moving portrayal of the sadness, resignation and loneliness of an older, traditional woman, whose son is rejected by the community of the local Woolgoolga girl he marries, communicates the heart of this film. An evening passes and scenes are compared. Hers, cheerless, television-watching, isolated, appears in potent contrast to the animated, exuberant, very traditional, neighbouring Sikh family. These neighbours, whose women, children and grandchildren play music and dance about a large communal room, arrange their marriages and, whether successful or not, the domestic scene resembles all the lonely woman desires.

Kate Hampel's *Hear No Evil* is about the heavy metal/gothic band Catwitch, based in Melbourne. While the film follows the band's progress through meetings, gigs, rehearsals and its first video, it also attempts an exploration of identity politics, inadvertently revealing Hampel's own political position. Before I express my concerns with this film, I have to say that it is really very clever and amusing.

Hampel explained at the forum that the film's focus was feminist and that while making the film, she became interested in the power struggle between the manager, Helena, and the all male band. If this relationship is meant to come across as the film's most significant ingredient, it doesn't, while Hampel's representation of the lead singer and her patronising analysis of the band's suburban environment does.

Interestingly, Hampel spoke of the actors in her film as subjects. Later, at the forum when someone asked how the subjects felt about the way in which they had been portrayed, her reply exposed her position. Hampel said that she had screened the film for the band but had been extremely nervous. To her surprise they liked it. Perhaps some of us find a joke made at our expense harder to laugh at.

This leads to a concern I have about these documentaries regarding ownership, authority, access and control over a process where the potential for manipulation and fictionalisation appears to be unregulated. Towards the end of the forum the question of ethical issues was raised by someone in the audience. There was some heavy groaning and panel members looked uncomfortably at each other. No member of the panel answered this question adequately. With a background in Aboriginal studies, I see the issue of ethics as critical in a forum named *Telling Our Stories*, 'designed to explore representation and identity politics.' It is transparently clear that 'who you are affects what you make and what we see affects who we are' but if the intention is to tell someone's story then tell it as honestly as possible, don't use someone else to tell your own.

Telling Our Stories *forum, Media Resource Centre, Adelaide, March 24. Films:* Fa'fafines in Paradise *by Heather Croall & Eva Wunderman;* Temple on the Hill *by Kay Rasool;* Hear No Evil *by Kate Hampel,*

Cate Jones is an Adelaide based writer and a tutor for Aboriginal students at the University of South Australia's Aboriginal Faculty. She is currently doing a Masters in Aboriginal Studies.

Interview

Corridors of creativity

Anna Dzenis interviews Richard Flanagan, writer and director of *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*

The Sound of One Hand Clapping *is the directorial debut of Richard Flanagan who comes to filmmaking from a literary background and a politically motivated environmentalist's engagement with Tasmania's history and wilderness. The film tells the story of Sonja (Kerry Fox), the daughter of Slovenian migrants who settled in Tasmania in the 50s. The film begins years later when Sonja, discovering she is pregnant, returns to her home to try and seek a reconciliation with her father Bojan (Kristof Kaczmarek) and an understanding of the reasons why her mother left her when she was 3 years old. The story discloses itself through a narrative structure that moves between the present and the past. The film has had a mixed reception. Some have found its story of families, and the dislocation of migrants unable to escape the horrors of war, deeply moving. Others have welcomed it as an addition to that growing body of Australian films which speak of the migrant experience. Others again have found a naivete in the narration of a director who learnt the craft of filmmaking in the process of making this film. Anna Dzenis continued the conversation with Flanagan.*

Arabella Wain in *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*

AD How did an historian, an activist, an environmentalist, a prize-winning novelist and a scriptwriter come to make a film and where does the film sit within your overall body of work?

RF Misadventure and folly would be the answer to the first part of your question—as to how it happened. As to how it fits in—it is for others to judge what it actually means. But I've always felt that creativity is a large house in which there are many rooms and I never wanted to be incarcerated in a single one of them with the title 'historian' or 'novelist' or whatever. I like getting out in the corridors and in the kitchen to meet with other people. I'm always interested in finding new ways of exploring different forms of expression. I'd like to get involved in physical design, go on as an architect and furniture designer and do some quite major building at some point. I've never operated with any ambitions or plans; I simply have something that I'm doing at the moment which is the only thing I care about. I think you only have the day and you must do the best possible work you can in that day because the future is always uncertain. So whatever project it is that I'm on, that's everything, and then other things seem to crop up.

AD The other night at the AFI Conversations On Film *series you spoke of the way people may proudly display a beautiful photo of a tree from a Wilderness calendar in their lounge room, but what they don't think about are the stories behind the tree, that maybe a woman hung herself on that tree. I was interested in this polemic and the way that the images in your film became animated—the process by which frozen moments became complicated and reveal themselves—like the panoramic opening shot of the uninhabited landscape and the hand-painted photo of the grandfather in the open coffin.*

RF At every point I was always searching for an image that would further the story but I also wanted the image to have endless layers so you could come back again and again and discover more and more. I remember many years ago seeing the film *Shoah*. There's a scene in which the filmmaker, Lanzmann, goes to Treblinka to find the Germans had razed it to the ground and then planted pine trees there, so there's this silvery pine forest. This made me think of how closely associated is the idea of forgetting with the romantic idea of the natural world. And with that opening shot that's also the closing shot, I liked the idea that people would just start off thinking of this as a 19th century landscape but in the end realise that there was once a community here, that people had a profound relationship to it, and they altered it and it altered them. That's what I hope people will take with them—that they'd never look at the land in the same way and when they were given these conventional understandings of it, they would always question and query them.

AD When I first heard about this film I thought it was going to be A Tale of Ruby Rose *story about a desolate Tasmanian wilderness, but that really was never the case. What kind of Tasmania did you see yourself depicting?*

RF I certainly didn't want to make *A Tale of Ruby Rose* type film. That was an interesting film, but in the end it used landscape as backdrop rather than establishing the land as a character central to the story which is what I wanted to do.

AD You've also described your film as a story about causes and consequences. You have talked about the way 'an act of violence' has effects that resonate across decades and generations. You have mentioned both the war in Bosnia and the films of Quentin Tarantino. What role does violence play in your film?

RF I was conscious when I was writing the script and making the film that I really liked the idea of having a story that did have at its heart an act of violence that you never witness—so that by the film's end you realise it has just gone on and on. It was very much influenced by what was going on in Bosnia and the way violence was never understood as a social act. It's always understood, particularly in cinema, as an act against another individual, but it's always an act that has social consequences and has consequences for many people that go on and on—and that's what I wanted to try and show in the story. I find violence in film very distressing—it seems to me that people deserve to be addressed with more thought. *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* is probably an unfashionable film from all these angles, because it doesn't deal in violence and all the things people seem to like in film now. But I feel that cinema can do a lot better.

AD It is possible that eventually your film will be discussed and analysed as an 'adaptation of the novel', yet when you talk about the script, the novel and the film you depict them as very different things—what is the relationship for you?

RF It's depressing because what I loved about making the film was that you didn't have to deal in words and there were all these other things that you could never do with words. That's what I wanted to explore and for me it always had to work as a movie. Of everybody on the set, I was never the one who had any fidelity to the script or to the idea of it as a novel. I wanted it to both work as a movie and explore the notions of cinema. What I learned in the course of making this movie is that cinema is closer to more abstract forms like music; it doesn't really share that much in common with literature but nobody wants to know about that. In the end, too, there's a certain snobbery on the part of the many people who review film and I think they like the notion of it being somehow similar to literature—they don't want to explore it on its own terms.

AD I was impressed with your actors' faces—they had beautiful faces—you could get a sense of community through those faces.

RF What I've always loved about movies is that you can simply go and watch people, so faces were really important to me. We spent a lot of time casting, right down to extras, so that the faces could carry a great deal of meaning. We actually used quite a few Bosnian refugees who had only been in Tasmania for a month, because in one face you can find everything you need to know about what has happened. I do believe that thing Aboriginals have, that the camera steals part of your soul. I think film enters and takes you into people's souls. So you can't really cast people who may have great acting ability if there's something they don't have in their soul. That's why I like Kristof as Bojan, because he's a person who's had great pain in his life and you just know it the moment you see him. He's got a really big heart and it's just there for people. I really dislike the way faces have become dishonoured in modern life—there's that sort of blanding out of faces—people resculpt with surgery and cosmetics so that they all look like Americans. To me the faces you end up with are like badges of honour. That's the one thing I really liked about the film, that I could show faces and allow people to look at them and love them. I just wanted to make a film that was about love—I thought that was something that was worth doing. If you had a chance to speak to tens of thousands of people—if you could send out a message of hope that would be love—that seemed worthwhile.

AD Most of the reviews I've read refer to that emotional moment in the film, the significant gesture when the father brings the cradle, the high-chair and the bassinet into the pub.

RF What we actually did there was strip out all the sound. So you start off with a little bit of rain, there's a little bit of pub noise at the beginning, and we took that away and then we took the rain away. So that in the end the only sound in the entire cinema is when Sonja goes up and puts her finger on the cradle and it rocks. And I mixed it so that it only came out of the centre speaker—which is very unusual because normally you would use all the speakers. But my hope was that it just took you right into the cradle and into Sonja's face. We spent a lot of time with the sound of that to try and strip away anything that didn't have anything to do with the father and daughter and the love they had for one another.

AD In another interview you mentioned a remarkable scene of Bosnian men in the truck that in the end you couldn't put into the film because of its destabilising effect on the narrative.

RF That was a great revelation to me because it was my favourite scene and it had an extraordinary power. It wasn't even just me, everyone loved it. It was shot very quickly—the light was going and we jumped on the truck and I yelled out "action." There were no rehearsals—nothing. And we cut it together—and it was terrific—but it entirely unsettled the film because it was so powerful. At which point you had to throw it away—it was peripheral to the short story that the film was. But it was integral to the novel, because the novel is a large enough structure to accommodate it. We kept on trying to recut it and then one of the sound editors, Craig Carter, said I don't know why you've got it in there, you don't need it. And I'd never thought of that—we'd truncated it, we'd extended it, we'd cut it every way we could, but no-one had actually said "cut it out." And this was blasphemy. But we cut it out, and then the whole film suddenly hung together.

AD What are the films that have been important to you? And what films did you watch in thinking your way towards this film?

• **continued next page**

Interview

• *from previous page*

RF I really liked Kusturica's *When Father Was Away on Business* and *Underground*. I also really like Istvan Szabo—*Mephisto* and *Colonel Redl*—particularly *Mephisto*. I remember seeing David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* when I was about 12—I think it was the first adult film I saw—and I didn't realise you could do those sorts of things in movies. I've always been particularly impressed with Jane Campion's films but I prefer *An Angel at my Table* to *The Piano*. And Kieslowski—I love *Decalogue* and I thought *Blue* was the most remarkable film of the 90s. Once you make a movie you realise there's not much that hasn't been done before and you think the form's become tired and someone like Kieslowski comes along and breaks all the rules of what a film could do and should be about and you realise that the form can totally reinvent itself. *Blue* was probably a big influence on me but in the end I tried not to have an influence. I tried to find a visual style that was true to itself. The other thing about film is that it's utter chaos. That's why I really dislike the idea of the auteur, because it supposes that you might be able to make a film in the manner you paint a picture or write a book where you do have total control. The truth is that there's this manic energy of hundreds of disparate talents and non-talents and there's all the madness of human life contained in that. There's loves and hates and sicknesses and follies and strange strokes of genius and terrible strokes of stupidity and somehow the director has to retrieve something out of this that will constitute a coherent enough piece that people might want to go and watch it. But to think that they would control it is to misunderstand life itself because it is manic—it's a carnival over which you look but upon which you don't really have much effect. I think the role of the director is both over-rated and mystified.

AD What will follow The Sound of One Hand Clapping*?*

RF I'm working on a book. I want to write an experimental novel that is entirely different in form and composition from anything I've done before and I also want to try and push out the possibilities of the novel. It's been forgotten that there are still new possibilities for books as forms because everyone's become fixated with new technology. At the end of the day it is the work itself which is important. I believe that success or failure are imposters which you must ignore because they both can become quite corrosive to your soul. I finish this tour and I just want to worry about the book.

The Sound of One Hand Clapping, *written and directed by Richard Flanagan, based on the novel of same name, distributed by Palace, currently playing at cinemas around Australia.*

Obituary

Fin de 21.C

Darren Tofts farewells a favourite

It is an unfortunate sign of the ironic times we live in that *21.C* magazine won't be ringing in the new millennium. The magazine of the future is to be discontinued after 7 fruitful years of projection and speculation, in which the technoculture that now seems so familiar was carefully mapped out and articulated. Its last issue, "Revolting America", edited by R.U. Sirius and prophetically subtitled "No Future", is the magazine's reluctant swansong, signalling, after Baudrillard, that in at least one incarnation the 3rd millennium has indeed already come and gone.

21.C had many qualities that made it distinctive. Its variety and unpredictability made it difficult to identify any singular contribution to the accelerated countdown to the future that has become so rampant in the last decade of the 20th century. However its determination to cross all checkpoints was in fact the quality that made it stand out from the crowd. *21.C* was less pretentious and fashion conscious than *Mondo 2000* and much broader in its scope than *Wired*. It recognized that the contemporary world was multi-faceted and fuzzy, a poetic body sans organs, as dependent as ever upon all areas of pre-digital cultural production. Unlike other publications attending to the trajectories of the present into the future, *21.C* recognized the importance of cultural memory as well, and did its best to tease out its traces and demonstrate their propulsive force in the casting of these trajectories.

As any vigilant reader will know, *21.C* fussed over its moniker as often as it changed editors: "Previews of a changing world", "Scanning the future", "The magazine of culture, technology and science", "The world of ideas." All of these missed the mark, for above all else the magazine was a preparatory guide, a concentration of reconnaissance dispatches from the future: *21.C*: Mode d'emploi, a user's manual for the world to come.

On the occasion of *21.C*'s passing, I spoke to publisher Ashley Crawford and editor Ray Edgar.

DT Tell me a bit about 21.C*'s history.*

AC & RE *21.C* has had, to say the least, a tumultuous history. In a funny way *21.C* has been a bit of a who's who of Australian publishing. It was started in 1991 by the Commission for the Future, and it's interesting to see how it captured so many imaginations. While it was Australian everyone wanted in: Barry Jones, David Dale, Robyn Williams, Paul Davies, Margaret Whitlam, Phillip Adams, the Quantum mob, lots of savvy media folk. After Gordon and Breach took it over and approached us in 1994 it went international and changed dramatically. Our mob was more R.U. Sirius, Kathy Acker, Bruce Sterling, Rudy Rucker and John Shirley; still big names, just in different circles. A different beastie altogether.

DT 21.C *has been a focal publication for discussion of contemporary culture and technology. Why is it being discontinued?*

AC & RE In effect it is being discontinued as a magazine but will live on as a series of books by regular *21.C* contributors. However as a magazine in its most recent incarnation *21.C* suffered from several problems. The company publishing the magazine is a successful publisher of highly specialized medical and scientific journals. *21.C* was far from specialized in that respect and accordingly the company had great difficulty working out how to market a title which had broader appeal. Without marketing it was difficult to establish the nature of the magazine in the public's eye. There was also the problem of advertising. As an editorial policy we avoided sucking up to the Bill Gateses of the world. The material was not about promoting product and when products were discussed such as Microsoft, Disneyland, Nike, software etc, it was usually with a critical tone as opposed to fawning. Most magazines rely upon press releases to inform them, we relied upon our writers and our instincts—probably a mistake.

DT In his Introduction to Transit Lounge *[a recently published* 21.C *anthology, see review on page 25] William Gibson described* 21.C *as "determinedly eclectic." What kind of audience were you attempting to reach?*

AC & RE Again a problem. Given that the magazine's brief was the future, well the future effects "everyone" and that was reflected by readers' surveys. We had subscribers ranging from unemployed 18 year old hackers through to US Vice President Al Gore, scientists, graphic designers, architects, you name it. Given that it wasn't being actively marketed towards any specific segment, well, Gibson got it right when he described it as eclectic.

DT 21.C *provided an important space for Australian digital artists to get their work out into the international community, and looking through the catalogue of back issues, the promotion of new media arts was one of its most consistent features. How important was this to your editorial policy?*

AC & RE Very important. One of the most amazing things about our work with digital artists and illustrators is that we could confidently state that Australia produced the best work in the world in this field. *21.C*'s main sales ended up being in North America and we regularly received parcels from San Francisco and New York illustrators trying to get a gig in *21.C*. However there was no comparison to the work being done here by Troy Innocent, Elena Popa, Murray McKeich, Ian Haig, James Widdowson and others. It was a wonderful challenge to illustrate the magazine. Given the futuristic topics we couldn't exactly send a photographer to 2020 to take a snap. The illustrations had to reflect the content, but could rarely be literal. They were impressionistic images of a world yet to come.

DT It could also be argued that 21.C *really got into discussions of multimedia art before anyone else. What's your sense of the magazine's contribution to multimedia criticism?*

AC & RE Well naturally we would hope that it has a lasting impact. I strongly believe that the writings of McKenzie Wark, Mark Dery, Bruce Sterling and in a more quirky sense R.U. Sirius, Rudy Rucker and Margaret Wertheim stand up very strongly indeed. Really, not many other publications have delved into multimedia criticism as heavily as *21.C* with the exception of *MediaMatic*, which definitely leads the field in terms of words, but which unfortunately doesn't have the budget to illustrate the discussions as lavishly as we did.

DT In the final analysis, you always had a problem with categorisation, didn't you? Do you think in the public imagination 21.C *was over-identified as an internet/cyberculture publication?*

AC & RE Yeah, people described it all sorts of ways. A socially aware *Wired*, an intelligent *Mondo 2000*. But it was by no means a *Wired*, and it was not really what you'd call an internet magazine, although as a subject area that was a regular element. But it was more what was being done creatively on the New, eg Mark Amerika's *Grammatron* or Richard Metzger's *Disinformation*, than it was about commercial or technological developments. *21.C* was, essentially, a cultural studies magazine produced in an age of cyberbabble, trying to make sense of the creative furore in an undefined cultural era.

Darren Tofts is the author (with artist Murray McKeich) of Memory Trade. A Prehistory of Cyberculture *forthcoming 1998, Craftsman House. He is also working on a collection of essays on art, culture and technology.*

Book review

The future business

Michael Hill settles into the *Transit Lounge*

Ashley Crawford and Ray Edgar have selected 51 essays, interviews and studies from their co-edited magazine *21.C* and put them together as a book called *Transit Lounge*. It is hard to categorise *Transit Lounge* because it's a book about everything, at least everything to do with the future, and so that means anything to do with the present and the past as well. William Gibson in his introduction indicates that the editors are willing to "fearlessly consider any futurological possibility whatever, to interrogate anything at all for its potential as fast feed into some possible future."

So you will find essays on Sigmund Freud and Sandy Stone, William Burroughs and Marshall McLuhan, Terence McKenna and Noam Chomsky, and on subjects such as psychedelia's influence on computer design, interactive art, stomach sculptures, and clowns in media. There comes a time when healthy pluralism can turn into a sloppy everything-is-everything melange, but ultimately this book (like the magazine) is saved by its own enthusiasm for all these weirdnesses and you kind of get swept along in the rush. It also helps that just about everything in *Transit Lounge* is well written.

As a collection of articles culled from a magazine, it serves primarily two functions. First, as a record of fin de millennium observations on life and the future from a range of writers and thinkers. Second, as a handy pop-future primer for those who might not have been paying attention when early issues of *21.C* were available.

The editors have done a good job in compressing a mountain of words into a still hefty (and good value at $35 rrp) 192 big pages of stuff. Gone is the magazine style formatting and instead is a low-cost simplified design of black type on rough paper with silver titles and chapter graphics. Applause to art director Terence Hogan—never has the future business looked so unhyped and understated.

In 51 articles there is a range of quality, subjects and authors. Sometimes these axes align to produce gems: Mark Dery's interview with Terence McKenna is a highlight. If you thought that Terence McKenna was just a lunatic nattering about Transcendental Objects at the End of Time, then you are only partly right. He and Dery have an energetic discussion about McKenna's ideas, threaded through with an acknowledgment of the importance of contradiction (and the ability to hold in one's head seemingly contradictory ideas) for the growth of the new paradigm of non-linear thinking. So you could say on one hand McKenna is intelligent and, on the other hand, mad as a meat-axe, and you would be totally right.

Dery makes another appearance (well, 7 actually—only matched by McKenzie Wark for output) with a lighter and darker think piece on the image of the clown in contemporary culture. Drawing on contemporary clowns such as Jack Nicholson as the Joker in *Batman*, John Wayne Gacy, Krusty the Clown and the slew of serial clowns in slasher movies, Dery follows the scary clown thread all the way back to medieval mystery plays where the Fool and Death were often interchangeable. Death makes a mockery of life's joys, and life can thumb its nose at death. Either way, there is a hell of a lot of clown imagery out there—"encapsulating what Stephen King has identified as the Have-A-Nice-Day/Make-My-Day dualism that typifies contemporary culture." Creepy.

Margaret Wertheim's profile on Evelyn Fox Keller, "The XX Files", provides a perfect introduction to Keller's ideas and her increasingly shakeable faith in her ideas to effect real change. Keller has shown that prevailing masculine views clouded the judgement of those observing the role of the sperm and egg in reproduction—the idea was that all the work was done by the sperm and the egg just lay there—but now we know (or at least believe it when this generation of scientists tells us) that the egg is actively engaged in guiding the sperm by releasing chemicals. The roles ascribed to the nucleus and cytoplasm in the cell are also found to be influenced by gender-based assumptions. Keller wrote her book over 10 years ago, and this article is a re-examination of her ideas and an instructive overview of what little has changed since then.

These are just three of the better pieces in *Transit Lounge*. Bruce Sterling's paean to dead media forms, Rudy Rucker's ode to the BrainPlug, Anthony Haden-Guest's hymn to Anime and Rosie Cross's tribute to St Jude are some more. Every reader will have their own favourites.

Criticisms? Both profile authors and profile subjects will be familiar to many who might be considered the target market: James Joyce by Darren Tofts, William Burroughs by Kathy Acker, William Gibson by Phillip Adams, Ted Nelson by Rosie Cross, Noam Chomsky by Catharine Lumby, Stelarc by Nicholas Zurbrugg, Jean Baudrillard by Jean Baudrillard. Maybe it's too familiar for some, and maybe the dynamic range of experiences offered in the magazine gets attenuated here by the editors' preferences.

And then there are the quotes and counter quotes throughout: Darren Tofts in talking of Sigmund Freud quotes Greil Marcus, Greil Marcus in talking of Guy Debord quotes Sadie Plant, Rosie Cross in talking to Sadie Plant quotes Donna Haraway. Keen cultural studies students could probably play that 6 degrees of separation game—instead of Kevin Bacon you could find you are only ever 6 jumps away from McKenzie Wark.

Ultimately *Transit Lounge* has enough good points to overcome any objections from reviewers who think a well balanced review should have some negatives. It is a sprawling mass of ideas and opinions through which readers can pick their own path, and its darkly optimistic enthusiasm for the future is a refreshing change from overhyped commercial expectation or anti-tech hysteria.

Nothing ages slower than visions of the future. Buy a copy and bury it for future generations.

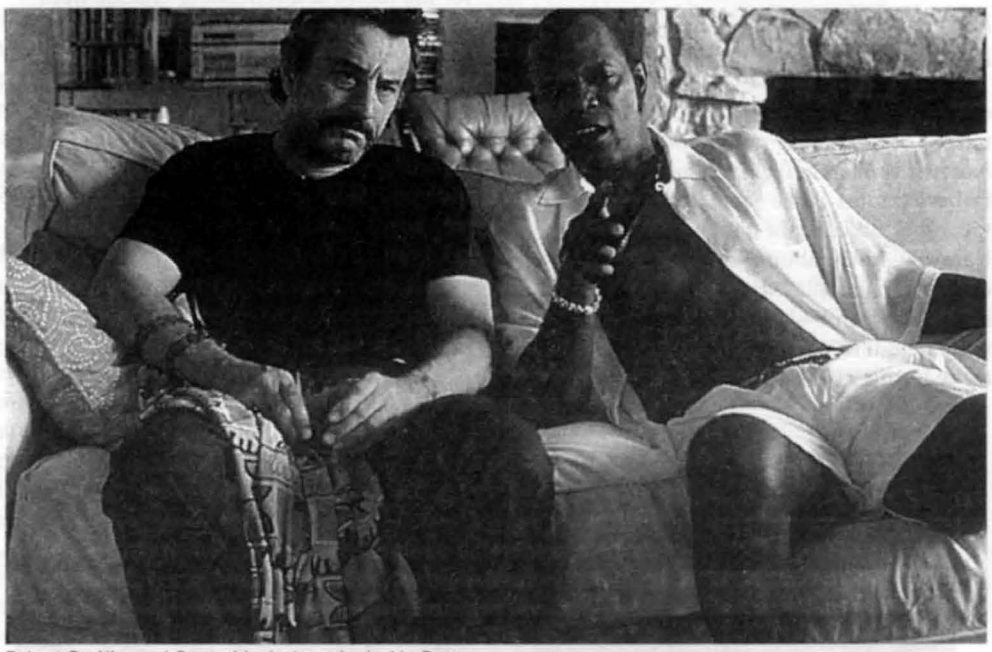
Ashley Crawford & Ray Edgar eds, Transit Lounge: Wake Up Calls and Travellers' Tales From the Future, *Craftsman House, 1998, $35 rrp*

Michael Hill is an interactive media producer at Massive Interactive.

Essay

Going Dutch

Anthony May reviews Elmore Leonard-based film



Robert De Niro and Samuel L. Jackson in *Jackie Brown*

Movie producers want you to know that you're watching a film from an Elmore 'Dutch' Leonard novel these days. He's not John Grisham or Michael Crichton but he probably doesn't want to be. Leonard works a different corner of the market, riskier but more fun.

Since 1995 there have been 6 screen adaptations of Leonard novels, 3 for theatrical release and 3 for cable, and 5 of those 6 happened in 1997. The one that kicked it off was Barry Sonnenfeld's *Get Shorty* in 1995. It was the only strong film in the resurgence of John Travolta's career between *Pulp Fiction* and *Primary Colors*. The other theatricals were Paul Schrader's *Touch* and Quentin Tarantino's *Jackie Brown*. For Turner, Dick Lowry directed *Last Stand at Saber River*, which is appearing in Australian video stores at present with Tom Selleck making a passable cowboy. Showtime produced the other two with Peter Weller directing *Gold Coast* (Weller had starred in the ill fated Abel Ferrara version of Leonard's *Cat Chaser* in 1989) and Jim McBride directing *Pronto*. McBride had been slated to direct Leonard's earlier *Maximum Bob* as a mini-series back in 1991.

People seem to like to hang around Leonard books. Jersey Films, who had the hit with *Get Shorty*, have *Out of Sight* in production at present with Steven Soderbergh directing and George Clooney playing the male lead, Jack Foley. They are using the same writer, Scott Frank, and production team as *Get Shorty* and are obviously looking to follow up on the trend that they were so important in starting. But the trend did not come about overnight. Leonard had been seriously maltreated in film adaptations before *Get Shorty* and his team has been scouting for good prospects for quite some time. Leonard's agent, Michael Siegel, told me as long ago as 1991 that he would be happy for the Coen Brothers to do a Leonard novel if they would ever move away from original screenplays. Although Ethan is not committed to direct, it was announced earlier in the year that the Coen Brothers would adapt Leonard's current novel, *Cuba Libre*, for the screen.

Get Shorty was always going to make a great movie. It's the story of Chilli Palmer (Travolta), a loan shark from Miami, who follows a dry cleaner to Los Angeles to pick up on a defaulted loan. While he's there, Chilli decides that he'll have a shot at the movie business. It can't be as bad as loan sharking, or so he thinks. Before long he's wondering what the difference is. The Jersey Films' production of *Get Shorty*, whilst showing great respect to the trademark Leonard dialogue, set another sort of benchmark for successful Leonard adaptations. What was a contemporary thriller with comedic turns became a comedy set in a criminal milieu. Leonard has been reportedly very happy with the adaptation but that may be due to the care given to his dialogue.

Always a stickler for the sound of his novels, Leonard has been mightily frustrated over the years. One of his nightmares must still be Burt Reynolds' adaptation of Leonard's *Stick* for a 1983 theatrical release. In translating the carefully distributed cut and thrust of Leonard's speech, Stick, the male lead played by Reynolds, ended up with all the good lines. What was a highly developed interplay of character voices became a series of wise-cracking gags for Burt. All that was missing was for the big man to wink at the camera.

Get Shorty was a much more sophisticated adaptation that got the sound of the book if not the tension. It was a hard call. Travolta is an actor perfectly suited to the restraint that the delivery of those deadpan lines needed. But when it comes to tension, his face is too genial for terror. Gene Hackman can do terror but he was the hilariously over the top Harry Zimm, bankrupt schlock movie maker long past his use by date. Delroy Lindo can be terrifying, and was, but his brilliant performance was lost in the springtime of the Travolta comeback fervour.

Comebacks were handled with much more sensitivity in Quentin Tarantino's *Jackie Brown*, an adaptation of Leonard's 1992 novel, *Rum Punch*. On first viewing, *Jackie Brown* might appear as Tarantino's love song to former blaxploitation princess Pam Grier. But this is a well turned adaptation that goes beyond translating that hot dialogue to the screen. Tarantino picks up the themes of Leonard's book and refashions the story, its characters, and its locations to shape it anew. It is the story of Jackie Brown (Grier), a mid-40s airline stewardess faced with a possible long term prison sentence for illegally transporting currency (and cocaine possession), and Max Cherry (Robert Forster), a bailbondsman with a failed marriage, uninspiring work prospects and a sad, grey cloud hanging over his life.

Leonard has long maintained that he doesn't have themes. He claims to just put some interesting characters into a tricky circumstance and watch them go. Tarantino does a fine job on this sort of self-effacing routine. He allows Grier and Forster the screen time, often beautifully shot by Guillermo Navarro, to work a marvellous dance of doubt around each other. Jackie doesn't know if she's just weaving a web for Max to help her or if she really wants him, Max doesn't know if he cares or not. There's just too much experience between the both of them for either to make a simple decision anymore. And that's how aging works, in the book and in the film.

Tarantino's connection with Leonard goes back to his teenage years when he was caught shoplifting a Leonard paperback, so the story goes. The novel was *The Switch* and amongst that book's lead characters were Ordell, Louis and Melanie from *Rum Punch/Jackie Brown* These three are played by Samuel L. Jackson, Robert de Niro and Bridget Fonda. These are weapons grade actors to support the reprise of the Grier and Forster careers. As always, the dialogue is faithful. Jackie Brown likes to talk. Ordell's profanities are so attractive that other characters in the film begin to speak like him. De Niro (Louis) and Fonda's (Melanie) discussion of a snapshot of Melanie in Japan is the high art of the inarticulate. Melanie, peevish and terminally stupid, and Louis, just plain stupid, descend to the point where a nod might just be saying too much.

However lovingly Tarantino transforms Leonard's book, the respect seems to be that of the fan for the master. Tarantino once told Dutch Leonard that he set the opening of *True Romance*, the 1990 film he scripted for Tony Scott, in Detroit as a form of homage to him. Leonard, a resident of the area, came to fame with his Detroit novels. They even have an Elmore Leonard Day in Michigan from this year. Tarantino's multiple optioning of Leonard's work is testament to the regard in which he holds Leonard. But a more articulate form of respect may have come from a filmmaker with stronger ties than Tarantino to Leonard's Michigan. Paul Schrader's Michigan was powerfully vivid before Leonard became the flavour of the month, whether it be the grind of Detroit (*Blue Collar*, 1978) or the puritanism of Grand Rapids (*Hard Core*, 1978).

Touch is taken from Leonard's 1987 novel of the same title. Although only published in 1987, it was actually written in 1977. Not quite run of the mill Leonard, this was a difficult book to place with a publisher, dealing as it does with a stigmatic crisis centre worker, a religious entrepreneur, and record promoter who loves the stigmatic. Not a standard crime thriller. But Schrader finds what is good in the story. *Touch*, the movie, picks up on Leonard's fascination with contemporary scenery, the low rise, breeze block architecture of contemporary America as opposed to the hip, down at heel L.A. version of Leonard that Tarantino delivers. Schrader also connects with Leonard's sense of story.

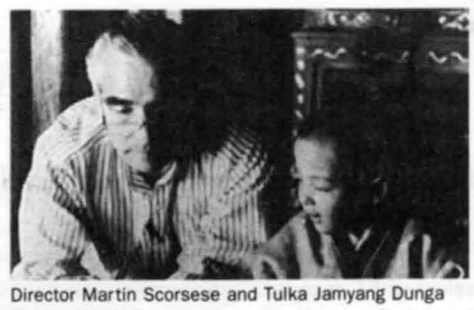
Leonard has always been a very cinematic writer. And his sense of story is very much within the New Hollywood indie production aesthetic. This fits Schrader like a glove. He moved on from that some years ago but he can still show America as a bleak but compelling place. He also has a way with casting (Schrader was the one who gave Michael J. Fox his shot at serious cinema and pulled it off) and brings out engaging performances from Skeet Ulrich as Juvenal, the stigmatic, Christopher Walken as Bill Hill, the former minister of the Uni-Faith church, and Bridget Fonda as Lynn Faulkner, the record promoter who falls for Juvenal. But it isn't the performances that make this film such a fine adaptation.

Schrader doesn't so much make a film that is faithful to the book as share a way of looking at the random but motivated events of the inexplicable mundane life. And it is that sympathy with Leonard's book that makes *Touch* such a great adaptation. Unlike *Get Shorty*, he doesn't have to play up the gags, unlike *Jackie Brown*, he doesn't have to mark how cool Leonard can be, instead he just plays Leonard straight. No winking at the camera and no fiddling with the dialogue. When they made films of Leonard's westerns in the 50s, he claimed that Richard Boone played his characters the best because he delivered the lines just as they were written. It's taken until now for someone to do a whole film that way.

Screenplays for Get Shorty *and* Jackie Brown *are currently available from the Cinestore in Sydney.* Out of sight *will be available later this year.* sales@cinestore.com.au

Anthony May is a Lecturer in the School of Film, Media & Cultural Studies at Griffith University, Queensland.

Reviews



Director Martin Scorsese and Tulka Jamyang Dunga Tenzin, *Kundun*

Kundun
director Martin Scorsese
writer Melissa Mathison
Touchstone Pictures
A New Vision Release

Kundun
composer Philip Glass
Music from the original soundtrack
Nonesuch 7559-79460-2

As much as we would like it to be a potent protest against China's tyranny over Tibet, especially now that *Kundun* is about to be released in Australia despite China's objections and film corporation market nervousness, Martin Scorsese's life of the young Dalai Lama (to the point of his flight to India) is dispiritingly dull and respectful. The Chinese need not have worried. No mass audience is going to rise up. Richard Gere is not managing that, let alone Martin Scorsese. Certainly the child Dalai Lama has a natural sense of authority, even arrogance, and a lateral disposition, but the teenager who dominates the later part of the film is interior, short on wit and evokes no sense of the intelligent and charismatic public figure he is to become. Perhaps script-writer Mathison's visits to India with her husband Harrison Ford (who read the emerging script to the Dalai Lama) obliterated any distance between her and her revered subject. Philip Glass' music too sets out well, fusing familar Glassian patterns with thundering Tibetan horns and cymbals, suggesting both revelation and an eduring religious condition. However, by the end of the film the music's insistence is poorly, even melodramatically deployed; a pity because it is some of Glass' better work, in unusually short melodically fluent bursts (see also John Pott's comments on *Monsters of Grace*, page 11). The Nonesuch CD of "music from the soundtrack" is impressive, though it would have been nice to have the additional music by Jason Kao Hwang that is heard in the film at a significant moment. Because it is a Scorsese film there is much that devotees of both the director and the Dalai Lama will relish—the consistent point of view cinematography (amplified by eye and ear closeups) for the child, the moments of vision, the frightening scenes with the court shaman, and some (though not all) of the moments when the Dalai Lama imagines the nightmares inflicted on his people by the invaders, including a giddying and ever expanding aerial shot of a field of bloodied bodies. The acting by the Tibetan cast ranges from the virtuosic to the barely competent, the cinematography is intimate with a hint of the epic (in the modellings of the Potala Palace), the Moroccan landscape doubles admirably for Tibet (save for extras as Chinese soldiers). His political interest aside, it's not hard to see the Catholic Scorsese's fascination with a remarkable child with spiritual power born into humble surroundings and destined for a life of denial, suffering and enlightenment; and then there's the blood… KG

Live Flesh
director Pedro Almodóvar
co-writers Pedro Almodóvar and Ray Loriga
based on a novel by Ruth Rendell
Goldwyn Films
A New Vision release

This is *the* Almodóvar to see. Put aside those prejudices or, if you're in love with his films, be prepared to go without expecting quite the usual thrills—but you will experience suspense and emotional extremes from a classically crafted tale of an intricate and sublimely symmetrical knot of love, betrayal and vengeance (and better told than any Rendell tale). *Live Flesh* reminds me of the best of Chabrol—even though it still displays many Almodóvar preoccupations and vivid stylistic traits, it is made with unusual restraint. *Sight and Sound* (April 1998) reports Almodóvar speaking to a London Film Festival audience of "his 'weariness' with the over familiar 'Almodóvar style' and of 'the temptations of austerity'." *Live Flesh* is sardonic, careful story telling, but without losing any of the Almodóvar capacity for the sudden satiric jibe, deliberate referencing (Buñuel's *The Criminal Life of Archibaldo Cruz*) and sustained sexual frisson. But it is also, quite integrally, a political parable about history and change, about responsibility (and education), domestic violence and about being physically disabled (the condition is filmed with care and at some length). With a few spare architectural cinematographic gestures it is also strikingly about Madrid. The performances are excellent, the soundtrack moody, but, in the Almodóvar manner hilariously grim with an astonishing song from Chavela Vargas. Save for one little plot hiccup (most thrillers these days are full of them), this is perfect filmmaking. As *Sight and Sound* tells it, the film is being marketed in Europe, where it is hugley popular, as "Absolute Precision". KG

Liberto Rabal in *Live Flesh*

Essay

You're living all over me

Needeya Islam looks at female friendship in teen film

Tara Subkoff and Alison Folland in *All Over Me*

In an article on teen films, the popular culture critic Jon Savage wrote that "youth cannot exist in itself—it has to be emblematic" ("Boomers and Busters", *Sight & Sound*, July 1994). In announcing this, Savage touched on not only one of the definitive characteristics of a rather broad genre, but also one of the continuing problems in attempting any analysis of it. To take on a teen film is to take on a whole series of questions and assumptions about the teen genre itself and its usefulness, as well as the implications of the varied youth cultures which often intersect with and colour it. Given the engaging nature of these tangents, it is often far more tempting to put to one side the more immediate concerns of a teen film in favour of exploring what it might suggest about adolescence in general.

Of course, some teen films are more self-consciously concerned with the zeitgeist than others: Richard Linklater's *Dazed and Confused* and (while not strictly a teen film) *Slackers*, as well as Larry Clark's *Kids*. These lend themselves more readily to such a reading; and popular, social and cultural influences clearly play a large part in the teenage experience. However, what can be lost in this type of generational analysis, as compelling as it is, is the complexity and richness of adolescence as played out by individual characters, and the perhaps more urgent questions of identity which this raises. That the fascinating specificity of female adolescent experience, for example, is frequently subsumed by a tendency to universalise youth is intriguing given the insights adolescence offers into questions of self-invention and subjectivity.

Frequently in teen films, explorations of adolescence as a phenomenon are made through narratives about friendship and its role in creating a sense of self. This is generally what 'rites of passage' teen films concern themselves with. Films dealing primarily with male friendship and social groups such as *Rumblefish* suggest that the complex forging and dismantling of alliances are normative, necessary moments in reaching adulthood.

There are fewer films which deal primarily with female adolescent friendship, and these tend to operate quite differently. In films such as *Heathers*, *Times Square* and *Fun*, friendship is frequently depicted in terms of obsession and pathology, usually arresting the movement toward any stable sense of identity or place within the social world. Leaving aside the question of whether this instability is in fact progressive, the closure (the culmination of a successful passage through certain defining experiences) which is so desirable and crucial within the economy of the teen film narrative, is usually denied.

All Over Me (Alex Sichel 1997) is an interesting example in that it plays out a rites of passage teen film narrative with female central characters and the conflict acts as an induction to the adult world, most importantly to specific adult identity. It focuses on the relationship between Claude and Ellen, best friends since childhood, and the way in which for each of them, the acquiring of sexual identity threatens the friendship. The complexity of this scenario is situated in Claude's sexual desire for her friend, Ellen's confused responses, and the question of Claude's loyalty to Ellen after the latter's malevolent boyfriend is implicated in a murder. Despite the possibility of identity within the narrative and the underscoring of Claude's interior world through her passion for rock music, the closeness of the friendship is still constructed as something to be overcome. It is presented as a phase and somehow inauthentic. The power relations between the two are best summed up by Claude when she refers to herself as Ellen's "dog." There is a sense in which she can only gain a sense of self, an identity, by distancing herself from the stifling friendship.

If narrative cinema can be said to be about the circumlocutions via which the couple emerges (among the pleasures of films such as *Rumblefish* and *River's Edge*, for example, is this agonistic play towards union), then films about teenage girls are particularly intriguing because they are nearly always about breaking apart. Rather than competing for friendship as in male-centred narratives, in these films the real romance *is* friendship and in the end it usually fails. It precedes a kind of repulsion, and this becomes crucial to the way in which subjectivity is negotiated in these narratives. In the process of asserting itself through emotional intensity and self-invention, the potential for mature self-identity transmogrifies into a loss of self, of place and of space. That is, it seems to lead to a self destructive merging. It is then the end of romance/friendship which is necessary for a reclaiming of identity.

Heavenly Creatures (Peter Jackson, 1994) with its focus on passionate adolescent friendship, fantasy and matricide in 1950s New Zealand, is a rare attempt to explore the workings of youthful intensity from the perspective of the inner world of its protagonists. The film's historical and cultural specificity, and the unusual nature of the crime they commit function along with this interior view, to distance the film from any kind of comment about adolescence in general. It shares the preoccupations of many teen film narratives such as attachment to popular culture icons, the failure of parents, and recognition of class differences but within an extremely heightened and ironic context. By engaging with these in a playful and speculative way, the film successfully avoids overwhelming its complex and singular characters with the burden of generic expectations.

The film works in a sense as a critique of popular representations of female friendship rather than as simple example. By portraying the many small ways in which their alliance is formed, and by allowing their fantastic interior world to take over the screen, their view is given a legitimacy that is so often missing in teen narratives; that is not just an emotional legitimacy, but an intellectual and creative one. Rafal Zielinski's *Fun* for example, covers similar territory in terms of friendship and murder, but represents both the violence and the intense bond of the two girls as fundamentally inexplicable. In *Heavenly Creatures* while the horror of the murder is not softened but instead viscerally and emotionally depicted, the logic from which it arose is not trivialised either.

Like many other films about adolescent girls, in *Heavenly Creatures* friendship is romance, but self-consciously so. As one of the girls knowingly remarks, "All the best people have scars and bone diseases—it's all frightfully romantic!" The adolescent fascination with romance is fully explored through the coming to life of their imaginary world of Borovnia, their obsession with movie stars and Mario Lanza and in their utopian desire for a future together, which eventually leads to murder. The prescriptive terms of the teen film narrative are discarded by divorcing the girls from the social and eventually negating it through the increasingly vivid and grand depictions of their inner world.

With their common imaginary space, the friendship is no longer a conduit through which the success or failure of acquiring subjectivity can be determined. Instead it becomes the very substance of subjectivity itself and it is this which is threatened when they are separated. Rather than frustrating a stable sense of self, their proximity is profoundly enabling, allowing them more of an identity and sense of place than they were afforded elsewhere. And while separation, as with many narratives of adolescent friendship, is inevitable, the film leaves us with a utopian image. Recalling the opening sequence, we see the girls on a ship, in their shared inner world, in an ecstatic moment of self-invention.

Needeya Islam is a freelance writer/film reviewer.

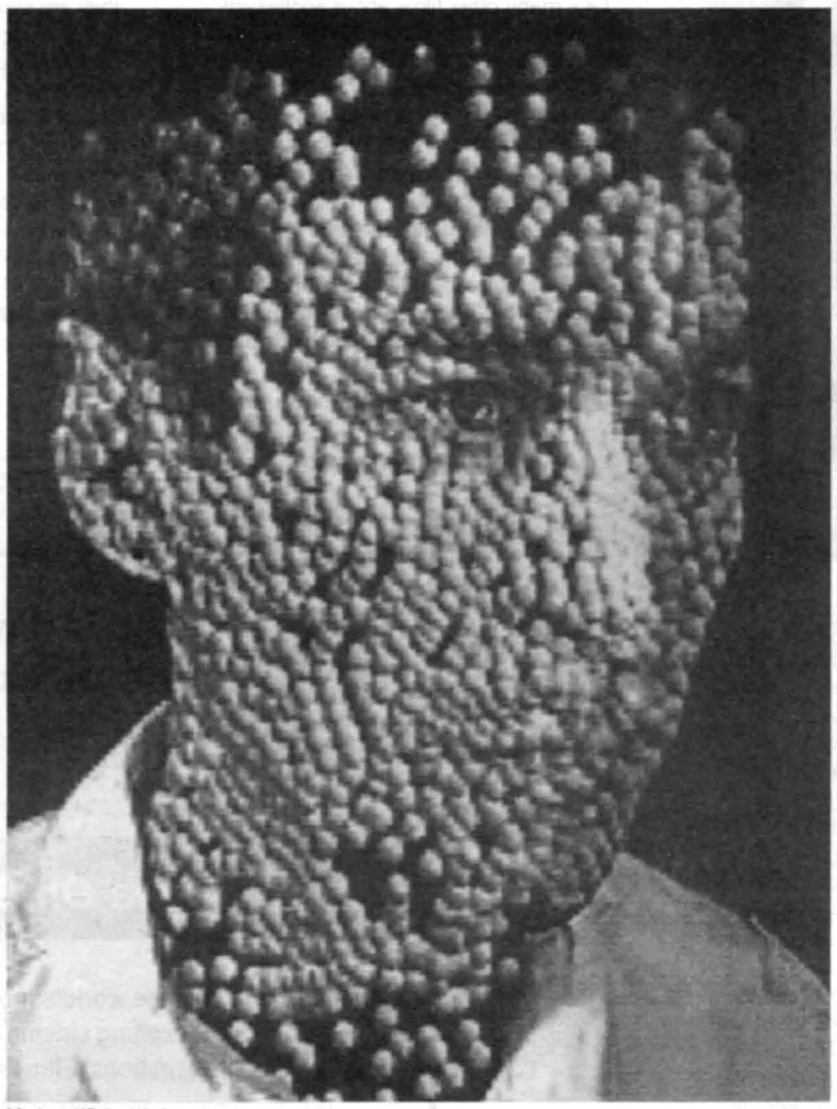
Preview

The video art beyond

John Conomos interviews Rudolf Frieling, a curator at ZKM in Germany, a featured guest at this year's Sydney Film Festival

During this decade ZKM (Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie/Centre for Art and Media), located at Karlsruhe in Germany, has rapidly become one of the major tertiary education centres in the world concerned with the teaching, exhibition and production of contemporary media art. It is a large, innovative and productive centre and one of its main objectives is to explore how central media technology is to art as we approach the end of this century.

Anyone who has visited ZKM will testify to its multifaceted teaching, curatorial and publishing activities. Someone who has been a pivotal figure in this context, in his capacity as Head of the Institute of Visual Media, is the Australian artist Jeffrey Shaw, who has been living in Europe since the late 60s. ZKM's artist-in-residency program has attracted a variety of German and international artists including Australians Jill Scott and Peter Callas and American Bill Seaman. Seaman won ZKM's prestigious International Award for Video Art a few years back.



Markus Käch, *Works*

What follows is an email interview with ZKM's curator/critic Rudolf Frieling, who is in charge of the video collection at the centre, and is travelling to Australia and New Zealand with an exhibition program of German new media works. The program, prepared by ZKM in association with the Goethe-Institut and presented in Sydney in association with dLux media arts (formerly Sydney Intermedia Network), will be exhibited at the 45th Sydney Film Festival and at Artspace in June. This will be a rare opportunity to see some recent innovative German new media art.

JC Rudolf, what are the main underlying objectives of your visit?

RF To present not only video art but also CD-ROM and internet projects. Accompanying the current artistic practices and issues we have co-produced a CD-ROM on the historic and seminal decades of media art, the 60s and 70s in Germany. I strongly welcome the invitation since there haven't been too many occasions to establish fruitful discussions and meetings with those who work in related fields in Australia and New Zealand.

JC What significance does ZKM play in the curatorial rationale of your presentation?

RF ZKM is not only the co-producer of this whole package but also crucial in helping to produce media art works. ZKM has hosted residencies of featured artists (eg Bill Seaman) and ZKM produced the only CD-ROM that promotes artistic projects: *artintact*. Then there is the historic CD-ROM *media art action* which was curated by Dieter Daniels and myself. Finally, 'links' can also be found to internet projects (for example, those by Jochen Gerz or Daniela Plewe).

JC What are some of the more important conceptual, cultural and technological directions that are foregrounded in the works you have brought with you?

RF There is sometimes a disturbing lack of political and social issues that surfaces in the average artistic production—with exceptions of course. The issues at stake seem to be either highly subjective with often supremely formal treatments or the works seem to indulge in playful scenarios (especially the multimedia works). Yet the manipulation of images and the underlying notions about the imagery that surrounds us lead to an intense examination of what an image is, how it is produced, and how it might be perceived.

JC What is your position concerning the future of video art?

RF To put it bluntly: the rise of multimedia will give 'pure' video artists a hard time but, on the other hand, this critical moment will help to establish a more concentrated perception of what has been produced so far and of what will be produced in the future.

JC Do you think CD-ROMs as constructed by visual artists, writers and cultural producers are heading for 'the dustbin of history'?

RF No—the support may change, but that does not mean that the artistic work becomes obsolete. The videotape is still in use and ever more popular with artists from all different kinds of fields.

JC What vital role do media/video festivals and prizes have in the broader context of Germany's media culture?

RF In the past they had a crucial importance—there was nothing else but festivals. The founding of centers and schools like ZKM and its adjacent Academy of Design will help to broaden this basis. Personally I feel that we need both sides—the hype of the festival and the more continuous reflection of artistic practices within the context of institutions. I have been able to consolidate and enlarge one of the most important media art prizes, the International Award for Video Art, which is a mutual initiative by ZKM and the broadcaster Sudwestfunk. For the first time in history, TV and video go hand in hand—at least for 3 weeks every year. This has become one of the major activities of ZKM and has helped to broaden the public acceptance of the notoriously difficult video art.

JC As a new media author and curator, did you have a curatorial input into ZKM's digital media museum?

RF I am responsible for the setting up and presentation of our video collection which is united with a large collection of electronic music—in itself a unique combination worldwide. The other 2 public departments of ZKM, the Museum of Contemporary Art, directed by Heinrich Klotz, and the Media Museum, directed by Hans-Peter Schwarz, have been independently curated by their respective directors. There is, however, discussion of works and artists that certainly influences also one's own work.

JC Finally, could you please say a few words about your collaborative work Media Art Action *?*

RF *Media Art Action* is the first of a series of 3 editions which will eventually comprise the whole history of media art to the present day, hopefully, in Germany. The accompanying book with texts by the artists and introductory chapters by the editors is a perfect way to distribute the CD-ROM and deepen its content. This is, to my knowledge, the first historic review of media art that makes use of a congenial medium. This survey is bridging the gap between purely information oriented databases and a more playful and sensual introduction to the topics and works collected. The collaboration with Dieter Daniels (and with the editor Sybille Weber and the designer/programmer Christian Ziegler) was extremely effective and productive, leading to a 'product' that hopefully stimulates others to engage in complementary research and editorial work. I would be more than happy to study historical works from Australia or other countries on CD-ROM. Browsing through catalogues is just not enough when dealing with media art.

Current Media Art: Video Art, CD-ROM and Internet projects from Germany *presented by the Goethe-Institut in association with dLux media arts (Sydney Intermedia Network). Video art works at 45th Sydney Film Festival, June 5-19; CD-ROMs and internet projects at Artspace, June 10-27. Rudolf Frieling will introduce the video sessions and exhibition opening. For further information contact dLux media arts tel (02) 9380 4255. ZKM website* http://www.zkm.de

Newsreel

2nd Brisbane Animation Festival
October 22-25

Australia's only international festival dedicated purely to animation is coming up. Sessions featured: International Competition; Window to the World: Estonia; The Outer Edge: A selection of the best SBS Eat Carpet animation; Jazz and Sex: retrospective of American studio work from the 1930s and 40s; A Global View: invited best of contemporary world animation and German Celebration: best animations from the Dresden Film Festival. Entries are invited for the International Animation Competition (closes July 1). To enter or for more info, contact Peter Moyes or Michele Thistlewaite tel/fax 07 3216 0808, email baf@visualeyes.net.au or see their website: http://www.visualeyes.net.au/qa

Experimental Screenings Program

tenement gallery@262A Brunswick St Fitzroy continues its experimental screenings program. Opening night (June 14) features Yoko Ono with her shorts *Fly* and *Bottom* plus a doco about the artist *Yoko Ono then and now*. June 28 offers *Travelogue*, a program of historical and contemporary film & video made by artists away from home, including Marcus Bergner, Ortiz Pinto, Dore O, Chris Marker, Brion Gysin. Enquiries tel 03 9415 7320.

The Films of Bernie O'Regan:
Archive of Enigma—tribute screening

There will be a screening of filmmaker and photographer Bernie O'Regan's films on June 15 at 7.30pm, Dancehouse, upstairs studio, 150 Princes St, Nth Carlton. A supporting program of new work by Christos Linou, Lee Smith, Marcus Bergner, Dirk De Bruyn, Arthur & Corinne Cantrill will also be featured. Enquiries tel 03 9380 6146.

Time In Summer:
an Ian Davidson Retrospective

Thirty years on from its debut at the Berlin Film Festival, the Media Resource Centre in Adelaide is showcasing *Time in Summer* and other works by Ian Davidson at the Mercury Cinema on June 25, 7.30pm. For more info contact Mercury Cinema tel 08 8410 0979 or visit MRC's website at www.mrc.org.au.

Australian Films Selected For Cannes '98

Two feature films and two short films were selected for Cannes this year. The feature films were Rolf de Heer's *Dance Me to My Song* (screened In Competition) and *Head On* by first timer Ana Kokkinos (eligible for the Camera d'Or), adapted from Christos Tsiolkas' novel *Loaded*. *I Want You*, directed by Gregory Quail, and Lynn-Maree Danzey's *Fetch* screened in Short Competition.

Screen Network Australia—www.sna.net.au

This recently launched initiative aims to improve access to information about the Australian film industry. The website contains a variety of resources about Australian screen culture including a calendar of events, industry news, and Great Moments of the Australian Screen. For more information contact Tracey Mair at the AFI, tel 02 9331 3165

Annual Shorts Catalogue

AFC Research and Information is currently compiling a catalogue of short films released during 1997 up to June 1998. Filmmakers are encouraged to register their titles for inclusion. To be eligible, your film must be: a documentary with a running time of less than 25 minutes, or any other program with a running time of less than 60 minutes excluding corporate videos, inhouse training videos, advertising or music videos. Contact Glenn Osborne tel 02 9321 6444, toll free 1800 22 6615 asap.

RMIT and AFI web initiative: Biblioz
www.cinemedia.net/afi/biblioz.htm

Biblioz includes information about the history of Australian film and is an ongoing project to develop web bibliographies on Australian screen topics. Developed by AFI's Clare Stewart, Mapping The Territory: Four Australian Documentary Pioneers uses prizewinning bibliographies from RMIT Australian Cinema students on the following filmmakers: Frances Birtles (compiled by Alethea Sheppard), Cecil Holmes (Serena Paull), Frank Hurley (Nick McMicking) & Damien Parer (Mia Tolhurst). Enquiries tel Chris Brophy at AFI 03 9696 1844 or Deb Verhoeven, Cinema Studies Dept, RMIT, tel 03 9925 2908.

SIN absolved

Sydney Intermedia Network (aka SIN), Sydney's premier screen arts exhibition organisation, was re-christened dLux media arts (note pun: *digital Light*) at the organisation's recent annual general meeting. Alessio Cavallaro, director of dLux, explains that the change of name has been undertaken in order to better identify and profile the organisation's position within the rapidly changing landscapes of national and global screen cultures. The new name will carry and further enhance the reputation for innovative screen arts programs established by 'Sydney Intermedia Network'. The first events to carry the dLux name will be staged at this year's Sydney Film Festival: D.*art*, the inaugural annual showcase of experimental digital film, digital video and computer animation art (which replaces SIN's MATINAZE), and *Current Media Art: video art, CD-ROM and Internet projects from Germany*. For further information contact dLux media arts, tel (02) 9380 4255, email sinsite@ozemail.com.au

Review

Digital subjectivity

Norie Neumark reviews *State of the Heart* at the ACP and *BioTechSex* New Media Forum

Josephine Starrs and Leon Cmielewski, *Diagnostic Tools for the New Millennium* (detail)

The *BioTechSex* heart is an empty space, traversed only by code, aching for information, haunted by memories of a fleshly existence. Or so it is understood by many new media artists asking what has happened to erotics and politics, to ethics and intimacy, to embodied subjectivity in the digital era. This is not a nostalgic longing for old media and ideologies, but rather an immersed exploration of digital subjectivity. These concerns animated the *State of the Heart* exhibition at the Australian Centre for Photography and were explored further at *BioTechSex*, the New Media Forum organised to coincide with it.

State of the Heart, excellently curated by John Tonkin and Blair French, brought together diverse and thought-provoking photographic/digital media projects. As you moved from space to space in the exhibition, your own digital subjectivity shifted uneasily. In the main room, Josephine Starrs and Leon Cmielewski presented their *Diagnostic Tools for the New Millennium* comprised light boxes and computer interactive stations. The artists continue their formal interrogations of interface and their 'schizoid' attraction/repulsion to new technology—entranced with its "flexibility and freedom" while wary of its obsessions and surveillance implications. At first sight this split was addressed by two separate works—one about love and the other, paranoia. Yet the works took on a strange life of their own with audience interaction, as Starrs noted at the forum: the Fuzzy Love Machine induced paranoia and the Paranoia Machine embraced you. The fuzzy machine photographed you and extracted intimate data before allowing you to play in the database. This activity clearly put some people on edge, making the erotica/danger edge all the sharper. And while the Paranoia Machine *represented* paranoia, the delight of the interface, even its intimacy, made the experience sensually pleasurable. The *Diagnostic Tools* in light boxes similarly refused to stay in neat conceptual categories, thus poetically conveying the contradictions and energy of the artists' own relationship to technology.

The blown up digital photographs in Michele Barker and Anna Munster's *The Love Machine* were startling. The work seemed like a straightforward re-presentation of photos from a photo booth in Hong Kong (the Love Machine), which combines features of the two 'parents' to reproduce their offspring. The Machine has pre-sets for race, gender, eye and hair colour that are folded into the morph, or *morpheme*, as Barker and Munster figured it. The elegant simplicity and power of the work emerged as you registered the strangeness of the images of Kenji Barker-Munster, the Asian son, Lissie Barker-Munster, the Afro-American first born, and Mary-Beth, the blond, blue eyed child who held pride of place (though somewhat like another *Munster*, Marilyn, she was, in her normality, all the more disturbing). The re-ordering of Barker and Munster's own images on the side walls underlined their disruption of the standard heterosexual reproductive couple—who was really 'on top', and where was the desire to see yourself in your offspring's face going in the digital era? By inserting themselves inappropriately into the Machine and blowing its output out of proportion, Barker and Munster refused an easy, humorous take on *The Love Machine* with its promise of flesh becoming code and code becoming flesh. Instead they teased out the tensions and political implications of the way normalising (pre-set) culture and power relations produce and code not just *The Love Machine* but genetic engineering in general—reducing difference and specificity.

The third work in *State of the Heart* was Francesca da Rimini's *dollspace* with Michael Grimm's *soundtrack for an empty dollspace*. Well placed in its own little alcove, the viewer was positioned in an extremely disturbing space, where the detailed observations of everyday life that interest da Rimini were at play. More than, different from cyberspace, it was an intimate *story* space which undermined narrow categories of photography, writing, web work and interactivity. The sound held you there, immersed you, and yet powerfully disturbed your position. Its visual elegance was very moving—with the carefully laid out text, haiku-like, sitting on a variety of screens composed of an eclectic assemblage of photos and drawings. Equally powerful was the writing, a strange and haunting exploration of "identity, desire, death and deception." The poetic fragments, story segments, and electronic correspondence (written to doll yoko/da Rimini) moved between mournful reflections and pornographic imaginings. The play between these registers was abrupt and disturbing—especially disturbing to be in the same room with other people, to share your uncertainty or witness their discomfort. Inspired by a pond in Kyoto where women drowned their unwanted baby girls, the work moved beyond this focus and operated as a space of reverberation, where the lack of central or single organising narrative left you disoriented, as "haunted by...hungry ghosts" as da Rimini herself.

The artists from *State of the Heart* were brought together with academics at *BioTechSex*, one of the best of the excellent New Media Forums. One of the issues that wove through all the provocative and insightful papers was regulation. The level of argument went beyond the common technofear or instrumental reading of technology (the use/abuse debate) to raise questions about the relationship between science (in general and biology in particular), technology and culture and the implications for artists of the bio/sex/tech nexus.

Adrian Mackenzie countered the prevalent technofear that technical codes regularise and smooth out differences; he argued instead that "life introduces something that is not fully determined by codes." For him, confusion, change, and short-livedness break the seeming totalising power of codes through their depth, their layers. Further, since codes are always embedded in (graphic) marks and must be materialised, they are "contingent", specific and dependent on a context. Anna Munster approached regulation from a different angle, focusing on the coded regulations and nodes of power already present in (capitalist) culture and therefore already/inevitably embedded in codes and technology. As an embodiment of culture, technology is entangled with social, political, and economic relations. Munster noted the way some cyberfeminists forget this and overly sanguinely appropriate technologies to avoid the problems of humanism.

Biologist Lesley Rogers unpacked regulation and codes, a prominent issue in biology in this era of the human genome project. With stunning examples from the sex lives of chicks and rats, she argued that behaviour can affect biology and its genetic codes. Given the conservative prominence of biology and genetics in this code-obsessed digital era, including in the media, this critique of science from an insider was valuable and satisfying.

The relationship of these critical ideas for art was also raised. Adrian Mackenzie noted the way many artists' works repeat existing problematic structures in order that they no longer do what they were meant to do. This resonated with Barker, Starrs and da Rimini's discussion of the ways their works de-contextualise cultural practices, and how this throws into relief the implications of those practices—from net sex to digital reproduction. As Munster pointed out, new media artists are well placed to "work within existing structures and tease out implications and histories."

State of the Heart, *Australian Centre for Photography, March 27-April 25;* BioTechSex *New Media Forum 7, Powerhouse Museum, March 28.*

Norie Neumark is a sound/new media artist and a lecturer in the Department of Media Arts Production at the University of Technology, Sydney. Her work is concerned with technology and subjectivity, and her current project (supported by the New Media Arts Fund of the Australia Council), Vital Transmissions, *explores how organs are figured and experienced differently by different cultures and at different moments of history.*

Report

Digital rice

Sam de Silva reports on new media in the Asian region

Often the region referred to as Asia is considered as an homogeneous environment—stricken with poverty, and social and political problems. But of course there are many countries which are placed at different positions on the graph of social-economic well-being. And within each country there are also vast differences.

In the cities in the poorer regions of Asia, such as Bangkok, Hanoi, Saigon, and Phnom Penh, the internet is readily accessible. High-end internet connected Pentiums can be found in venues such as cafes where for about $10 per hour 'Hotmailing', telnetting and IRCing are all possible. Often there is a queue to get access—busy with tourists and travellers eager to communicate their experiences in real-time back to their friends at home, or to organise rendezvous points with other travellers. All the tourists seem to have a webmail account. The net is never too far away.

Bangkok is full of new technology and the internet infrastructure is well supported by the government. Schools and universities have access to facilities and internet computers can be found in libraries. Software and hardware are readily accessible, but only affordable to the more affluent, a complete system costing around $1200. At Chulalongkorn University and Silpakorn University, two major academies in Bangkok, media labs equipped with high-end Power Macs can be found in the Creative Arts departments. Though Apple's marketing has seduced the academics, many of the students decide to own the low-cost high-end Pentiums which come loaded with the latest pirated software.

The images and animations produced by students are of a very high quality but mainly lean toward the advertising industry. On graduation most students will likely be employed by design houses and advertising agencies. Associate Professor Suppakorn Disatapundhu of Chulalongkorn University is very interested in developing electronic art within the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts. He is aware of the lack of student interest in art and the consequent focus on design and marketing. His hope is that the economic crisis in the region will mean that students might decide to stay longer at university and undertake research projects in the electronic art field. Unfortunately, the general attitude seems to be that if it has no commercial benefit then there is no point to digital art.

The Bangkok Post's online division recently uploaded photographs of large billboard posters originally created by a group called Artists for Social Change in the early 1970s. The posters were created to commemorate student deaths during a political demonstration in 1973. The drive to increase the 'creative' content of the Post's website wasn't by local Thai people, but instead by Theo Den Brinker, an Australian ex-pat who is the Director of the online division. The actual photoshopping of the scanned photographs was carried out by local graphic artists—but for them, it was just another task.

A number of Thai artists are producing interesting original work—especially work that is critical of their own country. The military, the Buddhist religion, the government and the King are subjects that some artists have criticised through painting, performance and film works. But using the internet as a medium of expression is a foreign concept. In fact, most of the artists using traditional media to create political work are suspicious of technology—viewing computers and the internet as instruments of authority—and prefer to use the older media that they know cannot be controlled by the authorities and are easily accessible to their audience.

Some people I met claimed that information—such as video evidence—proving the Thai military and the King have acted against the interests of the people exists on a CD-ROM called *The Truth*. Thai expatriates living in the US have threatened to

Bangkok Post Online Street Art Site

put this information onto the internet if the government and military acts against the people's interest and this is apparently of major concern to authorities.

China's plans for building a (government controlled) intranet for the whole country were attractive to the Thai communications authority as they could 'govern' the amount of bandwidth used to overseas sites (these were paid in US dollars and at a relatively high rate to overseas companies). This provides a handy excuse to 'regulate' net access.

In Hanoi and Saigon, access to the internet is available from tourist cafes but, interestingly, some of the people who run these cafes don't want to know about the content accessible from their terminals. There seems to be a fear of what this content will bring. Other owners and their families are more enthusiastic about what they can get—but of course this content is largely in English and is filtered through the 'virtual' grid of Microsoft, Yahoo, or CNN. It is difficult to maintain interest for culturally oriented or more complex or chaotic sites—those outside the glossy regimented mainstream. Combine this with the access speed issue and most people in these regions can only view the internet as a kind of online newspaper with 'entertainment' the main drawcard. On a more positive note there is also a lot of swapping of email addresses between travellers and local café owners which might hopefully be a forerunner of regional grassroots networks.

In Phnom Penh, there is a public internet and training centre which caters primarily for local Cambodians. The centre, funded by a Canadian NGO has, together with the Post and Telecommunications Ministry, set up an ISP called CamNet. Through the commercial activities of CamNet, and with some external funding, the centre provides low cost training courses on web browsing and web page design. Importantly, training is provided in the process of browsing (using search engines properly), something rarely taught here, thereby enabling people to utilise the internet more productively. However it should be noted that it most benefits those fluent in English.

The web is perceived by many in the region as a one way medium, just like a newspaper or television and overall there doesn't seem to be much interest in setting up websites. In places like Vietnam it is very difficult to get server space, but in Cambodia the students have established free Hotmail accounts and are creating home pages and hosting it with the Geocities advertisement-supported free hosting service. It comes down to whether or not an awareness is created in how to set up and operate websites—and once it is people will generally utilise the knowledge.

The web, when viewed from a country like Vietnam, appears to be a domain of commerciality for the self-indulgent (no-one in the year 2000 will be without their own personal website). Artists in the region already have difficulties in freely expressing what they really feel through their art practice and so new media art isn't even a consideration under these conditions. It could be that the future for this artform in this region will be determined by how much artists appreciate the marginal and privileged position of new media art and accommodate this in appropriate ways, not just in well-heeled touring exhibitions, but in developing and inspiring its use in accessible, relevant and non-paternal ways.

The Bangkok Post's online division is at www.bangkokpost.net/street_art75/
Camnet is at www.lideekhmer.org.kh/

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Review

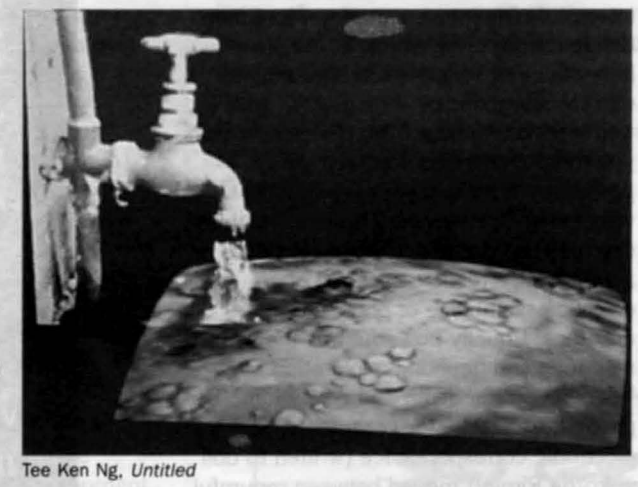
The peculiar things we do with technology

Ned Rossiter reads the fine print

Part of the wonder of encounters with artworks is the juxtaposition between your own efforts to comprehend a piece, if that is what you do, and the intepretation presented in the 'artist's statement'. The disjuncture that can at times emerge prompts some questions. To what extent is an artwork independent of its accompanying text? (Can or should it even be *thought* in such terms?) Does the extra-discursive nature of experimental artwork sabotage the potential it may have to correlate with the logic of written statements of intent, flimsy as they often are? These are some of the reactions I had to two exhibitions that use decommodified and new technologies to explore both the place and use of technology in culture and society.

Electronic media are used by three of the seven artists in *fresh*, an annual exhibition at PICA where select emerging artists dialogue with a curator—PICA exhibitions officer Katie Major this year—as they develop their artworks for public display.

Tee Ken Ng's installation *Onto Itself* makes use of reflective smoked glass to form a pane of illusion between two television monitors on which usually incommensurate subject matter converges: a running tap bubbles water over one TV surface; a suspended glass mug contains a straw of TV static; a digitally produced inanimate object contracts and expands its way into life as it passes, somewhat paradoxically, through TV static in an evolution of descent. While these arrangements do have a momentary fascination that comes with their peculiar form of presentation, they are less successful I think at communicating the counter-discourse on or critique of televisual discourses suggested in the artist's statement.



Tee Ken Ng, *Untitled*

Similarly, Neale Ricketts' statement promises interesting things for *Click*, a large video projection of mostly indistinct images: "By comparing the nature of the format (film) with the essence of the subject (waste), I am hoping to encourage an exploration into notions of waste and its by-products, which thus recycled, are able to once again, be meaningfully consumed by our society." Unfortunately, such ambition, important as it is, does not translate across to the work itself. Ricketts is also interested in issues of public surveillance by video cameras, and signifies this to a small extent by placing at the base of the video projection two video monitors with connected cameras, one of which transmits the image of the audience onto a monitor as they enter the installation space, while the other just points to the second monitor.

Part of the problem of employing new technologies in artwork as vehicles to communicate a critique of the technologies' attendant culture, is that the capacity for dazzle tends to overwhelm the subject of critique. The artwork becomes a display of what technologies can do, rather than an articulation of, say, decommodification and cultural practices of consumption.

Across the car park divide from PICA, in the modest space of Artshouse Gallery, is an exhibition of sculptural works by visiting Melbourne artist Michael Bullock. Resting on cardboard supports poking out of one the gallery walls, are 10 cardboard scale models of obsolete technologies: TVs, a vacuum cleaner, a toaster, speakers, a tape player, an iron, a record player. Above each object is a typewritten text, usually a humorous anecdote of the artist's habit of collecting and accumulating various mechanical and technological devices manufactured mostly in the 70s, only to then store them in a closet or back shed as a particular item fails to perform beyond its use by date.

Like Ng and Ricketts, Bullock too is interested in the kinds of peculiar things we do with technology in its stages of decommodification. Quite different though is his strategy of expression, avoiding the risk of the technology of production overwhelming its product, the artwork itself. His cardboard models, which could well have been pre-assembly line prototypes, stand somewhat pathetically as items once desired for their sheen and 'new frontier' domestic status. In some cases, objects like the record player or toasted sandwich maker have undergone a process of recommodification as the item attains a kitsch or cult value status. Bullock's text and sculptures are mutually constitutive of each other, with the text situating the junk technologies in a contemporaneity that is both out of the closet and away from the ignored display shelves of manufacturer's showrooms, if such things exist.

fresh, *an exhibition of installation, time based and electronic media works, curator, Katie Major, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), March 26 - April 26.* End of the Line, *a project of sculptural works by Michael Bullock, Artshouse Gallery, Perth Cultural Centre, April 17 - 26*

Column

Cinesonic

Philip Brophy block-bustered by *Lost in Space*

Airheads. Space cadets. Head in the clouds. Off with the birds. Lost in Space. Welcome to the film industry. We know nothing about what we do; we only hope that somehow something will work. We believe that as the media we are powerful, but we haven't the faintest idea why that might be the case. We just like to believe we are powerful, and hope you do too. So we make powerful block-buster films about...well, powerful block-bustery type stuff.

Picture that TV news image of Wall Street. All those *George*-reading (or *Ralph*-reading) wanna-be Tom Cruises, screaming to be heard through the noise of the free market, altering values in a system held together merely by the ruthlessly binary pressures of inflation and deflation. That's how movies get made. Everyone's got the money, everyone's a director, everyone's creative. They're all 'making movies'. Their little ego thrill of being a cog in the machine allows them to believe that they are a prime force in controlling the power of production, just as a blue-shirted drone on Wall Street feels that his pathetic voice is directly controlling the economic forces of the world. Masters of the Universe, one and all.

Audio-visuality reaches critical status under these contemporary conditions. In those 'powerful blockbustery type' films, every moment, every event, every gesture is pressurised to simultaneously contain and release the totality of the film, to express not single values but complete value ranges. Yet despite the highly fragmentary nature of films full of these pressurised incidents and details, a primal fear of the fragment governs the films' production, belying a neurotic reflex to tell everyone everything all the time lest they misunderstand, misconstrue, misapprehend. Stupidity is evident in wanting to tell a story so correctly, so ultimately, that one ends up saying nothing except that one is concerned to tell a good story.

Lost in Space has all the key ingredients for such stupid story-telling. It's based on a TV series—15 years after it was interesting to make viral references and allusions to the television medium. It fetishes technology in its representational content and its imagineering—like, as if technology is some sort of big deal in the cinema. It's about outer space—so 'big power' concepts invoking the military and NASA can be inferred. And it stars a family—for all those people who still haven't resolved things with their parents or (worse), for all those who know no better than to have kids of their own. But my sarcasm is not needed. This film degrades and degenerates these pithy humanist, rationalist ideals far more than I could critically achieve. It aptly expresses the chaotic delusions of a film industry that thinks it is powerful, believes it has control, and pays post-dubbed lip-service to whatever social mores currently are deemed worthy of story-telling.

The film opens with a standard po-mo textual pretzel which moistens the loins of media theorists and digital evangelists: in this case, a digitally composited representation of army dudes fighting actual star wars via virtual simulation. Reality, realism, depiction and grain confound each other—but this is the typical state of cinema, caught between championing and chastising the mortal struggle between the chemical and the digital. Furthermore, the pretzel effect is normalised to the nth degree, freed of any textual knots through the fetishisation of speed. Things might be textually confounding, but they move so fast that everything blurs, blends, blands-out. Thus, *Lost in Space*'s opening Star Wars scene collapses under the force of its own acceleration. Ten minutes of screen time states the same thing at every nano-second (there's some battle going on in outer space), suggesting that the endless options to pan/track/zoom anywhere in the screen void (of outer space and digital space) are ultimately meaningless. The scene could have been one minute; it could have been 20 minutes. In the digital realm, you can get anything you want—which means you get ranges without points; options without decisions; stuff without stuffing.

The role of sound design in such a dizzying realm of traumatised semiotics is to further confuse and disorient the auditor. Spatialisation accordingly constructs not a 'dimension', but a network of directional impulses: movement is sensed not for dramatic purpose but for pure vertiginous sensation. Yet—and the most intriguing aspect of *Lost in Space* is the consistency with which it corrupts its own formal logic—there is a clear demarcation between music and noise. That is, between the sound effect of an orchestra streaming out 'film musicy type stuff' (to remind me that I've paid money for a powerful blockbustery type of film) and the gorgeous noise of explosions, detonations and weaponry. The former is locked into a boxed stereo field emanating from the front screen, with occasional lifts off the screen into the surround channels, while the noise effects hang loud and heavy over the audience, mixed strongly into the wider surround field. So, despite the disorientation of what the sound effects are doing and why they are so overloaded and continual along with everything else, they have their own territorial place. Typical of conservative modes of cultural production, chaos and otherness are allowed but accorded their place. Their existence is never a problem (as claimed by taboo theory)—but their place is. Fixity of location is safety. Heroin dealing in streets you never go to is OK. Consistent noise in the surround will eventually grant you sonic equilibrium to filter the noise and concentrate on the frontal dialogue and orchestra.

But I got my money's worth in *Lost in Space*. For about 8 seconds the orchestra was mixed solely into the surround channels when the Space Family Robinson realised that they were indeed lost in space. No noise; only some slightly mournful orchestral murmuring to my extreme left and right. Then William Hurt took control of the situation and the family regained hope, and bang: the orchestra hits centre field again. That was worth $3.50. The remaining $1.50 of my 1/2 price Tuesday cinema patronage was for the 2 explosions which were preceded by some beautiful silence. The spatial and gestural shape of these explosions were erotic and eventful, and reminded me of the sophisticated sound design which has typified Japanese animation for the past 2 decades. But then I thought of the complex formal, technological, semiotic, audio-visual and spatial logics which energetically swirl throughout series like *Blue Seed* , *DNA2*, *Armitage III* and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. And then I realised I was experiencing a fast-flickering version of a Little Golden Book.

The only other sonic character of *Lost in Space* worth mentioning is its voice-dubbing. Is that really Penny's voice? Or did that stupid cute CGI chipmunk do it for her? And what's with her and Will each talking like a journalist who wants to be a stand-up comedian and mulches advertising-saturated bites from Lenny Bruce, Marshall McCluhan and Oprah into a supposedly knowing take on sitcom dialogue? Don't tell me—you script writers are hip to the fact you're working on a powerful blockbustery type film and you're being really subversive. Uh huh. These kids are mutant simulations of an old fart parent culture who wouldn't know how a kid thinks at the great non-eventful close of the millennium. These actors will be holding up convenience stores for their drug habits 10 years from now. Maybe they'll rob the houses of the script writers. Hopefully they'll escape tabloid terror because no one will recognise their real voices from *Lost in Space*.

Conceptually, this mania for telling everything at once, showing everything at once, sounding everything at once suggests great potential for new spectral materialisations of audio-visual combines where sounds fuse with images in unimaginable ways. Usually, loud noisy action cinema with an exploitation bent delivers. However *Lost in Space* is funnelled into a thin stream of humanist pro-family syrup whose potency overpowers all the assaultive pyrotechnics of the film's chaotic narration. It voices the audio-visual noise of production—a mechanical cacophony not of controlled forces, but of wildly unleashed effects and terminally unresolved decisions. It is so dense in its restless networking of fragments it creates a highly compacted veneer of bright, shiny, impenetrable nothingness. Most people recognise this glossy surface as 'entertainment quality' and 'production value'. It's what they want, and they'll get it until they die. Despite the bourgeois banality of adhering to tasteful cinematic decorum, *Lost in Space* is not vacuous, trashy, inferior, insubstantial, dismissible. It adheres to the Spielbergian/Lucasian mythological ideals both dumb and intelligent people admire so much. It is good, solid family entertainment of the most despicable sort. Unlike true exploitation cinema, it never ventures into those terrains of the pornographic, the horrible, the de-gendered, the abjectly violent, the psychoacoustic or the terro-sonic which would make it an engaging intellectual object. Go to sleep, Will Robinson. There is absolutely no danger whatsoever.

Review

Real alchemy

Paul Andrew applauds the NSWFTO Young Filmmakers Festival

Short filmmakers have lauded the NSW Film and Television Office Young Filmmakers Fund as a beacon amidst the tyranny of shorts funding. An opportunity for young ('slippery' under 35) filmmakers to receive funding up to $25000 to enable these turks to do what comes naturally—alchemy.

The inaugural Young Filmmakers Festival opened in March with a hullabaloo that marks this event as something of a jewel in the crown of the Premier's Department. With a keynote speech by enfant terrible Emma Kate Croghan, a coterie of film insiders and outsiders gathered to purvey a selection of the results from three rounds of funding (since the fund's inception in 1996).

The filmerati were not disappointed and neither were the throngs that gathered to watch the festival at the AFI during the two day festival. High production values, high profile actors, and closing credits which included industry luminaries with aspirant professionals, are familiar traits.

Narrative films dominated the line up, perhaps more a reflection of the judging process than types of applications received. Clearly, on the eve of launching Murdochwood, this festival is pitched by the NSWFTO to garner kudos for providing stepping stones to the new Jane Campions, George Millers, Baz Luhrmanns and Fred Schepsis rather than illuminating the new Paul Coxs, Paul Winklers, Tracey Moffats or Tom Zubryckis.

There were some notable exceptions. Warwick Baird's *Flooded Dreams* is a mythic testimony to the clash of values foregrounded by the Wik case. This engaging half hour doco captures the spirit of the land that envelopes both Indigenous and post colonial residents of the Lake Victoria regions.

Tom Hearn's elegiac *My Little Brother* is a highly personal insight into schizophrenia and heroin addiction. Montages of a video interview—done seven weeks prior to the death of the director/writer's brother—combined with stills, super 8 and additional home video footage fuse in a layering of past, present and future. Glen Eaves' *Structures on Rail* is an evocation of early modernist film which portrays technological progress. This beautiful 16mm film is orchestrated with poetic imagery, in camera effects and an ambitious musical soundtrack.

Jane Manning, *One That Got Away*

Kay Rasool's *The Temple on the Hill* tells another story of post colonial Australia. She documents the schism between traditional Hindi customs and their difficult assimilation into a hybrid Australian culture which reinterprets old cultural traditions. Wendy Nyes' diaristic *She* oscillates between fact and fantasy with a filmic style that celebrates 20 years of music clip chic and follows the urban and urbane she from her odyssey into unemployment and pursuit of pop music.

Michael and Alla Melkonian's eccentric comedy *Adventures of the Blobs* anticipates the new genre of sophisticated 3D animations which have come a long way from the antics of Max Headroom and co. Bill Marsden's *Applied Mathematics* is the most stylised of the narrative films, a very witty fable of the possibilities of logic in that most impossible terrain of illogical things, sex. Jane Manning's pubescent tale of unrequited love, *One That Got Away*, was a festival favourite, a Catholic torchsong of suppressed desire with a humourous end.

Sofya Gollan's *Chlorine Dream* is an elegant portrayal of a young girl's gentle inner life. Her subaquatic play with a backyard marine boy is balletic fantasia. Andrew Kotatko's *Unquite dream* is one of the most ambitious dramas undertaken. Rich production design and exquisite National Trust locations have helped make this film a success; an imaginary tale of encounters between Mary Shelley and Lord Alfred Byron on the eve of creating Frankenstein.

A significant absence from the screenings is Lynne-Marie Danzey's *Fetch*, not included due to its acceptance at Cannes this year. Yet another narrative starring Matt Day and Rebecca Frith. Like many of the 35 films already funded by the NSWFTO there is a marked predilection for 'one liners', where the premise for a short film is geared towards a witty or insightful denouement, to make a point if not a moral. Often Australian shorts, like their American counterparts, ensure closure is bereft of possibilities, that it should be finite and determined, not open to poetry, imagination and interactivity.

Damien Power's *Until the Vision*, is interesting in this regard. This prosaic film of a young man's last hours leaves the audience hanging in the balance, imagining what will happen well after the final credits roll. This film is *about* closure, the end of a life and at once it is about beginnings and life that ensues.

The YFF is a welcome and timely funding and development resource. What each of these production companies have achieved is true alchemy. Hopefully the NSWFTO will acknowledge the limitations on 'magic', and funding levels or sponsorship accords will be struck to ensure a professional focus and encourage professional development. Similarly, an accord with a commercial broadcaster, to package the films as 'a television hour', would go a long way to raising the marketability of short film culture and putting an end to the adage that short films don't sell. This is an era after all where clever marketing can sell anything.

Without doubt the Young Filmmakers Fund initiative is a milestone. Kudos, however, is clearly to be shared. When the endless lists of credits roll, including subsidies, in person or in kind from many artists, artists' families, and small businesses and sponsors, it becomes painfully evident how many have helped each of these filmmakers, these cinemalchemists, transform brass into gold.

Young Filmmakers Festival, NSW Film and Television Office, Chauvel Cinema, Paddington, March 27 - 29 1998

Book review

Parables of visibility

Ed Scheer evaluates Scott Bukatman's take on *Blade Runner*

Like the film's opening sequence (the third shot shows a huge eye taking in the panorama), Scott Bukatman's reading of *Blade Runner* begins with a motif of vision, describing the scene at the Eye Works where the technician is making eyes for the Tyrell Corporation (motto: "More human than human") for use in their androids (known as replicants in the film). The leader (Rutger Hauer in his only decent role to date) of a renegade group returned illegally to earth, makes the observation: "Well, if only you could see what I've seen with your eyes." This is the scene where we see the replicants beginning the search for their origins and identity, the subplot beneath Rick Deckard's (Harrison Ford) relentless search for the replicants in order to 'retire' them. But in order to take them out he has to firstly distinguish them from humans. He does this with the aid of the Voigt-Kampff test which examines a subject's eye and magnifies it to record any empathic response.

Whether you're a human or a replicant the film suggests that the 'eye' is the way to see the 'I' and Bukatman's reading situates this thematic at the nucleus of the narrative of the film. It's not hard to do with a film that makes so many overt references to eyes and vision, significantly linking memories—human or replicant—to photographs, but Bukatman has an eye for detail. He notes for instance the flash of red on the eyes of the replicants when the light strikes them at a particular angle (including Deckard's eyes); the way Pris's eyes open with an audible click (ear for detail?); and the fact that the film wasn't set in 2020 as originally planned because it was too obvious a nexus (my pun) with eye charts. He also picks up other important resonances discussed previously in Zizek (1993) about the significance of the homophone Deckard/Descartes and in Silverman's (1991) discussion of screen memories (arguing that memories are fantasies infused with otherness and all fantasies are implanted) though without too sophisticated an engagement (which wouldn't suit the small BFI format).

The book emphasises the complex connections between the multi-layered visual style and the parables of visibility deployed within the story, not the modernist type of 'ineluctable modality' as in Joyce but the di-visible postmodern kind: "Seeing is everything in *Blade Runner*, but it guarantees absolutely nothing." Bukatman illuminates the popularity of the film from an interpretative point of view in suggesting that it may stem from the way that the film "under-determines the lessons" of the encounters it sets up between vision and "delirious detail", vision and self, vision and urban space etc. In doing so it opens itself to new and different readings which do not exhaust the film's complex seeding of interpretative encounters. It is a seminal film, but a seminality without secretions. "I want more life, *fucker*..." Roy Batty says to Eldin Tyrell, his "hard to see" non-biological father, before gouging his eyes out in a gesture which terminates the seminal visions of which Batty him/itself is the product.

In a way, he got what he wanted: five different versions of the film followed after the first screened version (known as "The Workprint" shown 1982, 1990, 1991) including the 1982 theatrical release and the Director's Cut released in 1992 (*Future Noir*). There would also be more life for Roy Batty in the re-release of Philip Dick's novella *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* with the *Blade Runner* cover, title page and spine; and in the various sequels including H.W. Jeter's *Blade Runner 2. The edge of human*, (published appropriately by Orion Books Ltd. London 1995) in which Roy returns to discuss the etymology of the term 'blade runner'; and the interactive *Blade Runner* computer game on CD-ROM, a joint venture from The Blade Runner Group and Westwood Studios (released in Australia December 5, 1997).

Bukatman doesn't discuss any of this, which may disappoint the fanatics, but they will know this stuff from reading the web site of The Blade Runner FAQ (NB new address to the one printed in Bukatman: *http://www.bit.net.au/~muzzle/bladerunner/*). Production details are adequately covered though Bukatman is obviously relying heavily on Paul Sammon's obsessive *Future Noir: the Making of Blade Runner* (New York: Harper Prism, 1996). However, one juicy little fact he overlooked was that two of the rooms in J.F. Sebastian's apartment were furnished with units from Lerner and Loewe's *My Fair Lady*, though he does mention this film among other examples of "synthetic human narratives."

More importantly perhaps, he provides a valuable and up to date guide to the film's reception especially in the academic literature (Zizek, Silverman, Bruno etc) and has constructed a useful and readable montage of facts, opinions and scholarly argument. While offering his own readings, significantly in the area of the film's construction of fractal urban geography, it is chiefly as a guide to discourse surrounding *Blade Runner* that his contribution will be remembered and valued. All of which should keep the editors at BFI happy.

Blade Runner, *Scott Bukatman, BFI (BFI Modern Classics): London, 1997.*

Working place

Stalker's Rachael Swain reports on *Sight Specific*, an annual site specific performance seminar in the Netherlands

Its is almost a year since I attended the *Sight Specific* seminar and yet many of my experiences there remain with me as vivid images; watching a silvery projected horse as it galloped endlessly around moonlit sand dunes, biking to each of the morning talks as the rain flew horizontally over the flat land or re-working our own performance *Mimi* into the foreign edge of a Dutch forest, wondering what the Mimis, who come out at night, thought of the almost endless northern summer light in the sky.

The Theatre Instituut Nederland opened the symposium announcing that their annual international event had needed an adventurous edge. Thus the seminar itself was held 'site specifically' at The Oerol Festival on the Frysian isle of Terschelling off the North coast of Holland. The so called 'creme de la creme' of European and American site specific directors and presenters travelled by clipper across the Waddenzee (a kind of Dutch tidal wetland) to their houseboat accommodation at the harbour of West Terschelling. The week consisted of daily talks held in the Maritiem Instituut and nightly viewing of a range of outdoor performance and site specific events.

Oerol Festival is a wonderful ode to the concept of site specific theatre itself. Founded and directed by Joop Mulder, this annual international outdoor festival utilises the island as a stage in order to develop the theme of the festival: this year, "Van achter de wolken kwam de wind" (From behind the clouds came the wind). This otherwise peaceful 20 mile strip of sand dunes, fields and typically quaint Dutch villages is transformed by artists embedding their work into forests, long grey beaches, shallows and the ever present dunes. The festival attracts 80,000 visitors each year, and the audiences come knowing they will witness a combination of professional large scale site specific performances and installations, and younger artists trying their hand in the field, learning by the only way possible. How else do you know what it means that your audience is 6 kilometres away or to work with or against the elements? To compete with or enhance the lay of the land, or to dig below the surface of time and expose the histories of a particular site as a dramaturgical element of the completed work.

The conference itself consisted mainly of artistic directors of companies working in this field presenting their work and the ideas behind it. They were complemented by festival directors and academics leading discussions on the role of the festival and of the audience in Site Specific Theatre. With over 40 delegates and 200 performance events I will only touch here on a few glowing memories.

Kristen Delholm, artistic director of Hotel Pro Forma (and the production *Orfeo* which visited Australia 1996-97) from Denmark spoke in depth of the choosing of a site, of the "complex physical circumstances we need to make metaphysics", the time of day, the history of a site, what it is currently used for; all these things can effect the perception of an event. She said that Site Specific Theatre plays in "the continuum between illusion and reality." "We want the reality proposed by an outdoor environment, putting more focus on the senses and therefore perception. This takes us away from the question in theatre—what does it mean?" That therefore a spectator can "choose between reality or fiction or surprise."

Delholm (who enjoys lifetime funding from the Danish government) showed an impressive slide show of events she has directed, in art galleries, on beaches, even in theatres! One which I remember vividly was created in the metre wide gap between two multistorey buildings for an audience looking down from above. She commented that Site Specific Theatre is never economical or practical. Another slide showed a curved wall where 100 rowers sat and rowed in unison, each of their transparent perspex oars containing a tiny projector which projected an image of someone or something they loved onto the wall. Delholm commented that she likes to work with "authentic elements" in performers as well as sites, ie real rowers, real dwarfs. She doesn't like actors acting, but people doing. I noticed this was an opinion shared by others of the visual theatre directors who spoke like Frans Malschaert, director of Sirkel, from the Netherlands who "prefers his actors to forget their acting."

The Italian-French company Zur was to me the most successful and engaging performance on the island. They took us on a night tour, a search to 'L'oeil du Cyclone', nestled in a valley between high dunes where one enters a world of images and their servants, explored and encountered by chance. Visual effects projected onto curtains of sand, or endless sheets hung out to dry (in the pouring rain), a coffee bar at the top of a tree, and the beautiful galloping silvery horses which I mentioned earlier. A feast of the visual and tactile kind, though soft on the content, it was a joy to clamber around in this whimsical world. The drizzle only accentuated the Dutch ambience.

Mike Pearson, co-artistic director of Brith Gof from Wales, defines Site Specific Theatre as "the latest occupation where other occupants are still apparently and cognitively active." Mike's definition is perhaps one which echoes the company's strongly stated Welsh identity, and that of a post colonial experience. He focuses on that which is at site and that which is brought to site. Brith Gof's work, which often creates a "ghost architecture within a host architecture", has at times mined a number of histories of a site in one event. One performance consisted of 3 architectures and 3 stories performed simultaneously; one of site but not of period, one of period but not of site, and one neither of site nor period.

The artists who spoke at the seminar presented a variety of approaches to the dance which takes place between the fabricated performance and the framework of the site. Pearson's work seemed to capture something dear to my heart in his focus on a connection between place and identity. I asked myself how important is it to the nature of Site Specific Theatre to reach beyond the physical surroundings into a history of a site? And how is the past to be written, and on whose behalf; what are the politics of interpretation and representation? I think it is not by chance that I felt such resonances with Pearson's work as a practitioner from a country struggling to both retrieve Indigenous cultural practice and unfold a new theatrical language woven from shreds of a colonial past and a unique physical environment.

This overlaying of histories and architectures at a site can, and I think often does, produce a work which itself may be composed of several interpenetrating conceptual frameworks; scenographic, temporal, spatial, thematic, textual. No single story need be told here. As Mike Pearson said, "Such performances reveal, celebrate, confound, criticise, and make manifest the specifics of site which begins to resemble a kind of 'saturated space' or 'scene-of-crime', where, to use forensic jargon, 'everything is potentially important.'"

The cold light of day can shine a harsh gaze on a company producing Site Specific Theatre, faced with a work inseparable from its site, that being the only context within which it is intelligible. Many of the companies who presented at the seminar do 'move' projects (and this is where the role of the festival director comes in). Massaging a work into a new site requires a festival or producing body with a vision and commitment to the dense poetics possible when time is spent working a performance into a new site.

Brith Gof's first large scale site specific piece *Gododdin*, based on the earliest recorded Welsh epic poem and created with industrial percussionists Test Department, was conceived and originally staged in an enormous disused Rover car factory in Cardiff. *Gododdin* was subsequently restaged in a quarry in Italy, a crane factory in Germany, an empty ice rink in Holland and a tram depot in Scotland. All of the performance, production and scenographic elements were regarded as a repertoire or kit of parts readdressed and reconstituted for the specifics of each new location.

Above all the *Sight Specific* seminar revealed to me the diversity of forms and practices now employed in this adventurous work; some connected predominantly to a fine arts genre, others approached the 'guided tour.' Some are large scale internationally touring works and others inseparably embedded in a specific cultural and political milieu. These events are united by a visual language, a world of ambiguity and sensuality which invites an audience to see a site specifically.

Sight Specific *Seminar, annual & international event hosted by Theatre Instituut Nederland, The Netherlands, June 19 - 22, 1997.*

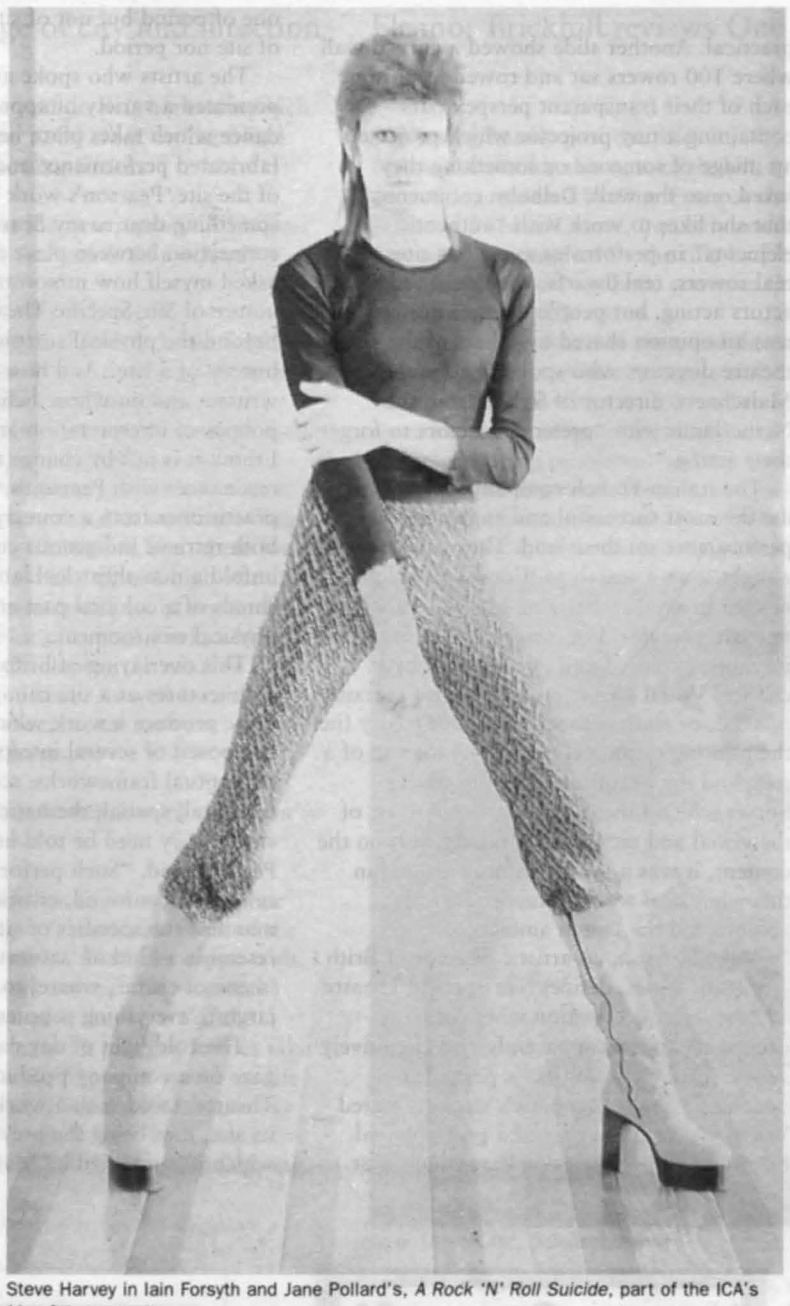
Rachael Swain has worked as a performer, director and visual artist in large scale and small scale outdoor performance for the past 10 years. She is the co-artistic director of Stalker Theatre Company and the director of The Marrugeku Company for its premiere project, Mimi.

Performance worries in Blair's nursery

Aleks Sierz interviews Lois Keidan and Vivienne Gaskin about the state of live art at London's ICA

Happy Birthday New Labour. It's been one year since you arrived on a landslide and the phrase "Cool Britannia" is on everyone's lips. We all waited 18 years for you—and cheered loudly at the birth—but, isn't it now time to look at how live art thrives in Blair's nursery? We all know New Labour is keen on the cultural industries—and loves to play with spin-doctors and image-makers—but what about experimental performance? Take the case of London's Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), the 51-year-old venue for experimentation across all art forms. On April 1, 1997 (April Fool's Day)—and a month before Labour's victory in the general election—Philip Dodd became the new director of this flagship. Within a year, more than 30 staff members had resigned. Why? Lois Keidan, who until November 1997 was head of live arts at the ICA, says: "When Dodd arrived, he claimed to have a new vision for the ICA—we spent 6 months trying to find out what this was. We finally realised he didn't have one." In the end, she—and Catherine Ugwu, author of *Let's Get It On: The Politics of Black Performance*—decided that Dodd hadn't a clue about live art and left to form Keidan/Ugwu, a company dedicated to locating "time-based performance within a critical framework, but outside the institutional context."

For more than 5 years at the ICA, Keidan and Ugwu "worked both proactively and reactively, responding to shifts in artistic practice and finding ways to contextualise those." "We supported artists," says Keidan, "with commissions, mentoring schemes, and by providing a critical framework for their work, including publications, debates, and conferences." In seasons such as *Rapture* (body art), *Totally Wired* (new technologies), *Corpus Delecti* (Latin America) and *Fortune Cookies* (Chinese diaspora), Keidan and Ugwu ran "an ideas-led program of work that featured a whole bunch of different voices." "We did one of the first British seasons to look at the new generation of black artists who were confronting issues of identity in their work," says Keidan. "We introduced a lot of body artists and we explored the work of culturally diverse artists—especially those whose practices were coming from the edge." Artists involved include Hittite Empire, Coco Fusco, Franco B, Ron Athey, Susan Lewis, Keith Khan, Ronnie Fraser-Monro—and many others. "But when Dodd arrived," says Keidan, "his whole outlook was out of date—he was trying to catch up with what we'd already done years ago. One day, he came in and said he wanted us to collaborate with Los Angeles—we'd been doing just that for at least 4 years."



Steve Harvey in Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard's, *A Rock 'N' Roll Suicide*, part of the ICA's *Live Arts* program

Generally, she sees Dodd (formerly editor of *Sight & Sound* magazine) not only as "notoriously arrogant, a bad manager of people and a bully" but also as "symptomatic of the phenomenon of New Labour." "Because of Cool Britannia, the avant-garde was extremely hot and sexy. New Labour tried to get in on the act, but without really knowing what was going on." A classic case of scene-creaming.

Like other spaces for live art in Britain—for example CCA, Green Room and Arnolfini—the ICA is "now in the process of being dumbed down—you can't help wondering who will support new, radical work in the future." The new regime at the ICA "lacks rigour, has no critical framework for its events." Instead of "being in opposition no matter who's in government", Dodd's ICA has become a "mouthpiece" for New Labour. "Here the needs of artists, and indeed the artists themselves, appear to be expendable in the face of profit-margins and mediocre approaches towards art, ideas and audiences," Keidan says. "Wall-to-wall DJ-driven events in a cramped public bar suggest that the ICA is not taking its responsibilities seriously. It currently serves up lightly tossed side-orders rather than well-prepared main courses."

With 11 such bar events every month, the ICA is certainly breaking the mould. Vivienne Gaskin, live arts officer since January 1998, sees this as a good thing. "It's true that we've tended to move away from seasons. The trouble with seasons is that they take a long time to put together—but the pace of culture is very fast nowadays and the bar events reflect that," she says.

They are "more democratic, less exclusive than many live art performances." There's no point "being purist about experiment," Gaskin says. "Culture itself is never pure. And some events—like Batmacumba, which marked the 40th anniversary of the Bossa Nova—were massively popular." And, "although it might be distasteful to live arts purists," Gaskin says, "I see nothing wrong in mixing comedy and music with art. For example, we had one event when The Pod, the experimental comedians, used video and overwritten captions to create a new kind of interactive event." If you mix previously separate genres, she says, "you can encourage new mixes of audience." For example, "when we had artist Tracy Emin as a DJ, you got a crossover between the art world and the club scene." This is good for the ICA as an institution because "it breaks down the coldness of the place."

Some shows, such as those created by Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard, "really fascinate me because they work experimentally with pop culture. Basically, they collate bands. On the 10th anniversary of the Smiths splitting up, we put on *The Smiths Is Dead*, with a tribute band, and this attracted a great mix of people: an art crowd, Smiths lookalikes and music journos—it was very exciting." Forsyth and Pollard's next gig features David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust.

Rather than discuss "simulacrum and doppleganger theory", Gaskin prefers to stress the innovative way the ICA building is now being used and how new audiences ("once too intimidated to go to the ICA") are coming in. "Performance doesn't have to be up its own arse all the time—there is room for club events as well as other so-called avant-garde practices." Behind the implicit debate between Keidan and Gaskin—avant-garde versus populism, difficulty versus accessibility, experimental project versus bar event—lies the material question of funding. So far, New Labour has shown very little interest in funding dangerous or difficult new work. And indications are that the ICA, like other institutions which support live art, may be turned into sponsor-led receiving houses, rather than factories for the creation of the radical.

If this trend continues, performance could be in deep trouble. Keidan says, "What is cutting edge anymore? It's a difficult and uncertain time. Lots of artists just don't know how to locate themselves. When institutions such as the ICA start dumbing down, the avant-garde becomes homeless." That's the trouble with Blair's babes, "they want the image, but not the real thing."

Aleks Sierz lives in London where he teaches journalism, is the theatre critic for Tribune *and a cultural commentator whose work appears in many publications in the UK and overseas. He is currently working on 2 books: in* In-yer Face Theatre, *he argues that controversial cutting-edge drama is an urgent critique of contemporary society, while in* From Old Country to Cool Britannia *he shows how British theatre in the 1990s tackles the issues of gender, politics and postmodernism.*

How the fringe circumscribes the centre

Anne Thompson samples the High Beam Festival celebration of the creative talents of people with a disability

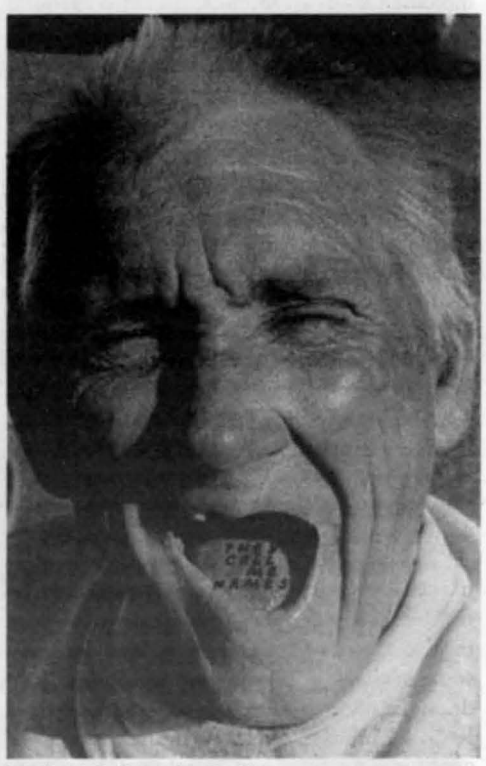
This inaugural High Beam Festival was the initiative of people with a disability and included dance, theatre, comedy and music, visual art exhibitions and workshops and seminars.

The dance performances were by mixed ability groups—Catherine Chappell and Dancers from New Zealand, State of Flux from Melbourne and Restless Dance Company from Adelaide. These 3 groups represent different styles and approaches to dance. Catherine Chappell has been a member of Limbs and the 3 dancers in the company without a disability are good exponents of contemporary dance. Consequently the Chappell company's *Touch Compass* was inscribed with the values of contemporary dance. Movement was skilfully patterned in the bodies, in space and in time and accompanied by music or a sound score. Similarly, the solos by the dancers with a disability were loosely shaped in space and through time. For me the focus of this company was a pleasure in dancing.

State Of Flux is a contact improvisation group. One of the members, Janice Florence, is a paraplegic and dances in and out of her wheelchair. This company performs and teaches as a professional company. There is apparently an extensive community of mixed ability contact improvisation groups in the United States. This form of dance has always been disseminated as a democratic form because of its emphasis on moving from sensation rather than from a visual aesthetic. It has clearly found a new clientele and audience base.

Restless Dance subscribes to a more theatrical aesthetic. The performance of *Flight* was in a visually stunning set, a room-cum-walled garden. The movement in the piece has clearly evolved from workshops on the theme of "flight" or the "journey towards independence." This movement was then structured into group sections, solos, duets. The focus of the work was emotional impact and humour. I become preoccupied with the relationships between the performers and the dramatic journey of individual performers through this landscape of relationship. The production values were high and the live music an eclectic mix of soundscape, original and popular songs.

The theatre performances, *Touched* by No Strings Attached and *Karrendi* which began as a recreation program run by Kura Yerlo for Aboriginal people with disabilities, were models of community performance. All the performers had a disability. In *Touched,* 4 intersecting narrative strands allowed each performer some time and space to 'be' in some way before an audience. A soundscape held the piece together. I enjoyed the queer aesthetic which reigned—the frocks, the garish makeup, the cross-dressing. I was also full of respect for the ambition of the endeavour, to bring this diverse group together, including Aboriginal performers, to address the theme of Reconciliation. In *Karrendi*, which means 'rise above and be proud' in Kaurna language, a loose narrative was the frame which again permitted each performer to sing a favourite song, tell a story or be part of a group dance. The focus of both these performances was the celebration of group and individual identity. Neither performance addressed 'theatrical skill' as such but had a 'visibility politics' or 'pride in our difference' agenda.



Len Burchill, *Reversing the Gaze*

I must note that all the performances I have mentioned so far, except for the improvisations of State of Flux, were directed by people without a disability. *mph*, a performance by Accelerator Dance, Steve Noonan and Jotham Broad (who has Down syndrome) was a bit like a road movie transferred to a stage setting. Two drifters meet and travel together. Noonan narrates the piece with Broad making a number of passing comments; but for me the piece hinges on quite delicate moments of physical interaction between the 2 performers. When I first saw this piece I was troubled by the fact Noonan spoke for, and about, Broad even though Broad was on stage. By the 3rd time I saw the piece I felt the performers had arrived at a place where the difference in their performances was a strength and not marking one as 'having' and the other as 'not having' certain skills.

I found the stand-up comedy at the High Beam Cabaret to be a great relief, partly because it was written and performed by performers with a disability and also because the form is subversive in that assumptions about people are always being exposed and confronted in a direct manner. Liz Navratil developed witty and gently provocative material from her experiences living in a Spastic Centre and her life now as she moves in the world as an independent person (she has cerebral palsy). Interestingly I found Steady Eddy's brand of cutting, abusive humour difficult to take (his first object was the ferals at Nimbin) and sexist (his next was his ex-wife) and find it telling that he has made it into the mainstream boy's club of stand-up comedy.

The 2 day seminar, *Arts, Identity and Expression*, reminded me of the invisibility of the history of people with a disability, the issue of access for people with a disability to artistic training, rehearsal and performance venues and opportunities. Liz Navratil gave a timely reminder that the mainstream theatre industry does not yet employ people with a disability to play parts conveying a character with a disability. Pat Rix spoke of the importance of having an identity as, and belonging to, a community and of her work as musical director of the Holdfast Bay Community Choir, a mixed ability group. Peter Vance has taken on the task of educating people about R.P. (Retinitis Pigmentosa), through telling his story and singing. I was reminded again by Sally Chance, artistic director of Restless, of the fact that there is always a centre to the prevailing dominant culture and it is worth thinking about shifting this centre or remembering how the fringe circumscribes that centre. Currently the dominant culture in Australia still needs reminding that people with a disability can participate in their own representation and in cultural life in general.

I only saw one show, a photographic exhibition called *Reversing the Gaze* (presented by D.A.D.A.A., W.A.) an investigation of the 'disabled gaze'. Participants had been given cameras to use and asked to determine how they would like to be represented photographically. The resulting photos were fascinating, a body blurred as caught in motion, the face, a hand. I was struck by the fact that these photographs were partial glimpses of people. There was no attempt to reveal all or an essence. These artists were not being constructed through the gaze of people without a disability but were looking back and at themselves. I was left with the thought that maybe this festival gave me the experience of being constructed through a new gaze and to witness a variety of attempts to capture and represent this gaze, by, for and with, people with a disability. It was a huge success on those terms.

High Beam Festival: Highlighting the creative abilities of people with a disability, *organised by Arts in Action, Adelaide, May 1 - 10, 1998.*

Giselle Milon Heidrun Löhr

"If you don't dare knocking, kick the door open". In the spirit of Le Chat Noir, A La Bastille lets loose some of the real life characters who inhabited fin-de-siècle Paris when Aristide Bruant, the father of the chanson réaliste was making Invective an art. Performing in French and English, Nini Dogskin (Giselle Milon, Gail Priest) is accompanied by Jose Luis Betancor on the bandoneon and Greg Gibson on woodwind. Visual artist Carlos Barrios drops in from time to time to sketch the performance and the patrons just as Lautrec used to do between absinths at Bruant's cabaret. Go on, kick the door open and take in the show served with a French meal at Cafe Basilica in Chippendale June 10-20 or see the show only at Tap Gallery in Darlinghurst July 2. Nini Dogskin will launch a CD of Bruant's songs in August at the Alliance Française. Their next project is Le Conforte Moderne, a musical theatre piece on the works on Boris Vian.
Information Nini Dogskin 97440670

A mixed plate

Maryanne Lynch tastes Rock'n'Roll Circus' *Sweetmeats*

Rock'n'Roll Circus is one of Brisbane's better known performing arts companies. A gutsy, physical theatre troupe, it is claimed by locals as their own and familiar to other states through tours of *Body Slam* and *The Dark*. In its most public incarnation it has revealed something of the subterranean life of this city, with its troupe of body-proud performers, their outlandish tricks and skills, and the flamboyant emphasis on sex/uality in their shows.

But this is a new era, a new troupe and a new show, so why am I talking about the old? Simply because it is impossible to divorce the one from the other in considering *Sweetmeats*, the first production of this latest incarnation. Not in a comparative sense but, as I have been doing over time, seeking to trace the identity of the company at large—and through this make sense of where it's heading.

This show is physical theatre, but is it a part of that broader trend identified by Peta Tait (*RealTime* 24) where bodies and disguises and ambiguities are writ large? No more the trick, rather a 'je ne sais quoi' trickiness of category and intent. While Rock'n'Roll Circus have been moving into the terrain described by Tait, in *Sweetmeats* the company gives what looks like an unintended retro nod to stage theatre and big-top circus, with mixed results.

The show, directed by theatre and film director Jackie McKimmie, is centred around twins separated at birth. A hoary ole tale, as we follow the inevitably juxtaposing lives through good times and bad times, culminating in the reunion and, again, separation of the siblings. The storyline is simplistic, evil=wealth and good=poverty, politicians on one side and inner city 'ferals' on the other (I'm waiting for the day when the targets are ourselves), and the sister (Kate Fryer) and brother (Derek Ives) as innocents in the midst of it all. Curious too is the use of religious imagery—surely not a compelling motif for the target audience—in the form of a nun-guardian (magnificently played by Fi Dunstan) and a Virgin Mary statue with kickboxing tendencies! A grabbag of ideas, some of which work and some of which don't.

This story borrows from conventional narrative theatre and translates it into physical theatre. Not the gender-bending physical theatre described by Tait—although there is some of that—but an attempt to create a dramatic narrative through physical language. Rock'n'Roll has been striving towards this goal for some time, and *Sweetmeats* is its most successful attempt. It's a pity, however, that the integration of narrative and form has resulted in such a banal tale. Instead of ambiguous hybridity, *Sweetmeats* offers stage mutton served up as lamb.

There are, however, compelling moments: the final image of the wimpled nun perched in the sky, swinging out over us on a trapeze and high hopes; the revisited juggling trick, executed by the politician (Matt Wilson) with slick confidence and gamefully imitated by his adopted (stolen?) infant son with whatever comes to hand, including his bottle; the politician's wife (Azaria Universe) seducing the butcher (Andrew Bray)—who supplies the innocents (or sweetmeats) for the powerful few who can afford them—around and under and on top of his bench, her stiletto heel both cupid's arrow and a dagger; the long flowing fabric which she winds around herself like a spider as she prepares for sleep high above all; the wooden platform of the politician and the rose garden of the butcher, intersected by the sinister line of pink carcases waiting for their 'skinning'.

And what about the big-top stuff, the extent to which the company wants to reverently play with the cliches of circus performance. Several of the new troupe have just emerged from a 6-month training program with Rock'n'Roll, and what they accomplish in terms of skills is commendable given such a short period. Yet, it's also, inevitably, limited. But what I'm really talking about is what sort of identity is being cast by the reconstituted company. I can't tell as yet. *Sweetmeats* is a baggy mix of stylistic possibilities, both exciting and frustrating.

In the meantime, old hands such as Ives and Wilson delight us with their nonchalant virtuosity. Ives in particular is compelling as an overgrown baby who just can't stay out of mischief—still in my mind is his casual skill in scaling high spaces in search of his bottle, punctuated by playing ghosts with a scrappy piece of white muslin. And Dunstan and Bray hold our attention with their ability to express the inexpressible, Bray as the lovelorn butcher executes a gymnastic dance of desire amid his roses—wordless, yearning, filled with despair; and Dunstan as the good nun constantly swoops down with a fine fury to save her found child (Fryer) from the clutches of evil. But the issue isn't so much a matter of individual performances, circus-skilled or otherwise, as what the hell the show is on about.

Given that physical skills are patchy and the narrative is formulaic, what sort of company is Rock'n'Roll aiming to be? Circus? Theatre? Physical theatre? *Sweetmeats* promises several directions but doesn't deliver any of them to my satisfaction. But it's early days yet; space needs to be made for company and performers alike to succeed *and* fail in their ongoing exploration of who and what the troupe is and might be in this new era. Time will tell us, the mugs in the stalls!

Sweetmeats, *Rock'n'Roll Circus, director Jackie McKimmie, Princess Theatre, Brisbane, March 26 - April 11*

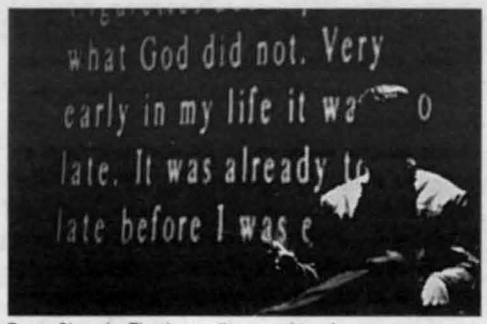
In the beginning...

Terri-ann White wonders at the Word at the *short cuts* performance program at PICA

Someone is writing a poem. Words are being set down in a force field. It's as if the words themselves have magnetic charges; they veer together or in polarity, they swerve against each other. Part of the force field, the charge, is the working history of the words themselves, how someone has known them, used them, doubted and relied on them in a life. Part of the movement among the words belongs to sound—the guttural, the liquid, the choppy, the drawn-out, the breathy, the visceral, the down-light. The theatre of any poem is a collection of decisions about space and time—how are these words to lie on the page, with what pauses, what headlong motion, what phrasing, how can they meet the breath of the someone who comes along to read them? And in part the field is charged by the way images swim into the brain through written language: swan, kettle, icicle, ashes, scab, tamarack, tractor, veil, slime, teeth, freckle.

Adrienne Rich, *What is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1993

I am writing a review of a program of performance works and all I can remember and think of are words. This was the case back when I was sitting in the dark space, too, and it's not just my predilection. Each of these works has as its germ of an idea a book, a prior text. Four new, original performance works by this designated category *emerging artist*, a funding classification that canny operators like PICA's Sarah Miller can turn to good effect and best advantage. Give some clever people some money to make a short work, say 20 minutes long, give them resources and intelligent support-people with more or different experience to them, and let them make something that will more than likely involve other collaborators. Put on a season of this work, woven together into a program.



Dean Chan in *The Lover (in an ashtray)*
Sanje Arambasic

The title of the season, *short cuts*, reminds me of the Robert Altman film, that clever meshing of 9 stories and one poem by Raymond Carver into a mosaic, a surprising approach for a feature film: a bold series of leaps across form. Back to words, and the genesis of each of the works in the program. A funny coincidence for directions in contemporary performance. Worlds and books. Lewis Carroll. Marguerite Duras. Rene Descartes. Valerie Solanas.

I find myself, at some stage before the interval, in a self-conscious position of funny egoism. I've felt this before, I might admit. From my place in the audience, projecting, I start to imagine myself onstage, making something. It's a yearning, I think, rather than sheer ego. I fantasise it is about fidelity to language and ideas, *and* a yearning for clarity *to* an idea: following through, developing it, learning from it and making it transparent. Without artifice, without convolutions or *too* many good ideas. Nothing worse than drowning in a flurry of ideas that cancel each other out because none of them have reached their fruition or maturity.

I think I saw what I'm yearning for last night in Kate Champion's work, *Face Value*. While I am not so stupid to understand that Champion has had a good deal more time and resources to build her work than the 4 projects in *short cuts* had, there still seemed to be lessons about a marriage of the elements that make performance: body, space, text. With some of this work, at least, I thought that the form was wrong and that the ideas would have been better made as a short story or a piece of prose. (I could be run out of town for such blasphemy.)

Grant Cottrell's *Red Queen/White Queen* probably caused me the most grief because it started so hopefully and funnily and then seemed to sink with the weight of all it was trying to do which, paradoxically, wasn't all that much. Just a matter of wrong directions or private codes that haven't been teased out sufficiently. A work about gay identity, nomenclature, "the politics of difference", it appropriates the queerness of Lewis Carroll's glorious *Alice in Wonderland* to prove its thesis about naming and the power of words. A worthy project, indeed, but without an adequate focus it falls onto an obscure path. If the work had been presented in one piece, rather than broken up into quarters, it may have been possible to follow better its purpose and maybe find that focus.

Speaking of fruitiness, *Descartes' Dream*, written by Jeffrey Ould and devised by Ould with Ben Laden and the sole performer David Fussell, seemed to speak from a space of camp: an epiphany that "changed the world", a dream that young Descartes used to formulate his philosophical thought. All presented in high heroic mode, spilling into melodrama but deadly serious; too serious, and I wondered, again, what was the purpose of this work. Were there too many people involved? (There was also visual artwork projected and music selected). Did the idea run away in the face of all these people, the Descartes fan club, mucking around with it?

Dean Chan's *The Lover (In an ashtray)*, a close cousin to his earlier performance work with a different subtitle, seen in Sydney and Perth last year, is a lilting and studious appropriation out of the novel by Marguerite Duras. It plays skilfully with subject positions: gender, sexuality, race, colonised. It is convincing and well considered, and sets its mood cleverly. My only concern had to do with the smooth credits that are projected as surtitles and the way that Duras' primary text is credited. It isn't: she is given thanks only. You need to read the printed program to see that the text is adapted by Chan, but why go to the trouble of the classy credits and then not add such a detail? It is such a polished and intelligent performance that I wished I hadn't had to point that out.

The Two Valeries, by Josephine Wilson and Erin Hefferon, is an anarchic burst of energy, humour and language and, underneath it all, a serious intent about, again, the power of the word. It was a delight after the ponderous and measured performance styles in the rest of the program to see the program's only girls being irreverent, loud, and prepared to mock themselves. The script by Wilson is full of that prestidigitation seen in her other work: clever, rapid-fire, and properly funny. Hefferon and Wilson assault the performing space and posit questions like "why can some words cause wounds and not others?," animating Valerie Solanas and her *SCUM Manifesto* alongside Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto*. Far too complicated to paraphrase and, yet with a clear focus, a clarity that allows the audience to go with the work, with the act of communication; despite its multiple ideas and languages.

It is the name of the game that programs like this will be uneven—that occurs in every form. With a 20 minute performance it is easy to maintain equanimity and generosity and watch ideas in motion, the most fascinating inquiry. I hope for more of this in the future.

short cuts: directions in contemporary performance, *PICA, Perth, April 15 - 25*

Requiem for the working class

Suzanne Spunner sees new work from the Melbourne Workers Theatre and Playbox, and a performance event directed by Yoni Prior

Against the background of the Docks Strike, some recent theatre in Melbourne offered a timely exploration of the marginalisation, displacement and thwarted potential for transformation within what we used to call the working class.

The Melbourne Workers Theatre staged *Who's Afraid of the Working Class?* in the faded 19th century glory of The Trades Hall and notwithstanding its title, the only thing agit prop about it was the raucous celebration in the next door wet canteen as the MUA and its friends celebrated another legal stay of execution. Director Julian Meyrick developed the project over a year with 4 playwrights—Andrew Bovell, Patricia Cornelius, Melissa Reeves, Christos Tsiolkas and composer Irine Vela—each responding to the question: "Who are the working class?"

Who's Afraid of the Working Class? comes up with the answer that it's the working class that is most afraid of identifying itself in terms of class interest, preferring the aspirations and trappings of the global consumer fast running out of credit, the leitmotif of the piece being expressed through the wearing of business suits and Nike shoes, while others are left to sleep and die among discarded clothing in Brotherhood of St Laurence bins. Work as such is a foreign country to almost all the characters—apart from policing and prostitution, everyone else has lost their jobs or never had one.

Presented as a deftly intercut series of scenes, the individual works form one discontinuous narrative of pity and anger and occasional moments of wit and resilience. The show itself is very cool and 90s, sophisticated confronting theatre, full of rage and free of polemic to the point of being anarchic. It portrays Victoria under Kennett as a place without hope, and much false consciousness. The scene is set in the opening monologue by Christos Tsiolkas delivered by a young man who is contemptuous of his father's working class dreams and romantic belief in unionism, and fantasises being fucked by our leader himself, turned on by the power of a real man in a suit, a man who, as he says, doesn't give a fuck about us! I found this piece the most disturbing—if there can be no revolution without general copulation, then this shows there can be general copulation sans revolution.

Tsiolkas' other reveries on the suit presented a young Aboriginal man, played by Glenn Shea in an impressive performance, constantly being shown that wearing a suit wasn't going to fool anyone into treating him like an equal, despite Noel Pearson's great success in following his own father's advice about wearing a white shirt and a dark suit in all his dealings with whitefellers.

In *Dreamtown* Melissa Reeves gave us 2 Italian girls from Coburg, played by Maria Theodarakis and Daniela Farinacci, on a glorious shoplifting spree in the city. The first time we meet them in the dressing room of a flash store they are a pair of brilliant and sparkling outlaws performing transgression with relish. Later at the police station they start to unravel but hold on for the final moment in which they assert their selfhood despite the odds; their cry of 'I am something' is heart wrenching. I thought the power of their denouement was diluted by the set piece interlude with the crazy cop and the Nike trainers, as theatrical and funny as it was. There was so much going for these girls, so much vitality and imagination, I wished for a chance to see them acting on the larger canvas of a longer self contained piece. I wanted to meet their mothers, their brothers and their boyfriends and all the other chicks at school.

Who's Afraid of the Working Class? Viv Méhes

In Andrew Bovell's *Trash* the situation is so grim and unrelieved, and so much a textbook case of abuse and neglect, it gets caught inevitably in Dickensian pathos. It is only when the brother and sister play a grim game of where would you rather be—'on the street' comes out trumps given the reality of the shelter afforded by Mum entailing one or other of her abusive partners—that *Trash* achieves an intense and frightening particularity. Leaving them sleeping in the Brotherhood bin as vulnerable as babes in the wood, we cut to the mother, played by Eugenia Fragos, who recognises her part in the sorry tale but is incapable of taking any responsibility, and significantly the monologue moves imperceptibly from an active present tense to an increasingly passive past tense.

Patricia Cornelius' *Money* was more disparate in style and uneven in effect with echoes of Pinter in her first scene about a squabbling family in debt. Another seemed like Beckett married with social realism. Reeves' monologue *Leon* which directly addressed the effects of the new Workcover legislation was a tight and finely detailed piece realised by David Adamson with all the pain and damaged dignity of a man who can no longer do the job he made himself to be.

The shifting narratives are held in a sad threnody orchestrated on cello and bass by Vela; indeed a Requiem for the Working Class. The strength of the music is to unify the piece and give rhythm to 18 scenes and some 20 characters played so well by the 6 performers. Meyrick's direction is taut and well judged and encompasses the considerable invisible dramaturgy that has made a whole from all these parts. He finds the points of connection to insert the links, creating the discontinuous narrative thread which culminates in the tragic incineration of the brother and sister found locked in each other's arms. Ultimately the strength of the work as a whole depends on this connection, to dramatise the interconnectedness of the urban milieu—what is sensational rumour for some is the tragedy of someone else's children.

Tobsha Lerner's *Miracles* at Playbox is set in a run down supermarket in the inner urban area and focuses on Immaculata Santini, the ignored and despised illiterate Italian cashier to whom God speaks via her cash register. In it class politics are subsumed under the rubric of magic realism, miracles happen, people are healed by the touch of the cashier's deft and caring fingers, and the boss makes profits from it all.

Lerner's characters have a cartoon simplicity to them and the form is doggedly representational, lacking depth and resonance and devoid of subtext. As an audience you need to be moved by the miracles, but apart from the smoke and mirrors it all just seems very, very silly—cash registers and a tuna that talks is it. There is no reality to the supermarket, nor to the place, Flemington, nor to Italian culture or to any of the other ethnic subcultures it glances over. If this is magic realism, the realism is slight and ill-observed and the magic is gullible silliness.

The most egregious gratuitousness was the Aboriginal character Pearlie who's there to provide New Age Dreamtime homilies and it would seem to make the play seem like it was written now when Aboriginal experience is on the cultural agenda; otherwise you could have thought it was written decades ago.

The saving grace was the credible performance of Laura Lattuada, infused with so much passion and vulnerability that it was at odds with the cheap laughs and banal sweetness of the resolution. The play denied Immaculata the space to dance with any conviction.

The real question in my mind was how and why this play was selected from the 300 Australian works submitted annually to Playbox. Director Kate Cherry has shown she has the capacity to tackle work with more meat.

Meanwhile at Theatreworks, *If These Walls* presented a series of provocations and responses to the changing demographics questioning the social cost of gentrification and urban redevelopment as the suburb of St Kilda becomes prime real estate. *If These Walls* was a project which culminated in a weekend of performances, events and installations created by students from the Media and Arts Department at Deakin University under the artistic direction of Yoni Prior. It was rough, poor theatre working on the strength of conviction and intervention, community theatre that went out and theatricalised the forces that are changing that particular community.

The central focus of the weekend was a participatory board game, "Developer of The Century", a local Monopoly come Hypothetical where the participants were some of the actual players—town planners, heritage consultants and the Mayor of St Kilda himself. However in the event, as in reality, they are the bit players. The real players—the Developers and the State Planning Minister—declined to participate and so their parts were fictionalised. It was all about making utterly transparent the extent to which the community is locked out while a charade of democracy and consultation is played out. Indeed the booming, overbearing voice of The Planning Minister like an unseen god or the Wizard of Oz hiding behind the curtains, stole the show as he does in real life.

Miracles, *director Kate Cherry, writer Tobsha Lerner, Playbox, Melbourne, April 24 - May 16.* Who's Afraid of the Working Class?, *director Julian Meyrick, writers Andrew Bovell, Patricia Cornelius, Melissa Reeves, Christos Tsiolkas, Melbourne Workers Theatre, Melbourne, May 1 - 23.* If These Walls, *director Yoni Prior, Theatreworks, students from the Media and Arts Dept of Deakin University, May 9 - 10*

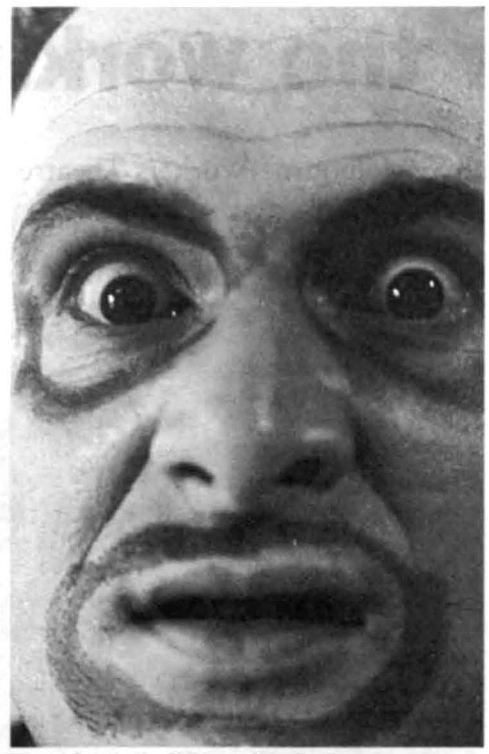
King for a day

Stacey Callaghan laughs with and worries at *Children of the Devil*

"Bummer of a birthmark, Hal." So goes the Gary Larson comic of a deer born with a target on its chest. In *Children of the Devil* the incredibly versatile Russell Dykstra hits the spot every time, although some of his targets are a little too easy. Drawing on the Bouffon style of theatre as taught by Phillipe Gaulier, the audience is presented with a tenuously connected array of recognisable characters including: Bevan, the car-obsessed 'bevan'; Larry, the American homophobic, homosexual, pyramid-selling Christian; Carmel, the tell-it-like-it-is talent agent; Mark, the director of Butoh and all things 'exotic'; and the traditional spitting and shitting Bouffon.

Born out of discrimination and vilification, the characters that inhabit the world of Bouffon show their disrespect for those with power through grotesque movements and blasphemous language in the hope that those they are parodying will drop dead at the sight of themselves so portrayed. To Dykstra's credit, Bevan and Larry are performed to new extremes with Bevan's interpretive dance sequence to Celine Dion and Larry's embracing of the strong, muscular arms of Jesus. I can't help but think, however, that I have seen these two stereotypes too many times before and are they really likely to be in this audience? Had Bevan been performed at the Speedway and Larry at a church meeting then the subversive political and cultural possibilities of these parodies may have been more potent.

Public ridicule is perhaps the greatest power bestowed on a performer. With Mark, Dykstra questions the relevance of the cultural appropriation of Japan's post-Holocaust Butoh movement and Suzuki training techniques to contemporary local performance. In his face-distorting, stomping impersonation of the witches' scene from *Macbeth* (reminiscent of a Suzuki and Butoh influenced Zen Zen Zo production that ran concurrently with *Children of the Devil*) it becomes obvious exactly who, in Bell's director's notes, "some of the people we would like to see fall down dead" are. In "Butoh Dreaming" the vicious parody continues, broadening its criticism to include the misappropriation of Australia's Indigenous culture by some individuals and companies in the hope of being funded. We see Mark, the tortured, slightly European director assure his disciples: "Don't worry, I know all about Butoh. I did a two week workshop with a Butoh master, Cheryl, when I was overseas...We will combine this with the sacred dancing of the Aboriginal people. I have watched a video with all of the dancing." With the cast suspiciously absent, Mark is left to puppeteer his rainbow serpent sock and perform his version of traditional Butoh Aboriginal dancing.



Russel Dykstra in *Children of the Devil*

The structured improvisational aspect of *Children of the Devil* allows Dykstra, within the parameters defined by sound and lighting cues, to listen to his audience and take us with him to places we may not want to visit. Like the hideous Carmel who prods and pokes the 'fatty-fat-fat" girl at her audition, Dykstra offers us hypocrisy in a land of misrule where he is king for a day.

Children of the Devil, *performed by Russel Dykstra, directed by David Bell, Metro Arts Theatre, April 24, 1998*

Stacey Callaghan is a Brisbane-based physical theatre performer, writer and director. Her self-devised solo performance, still raw, *won the 1996 Philip Parsons Prize and has recently been published in the Australian Drama Studies Journal.*

On the wings of words

Christine Evans talks about the evolution of *My Vicious Angel* soon to be premiered by Vitalstatistix in Adelaide

Christine Evans is about to join a small but significant list of Australian playwrights who write with a peculiarly poetic intensity—including Raimondo Cortese, Catherine Zimdahl (author of the triumphant *Clark in Sarajevo*), Jennifer Compton, Beatrix Christian, Christos Tsioklas (to my mind the most impressive contributor to the Melbourne Workers' Theatre's innovative and bracing *Who's Afraid of the Working Class* (see page 37). Christine is a Sydney-based writer (formerly from Perth), saxophonist (with Brassov), and composer and musical director for many theatre works. For on and off over 18 months I've been working as dramaturg for Christine on her first major work, *My Vicious Angel*. Towards the end of 1997, Adelaide's Vitalstatistix picked up the play and will produce it this July.

I selected an early draft of Christine's play for a one-day dramaturgy workshop for playwrights and dramaturgs I was running for Playworks in 1996. Like any good play, however early its gestation, however innocent its sense of drama, *My Vicious Angel* seized me with the intensity, musicality and economy of its language, the power of its scenario and the potential of its theatricality. It was exactly what I was looking for—the play was already in there, waiting to be drawn out.

When did it start and what was it? "The very first incarnation was as my honours thesis at UTS (University of Technology Sydney) in Communications when I'd just moved to Sydney. At that stage it was a much more poetic, ungrounded, sound-based piece and when I finished it I didn't really know if it could go anywhere else."

Why this play? "There was a seed of story that fell in from the real world, of Annie Davey, who is a twin, falling from the trapeze and breaking her spine. I kind of know these people from my association with The Party Line and long ago with circus. What fascinated me was that, as soon as she could, she got back up on the trapeze. That she was a twin and the toughness of circus people in getting back to work after injury caught my imagination. From then on it had nothing to do with Annie's story. It belonged in a psychic landscape and it was a poetic exploration of elemental imagery, and not grounded in an actual narrative in the way it is now. It was about the relationship between two people, one of them no longer alive—a dead twin.

"I enrolled in a Masters in Writing at Western Sydney and continued work on the script. I've always worked in bands and in theatre, so I was always thinking about writing for production. I wanted to do something I could actually get up on its feet, as a radio work. Partly it was practical, it was something I thought I could do with some musician friends and stage as a sound piece, but the thought of staging it as theatre piece was too much. ABC radio liked it and commissioned me to complete it."

When did you decide to give it a physical life? "Some friends encouraged me to submit it to Playworks for development, after a lot of prodding. And you invited me to have it as part of your dramaturgy workshop. I'd been thinking about acoustic space, the play as an echo chamber, a haunting, with relationships played out through the sense of echo, with consonance of voices and voices splitting apart, not a physical space."

After the workshop, we both thought this is worth pursuing as a stage play. And so did Playworks. "The first problem was getting started again and how to ground the work, to give it a material presence, how to ground the language of air, gravity, fire, water into something tangible, that was visualisable. And to get a narrative moving through it. But it was very interesting not to go for the quick and brutal solution of imposing a narrative over this quite poetic and interior piece. Instead it was a matter of clarifying the images and the connections and allowing a narrative to emerge."

Did the language change? "Enormously. In the workshop we noticed that Pearl (the trapeze artist) didn't have the same force of language, of metaphor, as her dead twin sister nor was she particularly grounded in contemporary life. So it was a matter of finding the language they share as twins, the way their language interlocks as a machine and propels them, and where they fall apart as child (the 'dead' twin who is always eleven years old) and adult. And also, the way the other characters (Mum, Dad, Oscar the parrot) have a life through the twins who act them out. That's something from the original piece that has transformed but still suggests that this a liminal space, that there is a lot of moving in and out between a psychic space and actual events."

The work is not naturalistic, but it does set up some naturalistic expectations and these have to be met, even if impressionistically. "Having to look for the prosaic background to Pearl's life (job, travel, lovers), for back stories, how the twins behaved as children, these also influenced the language. This was really interesting for me. I learnt that none of it had to go into the play in its literal form but it had to be done—it leaves traces of narrative and naturalism."

The play is a coherent narrative, of emotional and physical recovery and, possibly, the completion of a process of grieving over the dead twin. "One of the central images of the play is of the twins being two halves of a shell which must then break open—it's the way their language operates, it's the way the narrative works, half of it is linear, half non-linear and interior, the way psychic time is experienced."

What drives the musicality of the play? "Because I'm a musician, compositional strategies are available to me as a writer. Again, it's the echo chamber—what twins can be, is one the source, the other the echo. Pearl is the source and Merle, the dead sister, is in a way the echo." *But Merle sends signals in turn.* "Yes, there's the question of distortion. There's also then the fundamental ambivalence about who is the source and who is the echo." *And what the dead twin's purpose is in haunting her injured sister.*

What's distinctive about this experience of writing? "I've written plays to order and in collaboration, but I've never spent so much time on one thing in my life as this. It's been my own idea right from the start, and it's been really challenging because it's not written to a prearranged form, so I've had to find the form as I go, with your prompting."

On the page, *My Vicious Angel* is a chilling exorcism (who is exorcising who?), exuberantly poetic (accessible, yet generating an intense interior world) and it has developed a rich physicality—one body recovering from a broken back and an injured soul, the other a demonic faery with a desperate and destructive energy. The through-written music of accordion and saxophone evoking the merchant seaman father's beloved sad songs of the sea and of Mum and Dad tangoing tip-toe in the kitchen (so as not to wake the twins) will heighten the world of this already magical play into the heaven of music theatre, though with barely a song but the music of language. KG

Christine Evans, My Vicious Angel, *director Rosalbe Clemente, designer Imogen Thomas, lighting Geoffrey Cobham, performers Caroline Mignone and Lucia Mastrantone, Vitalstatistix National Women's Theatre, July 8 - August 1*

Big talk in small rooms

Virginia Baxter follows two performer-writers on their way to a performance

Deborah Leiser and Regina Heilmann started talking in Sidetrack's green room in 1995 after they'd both created works for Contemporary Performance Week. Something about the connection between their 2 pieces struck them—Deborah's was about the placement of the Jewish woman in religious rituals and Regina's a personal journey into her cultural past dedicated to her German aunt. That same year the 2 met in a studio for a Playworks workshop with visiting writer-director Deborah Levy. In *The B File* they slipped into German and Jew like dresses for a moveable stage entity named Beatrice. The process threw up some touchy issues and gave them a sense of working together.

They talked in theatres about creating a work that could explore the 2 sides of the coin of their shared history—both are around the same age and both first generation Australians of European parents. At first they thought it might be like some kind of wild, crazed dance. Then the idea of walking in someone else's shoes emerged and a title which they tossed out as too familiar along with the theatrically clichéd pile of shoes they saw themselves falling into. And as their friendship developed so did an unnerving sense of schism.

They talked a lot at tables. Forgiveness came up a lot. How to talk to each other, look each other in the eye. They read a lot—histories of the war, Susan Griffin. They watched a video in which children of survivors shared experiences with children of Nazi perpetrators like Martin Borman. They talked about the meaning of reconciliation and just how to arrive at what would be said in the performance.

In a kitchen they swapped recipes for Kartoffelpuffer and potato latkes and imagined making something together while they interrogated each other. Improvising one day, they discovered how performing a simple act like preparing food allowed more complex ideas to surface. And being performers with a physical bent, they moved around and under the table, between the boards. They started to see the table as carrying a history which sliced into the acts of the now.

They moved from room to room, from the personal to the political, the physical to the philosophical. And always with the questions. What would happen now if a neo-Nazi movement rose up in Newtown and Deborah knocked on Regina's door asking for shelter? How do you avoid getting caught up in a history so rich in dramatic potential? They decided they could talk and talk about these ideas forever. They had to get out of this room.

Earlier this year, they worked with choreographer Rosalind Crisp at her studio and now director Nikki Heywood is leading them via Min Tanaka and Body Weather back into the same intimate space of sense memory. In response to a question from dramaturg Anne-Marie Dalziel, they parody their potted history and surprise themselves with the emotion of it, the way that pain lodges in the psyche. They decide they want to push it this far in the performance.

Leonie Evans and Clarissa Arndt are young designers from Wollongong. When they arrive on the scene, there is already an imagined table, a wall and a room with no air. They work on the kind of table, whitewash the wall, give it moveable compartments and begin to conjure the claustrophobic space. Lighting designer Richard Montgomery senses room for lots of shadow. In another place, Elena Kats-Chernin adapts her music to the shape of this performance. So the small room of the theatre with its music and light takes shape, becomes a tangible element in the psychology of the performance. As Regina and Deborah remove and return pieces to their compartments in the wall, hairline cracks appear, something is dislodged and the air eases in.

Regina Heilman, Deborah Leiser, A Room With No Air, *Belvoir Street Downstairs, Sydney, July 3 - 19*

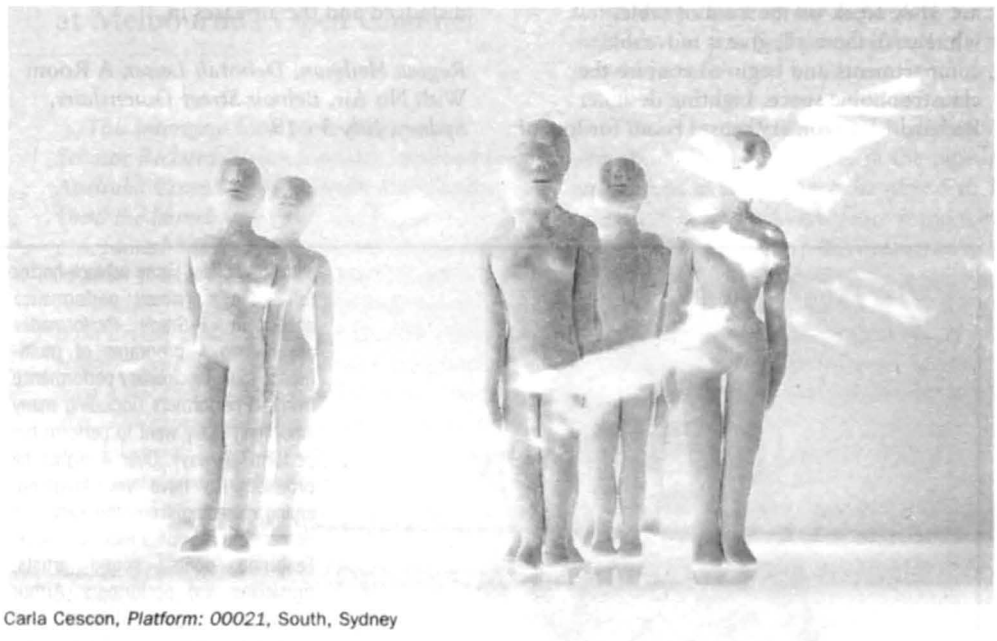
Sniffing out Snuffers

Snuff Puppets are auditioning performers for works to be performed locally, nationally and internationally. "Strong, physical puppeteers/performers" are sought for this "giant puppet/theatre company with a reputation for making anarchic, challenging and dynamic work." Phone artistic director Andy Freer on 03 9689 6317. Your time has come.

Jeff Stein offers some schlock-horror to Sydney's refined performance scene in *B-Grade Performance* assembling 4 programs of multi-media, multi-disciplinary performance from 30 performers (including many who don't really want to perform but perform anyway). Over 4 nights he promises to have you laughing, crying, bleeding from the ears and demanding your money back. Featuring poets, sound artists, musicians and performers: Arthur Young and Eugene Gluhareff, Jeff Stein and Torben Tilly, A. J. Rochester, Elf Tranzporter, Vicky Spence, Max Lyandvert and Veron Grigorov, Naim and the Fundamentalist All-stars, Monkey Burns, Bruce Lacy, Gary Butler, Lucas Abela, Oren Ambarchi, Michael Strum, members of Phlegm and Mu/Mesons, Peeled Hearts Paste, Cathy Flower, Bum Puppets, Annabel Lines, Flica and Fuka, Hydrogen Jukebox, film by Bryn Tilly and Joe Hill. If you have 5 bucks to throw down the toilet and bad taste is your thing, try The Performance Space over the next three Sunday nights, June 7, 14 and 21 for "perhaps the biggest collection of talentless no-hopers ever assembled live on a stage" (sic). Bookings 93195091

Filling in the spaces

Alex Gawronski looks at issues behind the dwindling of artist-run spaces in Sydney and Melbourne



Carla Cescon, *Platform: 00021*, South, Sydney

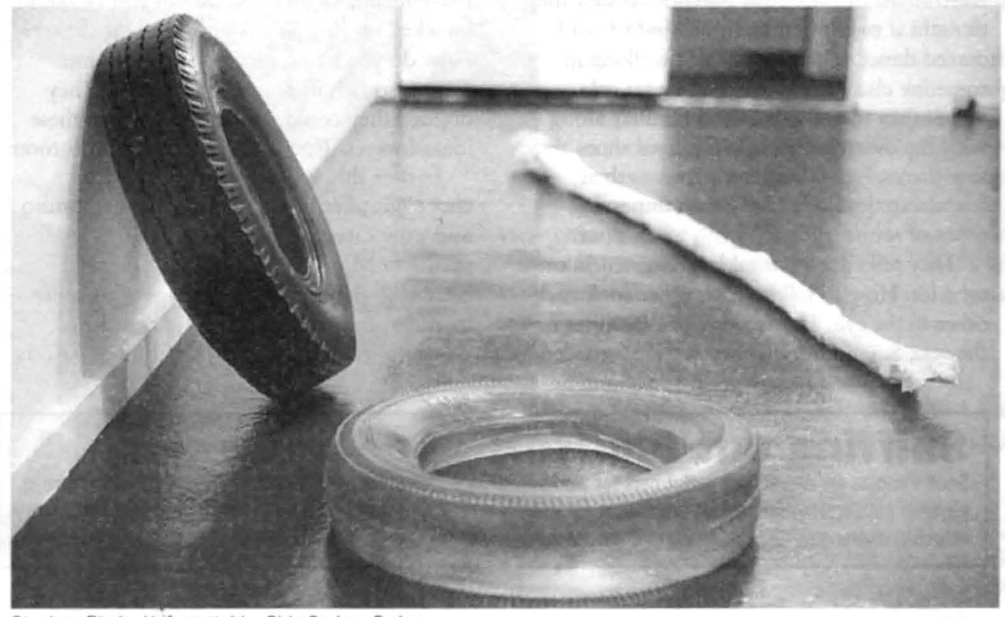
As the spectre of the 2000 Olympics looms large in the economic (and architectural) life of Sydney, so the city's real estate has become, at least for property holders, the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. All over the city and particularly in those increasingly gentrified inner city suburbs, the traditional home of the 'artist run initiative', real estate is being renovated. In many cases, long time tenants are being forced to look (somewhere) for cheaper housing. For those artists directly involved in running exhibition spaces, this current trend is of manifold concern. It means that spaces, particularly those semi-derelict warehouses previously available at negotiable rental, have soared in value and beyond reach of those keen to either establish new spaces or to maintain current ones. Beyond such prosaic issues lies evidence of a deeply rooted attitude to contemporary art at social and governmental levels. In certain 'official' contexts contemporary art is regarded with suspicion as a type of luxurious, irresponsible hobby, largely because of its apparent disregard for profit. In Sydney and Melbourne, 'facadism' has achieved such an elevated status that external appearances must appear to echo a profitable dream, a dream which is uncannily reminiscent of high capitalism's glory days. Having other agendas, artist run spaces must either adapt or fold; lately, with the closure and 'down-sizing'(!) of many respected artist run galleries it's mostly the latter.

The case for adaptation raises other questions concerning expectations. Given the limited resources currently available to artist run initiatives, how could such organisations possibly expect to compete with multi-nationally sponsored refurbishments? The official response to such a gripe has often been couched in terms of an inability or unwillingness on the part of trenchant radicals (artists) to chase the corporate carrot. However, chasing that carrot could be said to be counter productive—the corporation carries with it its own aesthetic, its own expectations, its own criteria of 'success'. Of course, benevolent assistance is not out of the question, yet its instances are too few in a radically competitive economic environment.

Beyond practical attempts to secure funding lies a language that is expressed in terms of 'profit margins', where failure is a 'mis-calculation'. What such language excludes is another founded either in passion or experiment and the lessening of stringent controls. A questioning of modes of control, creatively speaking, is not necessarily a cry for 'slackness': professionalism is a quality expected and strongly admired among artists also. A combination of experiment and research rather, enables artistic enterprises to intervene, to extend possibilities inherent in the public domain. The physical structures which support official jargon serve to maintain a veneer of constant productivity, achievement and 'progress'. That is why a development such as the recently renovated Grace Brothers buildings on Broadway externally echoes a savvy (though not inelegant) nostalgia, whilst its interior is strictly futuristic, all silver paint and sharp aerodynamic decor, accessible but ultimately rather 'cheap'. Conversely, it is also why the Blackwattle Gallery and artists' studio complex in Glebe, housed in turn-of-the-century industrial waterfront buildings, is threatened with extinction. Space in Sydney and Melbourne today means private space, which maintains outwardly at least some of the communal, even slightly 'bohemian' trappings that are oh-so-chic, oh-so-'modern'.

With these issues in mind, it is not surprising then that the oft quoted nomadism of contemporary art practice has come to de-site many of its primary haunts. A pertinent example of enforced nomadism is Sydney's successful Side On gallery which has been *sans* gallery now for nearly 5 months, a significant time frame in the life of many artist run galleries. Similarly while it is on hold, regardless of the efforts of its directors to locate a new site and despite their not inconsiderable individual professional profiles, the gallery has become, more or less, invisible. This stopping and starting taxes the efforts of all involved, the directors as well as the gallery's main supporters and dependants, the artists.

The natural attrition of artists' spaces could be measured in statistics, yet it seems unnecessary to do so for the general word amongst contemporaries is disappointment at the precariousness of locating affordable, publicly accessible exhibition space. Similarly it is also a great disappointment to be informed by a gallery that a show planned



Stephen Birch, *Unforgettable*, Side-On Inc, Sydney

months in advance cannot take place because the real estate has been sold. This has occurred even in the case of such high profile venues as Pendulum, and earlier with Selenium which was razed to the ground, uprooting an established collective of professional artists and erasing a significant exhibition site to make way for what else, but more apartments. In these cases it seems as though the artists involved are without rights, not even those of squatters, and that the hard work and voluntary dedication to the visual presentation of ideas is, in the 'real world' of high finance, entirely negligible.

Sydney itself is geared to become a world 'showcase' city by the year 2000, and as the term suggests, the city will be all show. Recently Melbourne has seen an even greater exponential degree of real estate development, as Kennett's dreams of founding his own Rome become glaringly apparent. In that city also, artist run spaces are endangered despite comparatively lower rental prices. Grey Area is one of those initiatives soon to bite the dust as its members pack up their studios and eventually vacate their modest shop premises. Grey Area significantly contributed to Melbourne's cultural development through its exhibition program and performance evenings, providing much needed space for emerging and mid-career artists to realise their ideas. Another venue, Talk Initiative, represents an additional problem typical of artist-run venues, under-supply. Talk's program for the year has been full since the end of 1997, indicating a substantial level of interest in contemporary practices, yet representing also the frustrated need for gallery space.

Thankfully, artist run spaces continue to emerge— like South and Herringbone in Sydney–while older spaces like Particle have reopened in alternative locations. This is testimony more to the determination, commitment and faith of artists and gallery supporters than an informed cultural, social consciousness regarding contemporary art practice in Australia today. Of course, there are alternatives to exhibiting in galleries and artists continue to utilise and exploit these. However, as glittering facades continue to rise, so the epithet that the most vital works are produced in the most adverse conditions strikes those in the know as extreme political cynicism, particularly once the expediency of choice has been abolished. It is obvious to practising artists, especially through such things as grant stipulations, that a proven exhibition history is necessary to achieve professional respect and to further creative opportunities. Artist run initiatives supply a vital link in the development of careers. More broadly, they mediate difference as a formative experience of contemporary culture and as a necessary means of renewing that culture. That artists still rise to the challenge is to be greatly admired but should not be taken for granted.

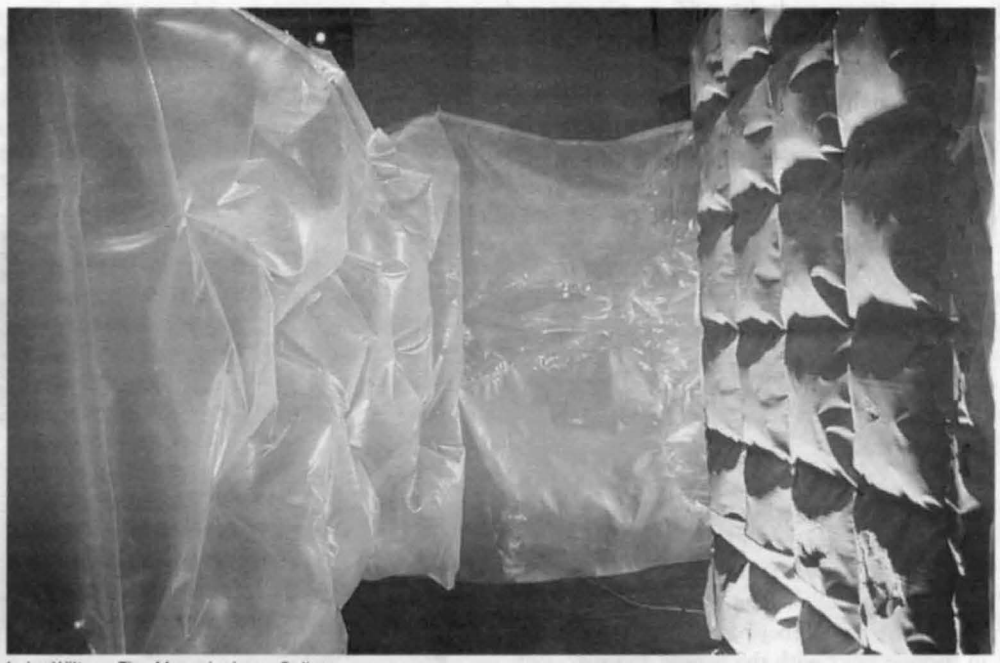
What to do with the winnings?

Andrew Gaynor evaluates emerging artists' shows in Perth

The brief here is simple. Money was devolved from the Australia Council to the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA) to direct to special projects by 'emerging artists.' Ah, 'emerging artists.' Such a focussed definition, like 'community', 'regional', 'middle career', 'senior practitioner', 'minority', 'marginal.' Oh, and let's not forget that increasingly patronising term, 'yoof.' 'Emerging artist' is a pretty flimsy concept and can be applied to a huge range of personages from the recently graduated 21 year old to the fully fledged practitioner who went back to study and is soon to emerge with that holy grail—a Masters.

Faced with such amorphous boundaries, PICA passed the money to 3 organisations—*Gibber* magazine (a publication that gives voice to the kids on the streets, in detention centres and the like, which used its funds to organise an exhibition of graffiti 'pieces' at PICA), and to 2 artist-run collectives, the Verge and jacksue Galleries. These gallery/studios have well deserved reputations in Perth as the most proactive artist collectives currently operating. However, there is discord as to whether the devolved funds used to create these special projects resulted in the artists producing anything particularly memorable.

Transparency at the Verge attempted to critique the funding game itself. In Western Australia, The Lotteries Commission is a major supplier of devolved cash for artists. The waxing and waning sales of scratch-and-win tickets directly affects the amount of money available for subsidies. The Verge artists decided to play an active role in this fluctuation by using their (enormous) $2500 grant to purchase scratchies, which in turn realised an (outrageously enormous) $600. The exfoliated tickets (plus debris) were displayed vitrine-style alongside a wall of virginal tickets that audience punters were themselves allowed to scratch. On the other wall, a text played wittily with the Three Little Pigs and the complicit pork-barrelling for funding. But it seems the artists of the Verge got scared by their own naughty concept and were swept up by the adrenalin of the taboo rather than stepping back and considering the 'art'. The revelation that the wall of tickets was legally void gave little to the punter beyond an already familiar frustration. Similarly, as the application for grants is itself a form of calculated risk, it is sad that the Verge did not at least investigate a punter's 'system' in the purchasing of the tickets. Some tighter engagement between practice and commentary might have had a far stronger impact. As it was, it fell into the 'artist-throws-a-brown-eye-to-the-world-as-earth-shattering-comment' level of insight and little else.



Luke Wilton, *The Maze*, jacksue Gallery

On the other side of town, the artists of jacksue claimed that *The maze* would be a "floating headspace (that would) transcend its own structure". Put bluntly, it didn't. Whilst the idea was exciting, it seemed (dis)organisation got seriously in the way. After all, collectives are hydras with each head either in collusion or at odds with the other. The cavernous (11 x 17 x 7 metre) gallery was filled with an inflated clear plastic structure that sought to mimic the labyrinthine passages of the mind. This was one maze that would pose no problem to a bovine-brained Minotaur. Ultimately, the complexity of the idea was let down by the clumsy craft of the practitioners. Generators broke down, floaties leaked, lighting was amateur and the surprise at encountering a concrete section or a popcorn dispenser was no surprise at all. Repeated viewings definitely didn't add to the experience.

Both collectives include artists with a wealth of experience exhibiting, organising, participating and *thinking* (and here, the author must declare his interest, having been volunteer manager of jacksue Gallery until May 1997) but these two projects do not really give a sense of major benefit through injection of cash. jacksue has previously created dazzling events and projects using the artists' own finances that have been far superior to *The maze*. Similarly, the Verge has also provoked and excited, sometimes funded, sometimes not.

It is always easy to sit on the fence after the fact and bemoan "I would have done it *this* way", but it does seem that an opportunity has been missed. The bottom line is that the notion of funding 'emerging artists' is pretty arbitrary. Agreed. The actual money was minimal. Agreed. The artists raised themselves to the challenge. Also agreed. The artists transcended the budgetary limits through strategy, planning, calculation, intelligence and craft to create truly memorable experiences. Not proven. And as to whether the funding of this shapeless mass known as 'emerging artists' is any more astute than funding 'community' or 'marginalised' or 'yoof' or whatever, the jury is definitely still out.

Transparency, *the Verge gallery;* The maze, *jacksue gallery, April 4-May 17.*

Andrew Gaynor was an emerging artist who returned to full-time study in 1995.

Site specific adventure or exhumation?

David Cross at *The Bridge: Construction In Process VI*

Handing the asylum over to the lunatics. This is how *Construction in Process* chairman Richard Thomas described the 6th international staging of perhaps the world's largest process-based art event. Subtitled *The Bridge*, the festival of ephemeral site-marking inundated Melbourne and its surrounds for six weeks in April and May. Bringing together over 60 international and 50 Australian artists, *The Bridge* sought to "unify artists, create a sense of a global community, and debunk the pretentiousness of the art world." The blockbuster with a conscience permeated the event's philosophical raison d'être with slogans like "festival not spectacle" and "passage over difficult terrain" clearly marking its purported outsider status. In line with the freedom of artistic expression message, artists were encouraged to respond to everything and anything from derelict tanneries to positioning naked bodies in bathtubs with sheep for company.

The Bridge resurfaced the anything goes 70s with a whiff of utopia, avantgardism, and plenty of sticks and stones. It was a veritable love-in for Earthworks artists with a nod to more politically engaged site specific practices. The retro feel was seemingly a calculated backlash against the ego-driven commodity fetishism of the 90s art world and represented a nostalgic yearning for a modernist collectivism. Unfortunately, the counter cultural objectives were matched by an organisational structure that let it all hang out. The publicity machinery was weak at best and poor site-marking—always a problem with site specific shows—meant that the street directory commanded as much attention as the work itself. There were also some rumblings from the artists themselves about lack of resources to construct their art. How this quasi-anarchist event managed to attract the sponsorship of the Kennett government is anyone's guess. There must be an earthier, heal-the-world side to our Premier. Either that or he was promised more monuments and touristy spectacles than were realised.

With cultural exchange as a basic tenet of *The Bridge*, a number of projects succeeded in forging links with the people and places of Melbourne. English artist Ann Noel's process based work *Event in Progress* took place at Highpoint Shopping Centre, the largest shopping mall in the western suburbs. Here she sought to engage with a traditionally non-art audience by entering into a contract of giving with passing shoppers. She offered a signed art work to passers by in return for a personal item they were carrying with them. The lipsticks, combs, and key rings she received were then exhibited in a display area usually reserved for carpet cleaning demonstrations. While many of the objects were prosaic some had real significance. One woman returned the next day to present Noel with mementoes of a niece who had died. Others returned just to talk and introduce other family members to the artist. Noel in her own way made intimate connections with people and introduced art into an environment where most artists fear to tread.

Agnes Denes Kiron Robinson

Agnes Denes' tree reclamation project was likewise geared towards a productive exchange. She planted 3500 native trees at the City West Water treatment plant in a pattern that reflected the energy and flow of water in the large tanks on site. While the work emphasised a greater environmental sensitivity than many 70s Earthworks its significance lay also in the collaboration between industry and artist. Denes provided an example for meaningful dialogue between art and government enterprise that was both functional and innovative.

Fortunately most of the work in *The Bridge* avoided one of the key pitfalls of international art events of this kind. That is, the phenomena of artists arriving in a foreign city and making site specific work that appears to be site neutral. This problem has arisen incrementally with the internationalising of art practice that has seen big name artists brought out to unknown lands to respond to our culture. Often their purported lip service to site specificity masks a greater colonialism that reeks more of the flexing of signature style. Although there was some assertive site-marking including Tom Bills' large scale concrete forms and Avraham Eilat's homage to Duchamp and Brancusi, *To the Artists of the Twentieth Century*, these works were in the minority. Even in the case of Eilat's massive endless column of toilets, a wry humour saved the sculpture from self indulgent posturing.

Humour permeated the work of a number of other artists who in a surreal way intervened in the built environment. Binghui Huangfu covered the well known Burke and Wills monument in Swanston Walk in silver foil giving the old explorers an updated lease on life. Looking like enormous chocolate figures, Burke and Wills seemed to claw back some of their presence lost to the neon-infested metropolis that has gradually sprung up around them. A similar candy theme was evident in Wastijn and Deschuymer's giant *Smarties* that sat in a park under the Westgate Bridge but was clearly visible from it. Bemused drivers struggled to keep their eyes on the road as they got a 15 second art fix.

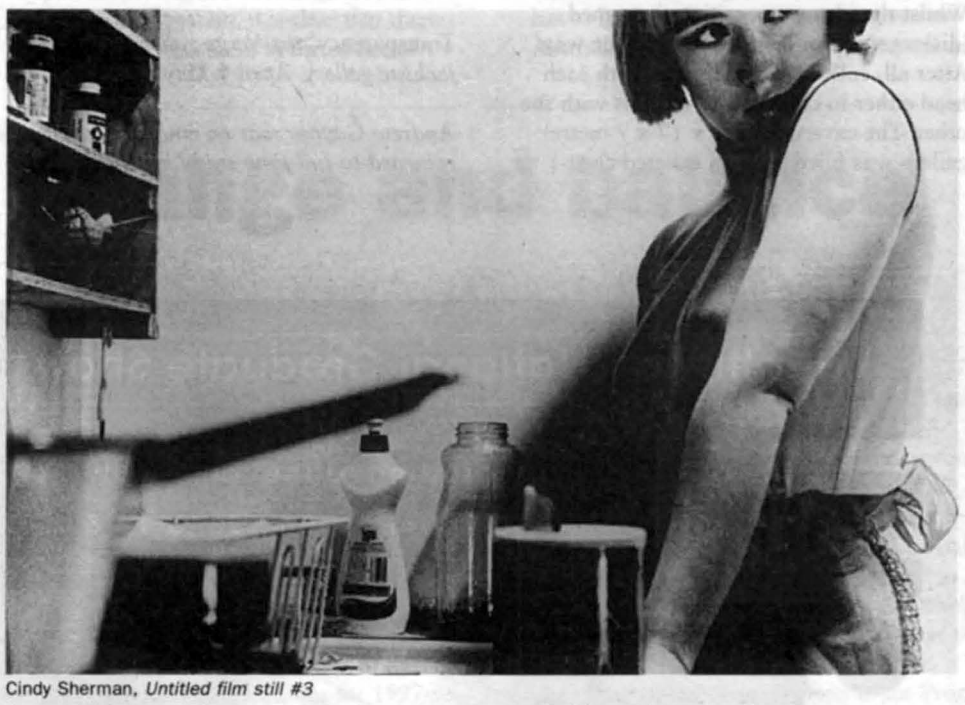
One of the major drawbacks of the exhibition's focus on ephemerality was that many of the works didn't go the distance. Aside from the fact that by week three a number of the works had lost their signage, they had also dematerialised to almost nothing. Stomping around with my map it became very difficult to figure out what was the art and what was urban detritus. While this was interesting in its own right, it became an exercise in forensic art investigation. Greg Plesznski had a sign but little else and many of the untitled structures on the Maribyrnong River had disintegrated to nothing. What appeared to be Kim Power's sculpture of beer cans and lace may have been discarded from a passing freighter.

The Bridge's scorecard of entropy 2 rationality 1 highlighted the significance of a transitory aesthetic responsive to cyclical change. While this was primarily an environmental focus highlighting the role of natural elements in casting and recasting the organic environment, there were some other interesting political implications.

Scottish artist Alistair McLennan's 12 hour performance at the abandoned Newport Substation focused on the sectarian troubles in Northern Ireland. Coming as it did on the eve of the peace talks, McLennan's performance was a salient testimony to the often tortuous 30 years of violence. The artist, wearing the terrorist's uniform of black clothing and balaclava, sat in a chair motionless in front of a large banquet table. The table was decorated with balloons and streamers as if a celebration was taking place yet these were juxtaposed against a number of pigs' heads and rotting fish that lay smattered from one end to the other. A sense of decay and loss was heightened by a continuous, deadpan reading of names through a PA system. It was readily apparent that these unknown people were the victims of Britain's civil war. The twin themes of celebration and death were intertwined to form a gothic commentary about how violence has infiltrated all aspects of people's day to day lives in this contested English province.

The one event that best summed up *The Bridge* was *Pile On*, a whole 5 storey building of installations in the city. *Pile On* was a loosely curated laissez-faire exhibition that saw art crammed into just about every nook and cranny with established artists exhibiting alongside younger up and comers. At its best the exhibition was dynamic and fresh with mazes, interactive environments, and an enormous vulva coaxing you into a state of rebirth. A real sense of collaboration and experimentation marked many of these works that lacked polish but had spark in abundance. At its worst however we got crass grunge angst that was poorly made and thoughtlessly conceived. This lower than lo-fi end of the market was the logical result of a non-hierarchical selection system that sacrificed quality for inclusion.

Like all blockbusters even those with the best intentions, *The Bridge* was a patchy affair. For every inspired project there was a backfire and usually an unmarked one. One senses that the real worth of this project was not so much in the works themselves but in the dialogues fostered by the community of artists present. With a significant Indigenous rights component in both the exhibition and symposium and a genuine commitment to discussion, the event was more successful as a conference about political empowerment through art. In terms of being a comment about the current status of site specific practice however it was too rooted in nostalgia and flowery organicism. Unfortunately, *The Bridge* dug the 70s just a little too much at the expense of cultural issues that surround the here and the now.



Cindy Sherman, *Untitled film still #3*

Since 1975 in around 300 works Cindy Sherman has photographed herself in a range of costumes and contexts mocking our projected desires and revelling in some of the unacceptable facets of femininity. *Read my Lips* showcases the work of Cindy Sherman along with Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger in over 70 photographs, prints and installations from the late 70s to the present. The exhibition includes Jenny Holzer's controversial installation *Lustmord* recently seen at the Adelaide Festival of Arts Barbara Kruger will create a site-specific work for one wall of the show, and a new Cindy Sherman film will have its Australian premiere. *Read my lips*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra June 6-August 9

The meaning of space

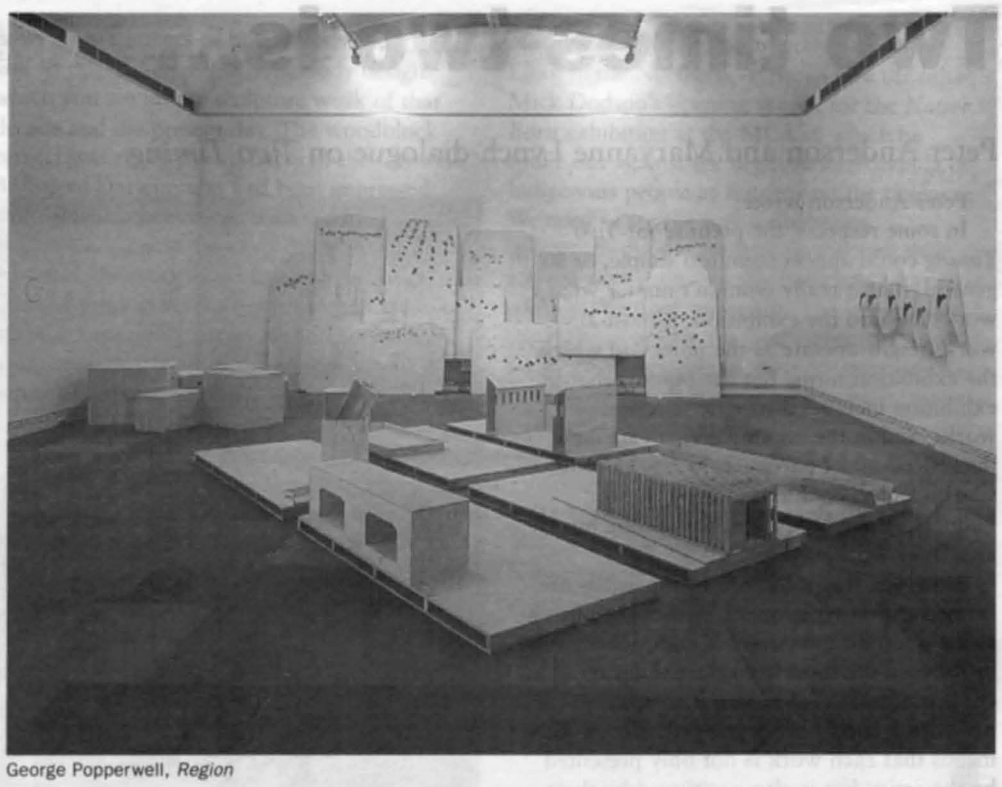
John Barbour welcomes the provocation of *pure*

Continuing at the Art Gallery of South Australia through until June 1998 is *pure*, a rather remarkable exhibition. Comprising works selected from the gallery's permanent collection, *pure* is remarkable both because it achieves a great deal through extremely modest means and because it stands as something of an exemplar in the way it represents works of art that do not easily subscribe either to symbolic narrative or literal description.

Curated by Christopher Chapman of the AGSA in conjunction with Adelaide artist George Popperwell, the exhibition brings together a diverse bunch of works by just 11 artists—national and international. Some are well known, others not; they include Popperwell himself, Dennis Oppenheim, Bea Maddock, Peter Tyndall, Shaun Kirby, Joseph Kosuth, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Susan Hiller, Joseph Beuys, Simone Mangos and Sigmar Polke.

Figuring large within the exhibition is Popperwell's work *Region*, and it is central to the exhibition both physically and metaphorically. 'Central' in that the exhibition apparently grew out of conversations between Popperwell and Chapman over negotiations by the gallery to purchase *Region* itself, and because these conversations led to the idea of using selected works from the gallery's permanent collection to establish a loosely discursive theme based on association and resonance rather than overt 'meaning'.

Given the impetus for the exhibition, it is worth reflecting a little on *Region*. Massive in scale and complex in conception, the piece occupies roughly half of one of three rooms devoted to the exhibition as a whole. It predominantly comprises forms made out of construction ply—a grouping of six architectural or architectonic elements on pallets spread across the ground; a large grouping of flat wooden planes with curved tops made out of the same material and 'filled' with large holes (very obviously like those made by machine gun fire); a group of six smaller, cuboid structures, each with two holes (one on top, the other in the side)—all facing in towards each other as if conversing; a number of tracing paper 'cones', each with a black triangle; and a circular disc of ply on another wall with text asking the question "who's afraid of red, yellow, blue, green, pink, violet." The key (naturally) is the text, which operates as a kind of rebus, with the words (it eventuates) referring to the significance of the colour of the triangular patches worn by gypsies, Jews, homosexuals and other 'undesirables' during the Nazi years.



George Popperwell, *Region*

The work is unashamedly hermetic and deeply troubling—despite, rather than because, of this hermeticism. It is no surprise to discover, through the clue offered by the text on the wall, that its primary references are to the Holocaust, with each level of its encoding being structured around particular parts of several of the death camps (particularly Auschwitz, Mauthausen, and Dachau)—the height of the holes in the wall pieces for example referring to the height of bullet holes, the architectural structures on the pallets to various disembarkation ramps, watchtowers etc, the two holes in the cubes to the gas chambers, in which one hole was used to introduce the deadly gas Zyklon B, the other to spy on the prisoners as they were being gassed.

But *Region* is not what makes the exhibition *pure* interesting. Rather this is achieved through the extrapolation or mapping of the concerns of this work onto those of the other artists in the show. The result is rare and epiphanic—at once enriching and saddening. Let me indicate why this is so.

First: *pure* is wilful, in that it does knowing violence to the works it draws into its net—precisely because it employs them in ways other than intended by their authors. Peter Tyndall's *dust painting* is a case in point. Tyndall's concept of the "detail" is here perhaps less evident than the obvious reference to Duchamp's *Dust Breeding*, through which the viewer's reading is diverted away from the predictable 'meaning'.

Second: *pure* puts me in mind of the "don't mention the war" episode in *Fawlty Towers*, in which John Cleese, entertaining a party of German tourists in the hotel restaurant, despite his best intentions, can't stop himself from referring in the grossest possible way to his German guests as war criminals. The 'war', as an emblem of moral distortion, crops up everywhere in this exhibition, indirectly in the struggle against gender and sexual stereotyping referenced in the works on display by Susan Hiller and Felix Gonzalez-Torres; in the model of the death camp which provides the armature for *Region*; in Simone Mangos' photograph of German kapos leaning out the door of a wooden-sided goods train (one of 'those' trains?), placed on top of an old, narrow window; in Beuys' felt rolls...in Sigmar Polke's silkscreened print of mechanical football players.

Third: *pure* is about time—time as waiting for death—time as hopeless. Time as loss—but also as recuperation. About morality as conditioned in time (as, perhaps, in Nietzsche's *Geneaology of Morals*, or as karma). The moral abjection of the Holocaust producing as a response amnesia as well as attempts to make personal, belated (artistic) restitution. But it is also about time as glacial—amoral—the slow, inexorable, grinding down of existence.

Fourth: *pure* is a provocation. The kind of provocation Job offers when in despair he tells God "you shall seek for me in the dust but I shall not be." Oppenheim's two huge, green, giant hands—each minus a set of finger tips—one set of finger tips standing on the palm of a hand projecting from the wall, the other set on the floor nearby—like standing stones—a Stonehenge of amputated finger tips.

Fifth: Another provocation. *pure* stands in relation to the recent Adelaide Biennial exhibition in the way that Benjamin saw his thinking in relation to theology ("it soaks up God as the blotter does ink"). It prefers depth to surface and substance to superficiality, drawing pleasure from the exercise of subtle discrimination.

Sixth: *pure* is about the meaning of space—the space between things, the space to feel, to think, to see. What could be simpler? Yet so rare? Space as the agent which 'enacts' (in the sense of brings out, brings into being) the 'meanings' of the works themselves. Space as a mark of respect accorded to both works and viewers. A respect consequent upon a recognition of the essential independence of the art works from each other, and of viewers as able and desirous of engaging deeply with the meaning of the work/s. Space alerting us to the necessity of being watchful.

And last but not least: *pure* suggests just how good Australian art can be seen against the best of the rest of the world.

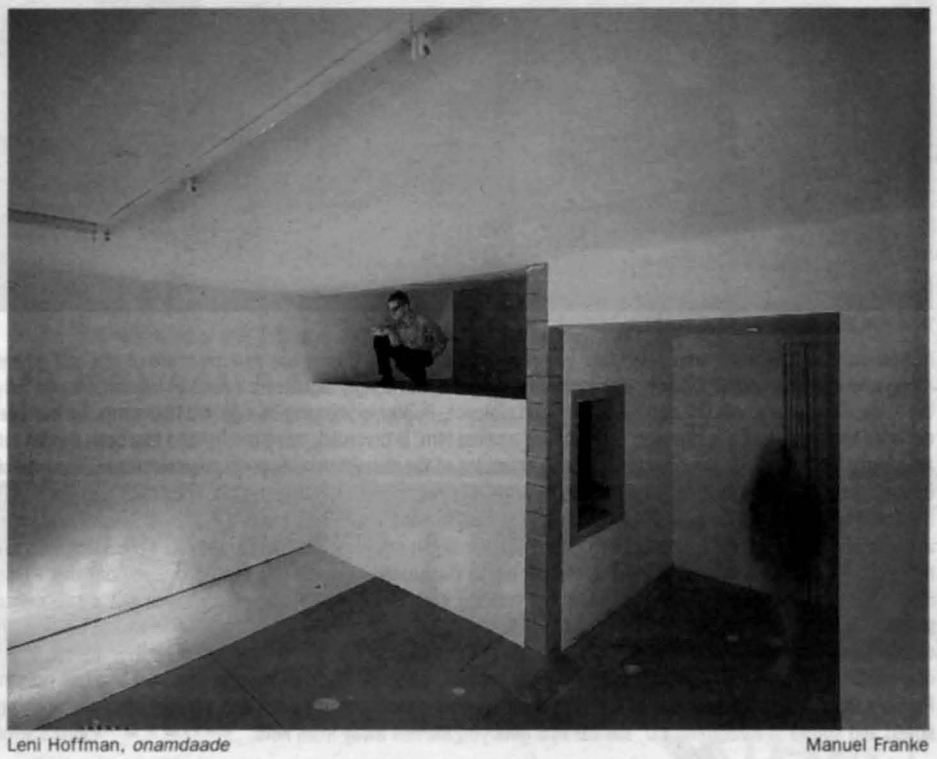
pure, *a collection of contemporary Australian and international art, curators Christopher Chapman & George Popperwell, Art Gallery of South Australia, February 27 - May 27*

John Barbour is a writer, teacher and artist whose work is represented by Yuill/Crowley Gallery, Sydney.

Leni Hoffmann is one of those artists who has a material that they have made their own. Now, any young artist who sets out to work in plasticine will almost inevitably be seen as somehow in her debt—although, of course, as any kindy kid knows, nobody really owns Plasticine, and at the end of the day whatever you have made goes back into the lump. This permanent state of pliability, and of course the vibrancy of its colours, makes it a material that seems almost purpose built for temporary installations. However, while one might recall the small scale sculptural possibilities of the medium—from aliens to zoo animals—it is as an all-over surface application that Hoffmann tends to use the material. In a sense, it is almost a pre-sculptural use, but one that I'd probably not want to call 'decorative'. In her most recent exhibition, Hoffmann has done much more than simply transform the space through the application of her chosen medium to sections of the floor in flat sections of colour. She has also adjusted the material and architectural structure of the gallery, by taking the lights from their neat square on the ceiling and relocating them to positions low down on the walls, and by building a temporary floor above the usual entrance ramp. The new floor is covered in the sort of tar that gets used to waterproof flat roofs, providing a multiple set of references for the viewer—to the street, the roof, and stickiness of plasticine underfoot. On entering the gallery in the usual way, the viewer finds themselves looking down on the plasticine 'painting' laid out on gallery floor, peeking in from above, almost left out on the street. Of course, once inside, the view is quite different, and you get to walk across the floor, get inside the work, and possibly take a fragment of it home, stuck in the tread, on the soles of your shoes.

Peter Anderson

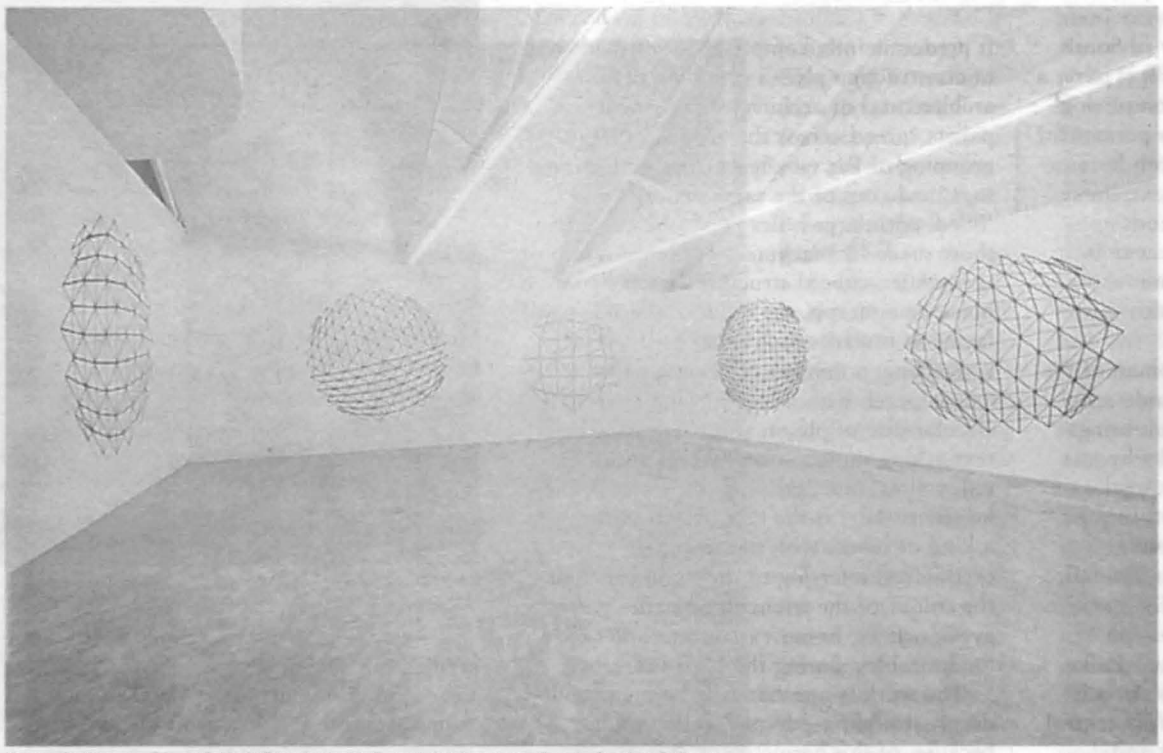
Leni Hoffmann at David Pestorius Gallery, Brisbane, April 16 - May 23 1998.



Leni Hoffman, *onamdaade* Manuel Franke

Two times two is...

Peter Anderson and Maryanne Lynch dialogue on *Two Timing*



Kerrie Polliness, *Black O Wall Drawings #1-5*, installation view, Sarah Cottier Gallery

Peter Anderson wrote:

In some respects, the premise for *Two Timing* could almost seem too simple, or so general, that it really wouldn't matter what works fell into the exhibition. Almost any works might operate as the points on which the exhibition turns. But the point is that the exhibition includes a specific selection of works, and in the accompanying catalogue, the reflections of particular artists—Bronwyn Clark-Coolee, Kathleen Horton, Kerrie Poliness, Amanda Speight, Sarah Stutchbury and Dion Workman.

However, the reflections of the artists are framed within what might be thought of as a single question interview—a comprehensively introduced question from the exhibition's curator, Gail Hastings, to which each provides a fairly well developed answer. This means that each work is not only presented by the artist, but is also positioned by their comments. So what is the point on which the whole show turns?

In very simple terms, the exhibition looks at the relationship between what Hastings outlines as two stages of the life of an artwork. First, "that of the artwork being 'made', a time-span most usually thought of as occurring before the artwork has been presented for public scrutiny", and then the second time-span when the work is looked at.

But how unrelated are these two times? Is the artwork always being remade, is it always in constant production through the process of looking at it, and talking about it? And, perhaps more to the point, how does the expansion of this second time—through critical or descriptive writing—pull us away from the possibility of an immediate, and direct, engagement with the work? It is this latter mode of encounter that actually seems to be at the base of Hastings' curatorial move, which has less to do with the two times of an art work, than the "crisis" that she sees so often accompanying the second moment.

Maryanne Lynch wrote:

I am in the gallery: co-existing in social time and personal time, and in the gaps, loops and links that occur between them. I cannot, ever, have "an immediate, and direct, engagement" with the works before me. I move between the chance of Kerrie Poliness' wall drawings, one geometric design drawn as two possibilities by passersby, and the interval of Dion Workman's two walls, each painted a monochrome colour of close relation to the other. These works play with time and with me—but I play with them too. In spite of myself.

I speculate on Hastings' theory. Is it too simple to talk about time in stages? To speak of two productions, or stages of art-making? Yes, we are always mediated by and mediating the context in which we 'see' an artwork. Yes, the artwork becomes subject to public time and the temporal codes of the gallery space. However, there is also the lineage of art history, from which these works emanate and into which I place them. And the biography of the artists themselves. And of me, the viewer. And...I am interrupted by Kathleen Horton's 'modules', small open-ended boxes jutting out from the gallery wall in what might be random positioning but could equally be a careful notation of eye and space. There is text winding its way around the interior of each module: this draws me into a different definition of time. I consider meaning-making through the co-/operation of image and inscription—the one calling on faculties preceding cognitive thought (or organised, qua social, time) and the other drawing on cognitive thought to go beyond it.

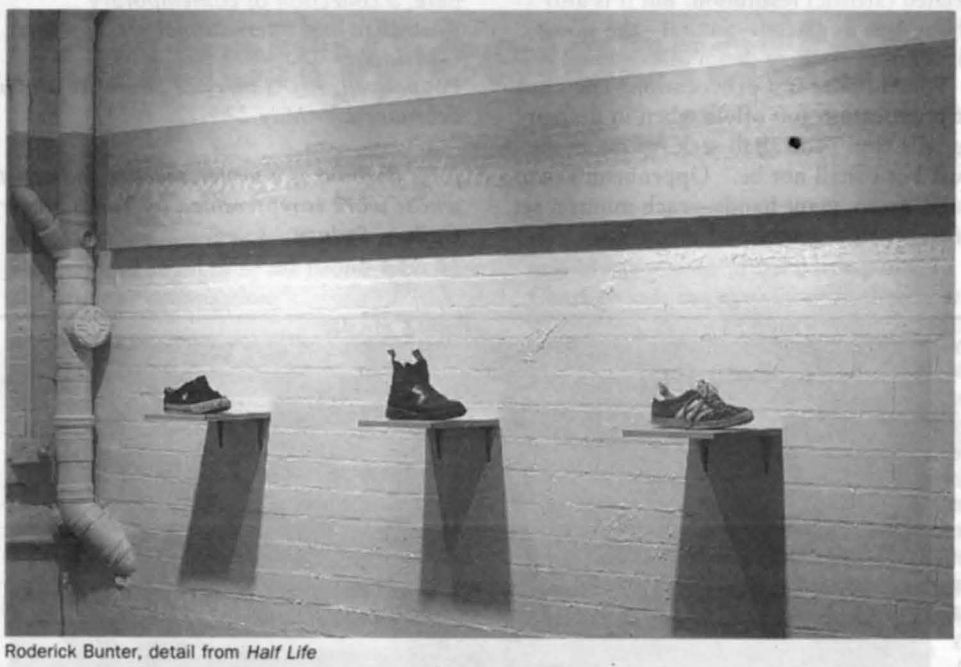
I move off and promptly stumble over Bronwyn Clark-Coolee's stuttered scream: five A4 sheets displaying a variety of languages, from colour to handwriting to image to deletion. I can't rest: this is a jump cut of time, calculated by the artist but also selected from a vocabulary again outside and inside of social/personal time. I can read it, which means that I know this vocabulary too. From the corner of my eye, I espy the catalogue. Another reading offered to me! I refuse it...at least for a while. I know that the contents will attempt to 'explain' things to me, even as this is denied, a useless effort but so seductive. The desire to place things within a unified time. I am in this space too but it is already overflowing with lost moments, pauses and restless stillness. In short, is there no 'stage' of time, no 'stage' of production? Only an eternal betrayal...a two-timing of the show's very inquiry?

Peter Anderson wrote:

You ask me to write about the exhibition, to develop a critical response, then I ask you to do the same. We both get caught out trying to make the present seem more like the past, like the moment of immediate engagement. In some senses we write as if caught in the moment of production, or at least you do. For me it was already too late (I'd seen the exhibition, read the catalogue, talked to the curator, even acted as Chair at a forum where Andrew McNamara, Toni Ross and Rex Butler spoke about the exhibition): there was no space left for an unmediated response.

Each work is put through its paces, not just in the studio, or as soon as it reaches the viewer, but also here. And then, there are always more times, later times, times when the work is not here, when this is all we have. What *Two Timing* does is make the work operate in each of these times—and perhaps make the play on "two timing" function as the route to meaning, each time.

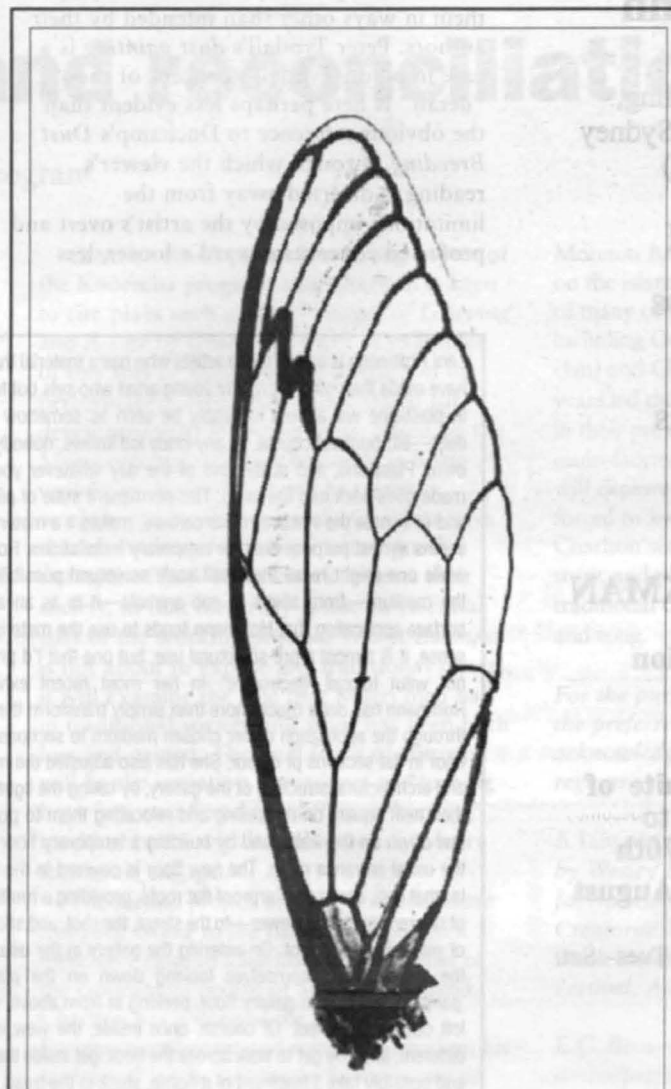
Two Timing, *curator Gail Hastings, Metro Arts, Brisbane, April 15 - May 30*



Roderick Bunter, detail from *Half Life*

At first glance of his installation, *Half Life*, you realise that Roderick Bunter has had his share of ups and downs. Along one wall are reproductions of documents representing seemingly significant events in his half, though fully-lived, life, encounters with law and order, love and violence. Bunter is showing us selected fragments: he has been declared bankrupt, had a restraining order issued against him, is divorced, owes money and has been denied rent assistance from the DSS. His own life provides examples of the current condition of urban existence. The irony in Bunter's ostensibly careless exposure of his personal life as a sign of the times is both poignant and urgent. On the remaining walls runs a strip of sky blue painted canvas panels with tyre tracks along their length. The image is deceptive, like translucent clouds streaked across the sky. It presents a subtle paradox as a translation occurs: the lightness of clouds leaves no trace in the sky unlike the burdened speed of a vehicle or body on land. Placed intermittently under these panels are small shelves. On each is a well-worn shoe displayed like a souvenir or trophy: each topography urges scrutiny, the search for a past. They also point to fragmentation and tension, the shifts in velocity of urban life. Like the vignettes of Peter Anderson's poetic catalogue essay, they are reminders of a moment—a glimpse, a laugh, a touch, a place—which longingly leads to 'beyond' this past and this present. Perhaps these shoes are residual of life's other passengers, disconcertingly still and silent against the imagined speed and sound of a zooming car: the car that gets you the hell away from here. Linda Carroli

Half Life, *Roderick Bunter, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, April 2-May 2, 1998.*



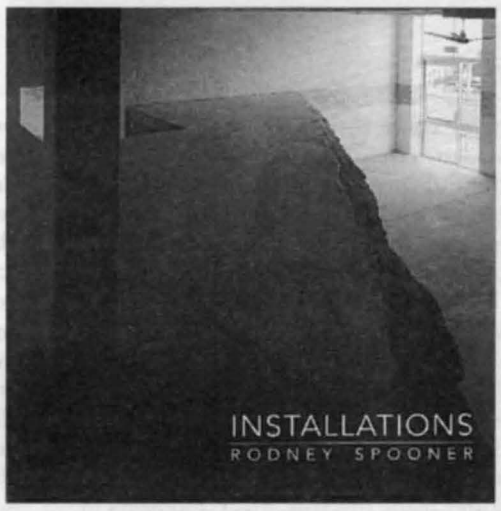
Among a new batch of artist run galleries in Surry Hills in Sydney are two in Campbell Street—19 at 19 Campbell Street and Herringbone Gallery at No. 111. And this month, an exhibition of works by Peter Woodford-Smith opens at South, Level 6, 241 Commonwealth Street. Woodford-Smith casts sets of multiples from nature—bronze caterpillar casings, wings, weevils along with botanical fragments, finely decorated fish and turtles. The artworks only come out at night. See them at South, Monday to Saturday 5.30 - 8.00 pm Information Phone 9281794

Cliff-diving cows cause concern

Wollongong's PROJECT centre for contemporary art is showing Heidi Hillier's Illawarra Daily Yarn. Inspired by headlines like the above, Hillier scrutinises her local paper for recurring images, themes, the portrayal of villains, heroes and the plain ordinary. Like the paper, the exhibition will change over time—but not much. PROJECT centre for contemporary art. Keira Lane, Wollongong Tuesday-Sunday 11-5pm 02-4226.6546

The tension between building and architecture

Jacqueline Millner welcomes an IMA monograph on Rodney Spooner



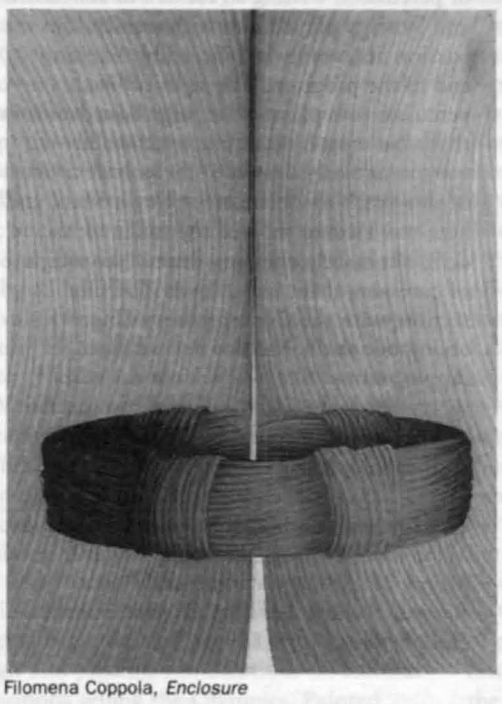
David Pestorius, the dealer who represents Rodney Spooner, noted at a recent conference on arts publishing that Australian artists may well be disadvantaged by the paucity of monographs available to publicise their work overseas. This handy little monograph on a contemporary Australian artist is a step by the IMA to redress this lack; it adds to its substantial list of publications on contemporary art which includes a recent book on another Brisbane artist, Scott Redford. While neither as lavish nor as polemical as Redford's *Guy in the Dunes*, *Installations: Rodney Spooner* is nonetheless a useful consolidation of Spooner's work to date, featuring colour documentation of installations from 1993 to 1997 and two short essays by Brisbane-based writers John Macarthur and Michele Helmrich. The essays strike a balance between the major concerns in Spooner's work, namely the nature of architectural space, the yet-to-be-exhausted project of minimalism and artistic critiques of the museum.

Helmrich tackles Spooner from the perspective of the history of modernism, contextualising the artist in terms of some modernist antecedents such as Robert Morris, Richard Serra and Carl Andre. Her piece provides descriptions of those of Spooner's works which specifically address the ideological dynamics of the museum/gallery, including *Sound Foundations*, constructed inside the Museum of Contemporary Art in 1993 from large concrete casts and a recording of clamouring jackhammers, and *Almost There*, where Spooner erected a simulation of the IMA's facade inside the gallery. Helmrich's piece works well at evoking the themes Spooner traverses, although statements that "Spooner deflects easy categorisation" tend towards the cliche.

Macarthur, a lecturer in architecture, provides less description than a frame of architectural discourse within which to read Spooner's work. In particular, Macarthur seeks to reinvest building with conceptual force, deploying Spooner's installation strategies to this end. In the artist's works which render spaces strange, redundant, unstable, Macarthur argues is a practice which foregrounds the interesting tension between building and architecture: "When Spooner reiterates the IMA building as art, but by means of building techniques, he doubles 'building' and makes it the material of art in a radically general sense."

Perhaps a consideration of Spooner's 'paintings', often rendered in corrugated concrete and hung in configurations which reference the salons of pre-modernist art (recalling Allan McCollum's installations), might have added more texture to this volume. The book's design and tone exude a certain austerity and seriousness not entirely consonant with Spooner's works. An accent on the humour and absurdity of the spatial conundrums this artist constructs is unfortunately missing. However, again the IMA is to be commended on its consistent contribution to the archives of Australian contemporary art.

Installations: Rodney Spooner, *published by the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 1998.*



Filomena Coppola, *Enclosure*

The shudder of a caress

Diana Klaosen surveys recent work of Filomena Coppola in Paris and Hobart

In Paris in 1997 on a four month residency at the Cité Internationale des Arts, Filomena Coppola drew immediate inspiration from her new environment and worked on craft-based pieces, incorporating unusual media. The commissioned, wall-based works for *In Praise of Make-up* curated by Clare Bond, at Hobart's Plimsoll Gallery in 1997, were both titled *The Weight of Another*. They are highly tactile, sensuous relief "collages" of real feathers, meticulously arranged, that happily survived freighting from Europe to Tasmania. Bond aptly described them as "authentic souvenirs...[evoking] the shudder of a caress".

Coppola also made drawings and sketches, some of which formed the nucleus of the pastel drawing show *String of Pearls* which opened at Dick Bett's in Hobart last February, barely two months after her return. The 21 large-scale pastels are worked in Coppola's inimitable, organic, super-colour-saturated style. Simultaneously pared-down in form and content, with a heightened physical presence and an extraordinary sense of depth, the works, such as *Nature Morte 1* and *Blue Indigo* are at once powerful, seductive and soothing.

It is rewarding to see the line of development, especially the influence of Europe, that links *String of Pearls* with the earlier shows *In the Garden of Eve* and *Paradise Lost*. For *In The Garden*, most prints are two metres wide and every square centimetre is patterned with sinuous, decorated detail. Coppola has researched the use and effects of wallpaper which, she says, "evokes an interior space and a sense of intimacy...of stability and reassurance. It can soothe, aggravate, relax and even disturb." Coppola's works succeed in doing most of these simultaneously. They engulf the viewer and intrigue with their unexpected juxtaposition of grand gestural foreground shapes and tiny background patterning.

In *Paradise Lost*, her use of the column—solid, physical, man-made—alongside untamed, swirling vegetation sets up a frisson. The contrast between the two echoes the dichotomies that fascinate Coppola—male and female, Italian culture and Australian culture, the historical and the contemporary. In *this* Eden everything is writhing, serpentlike, threatening to engulf the viewer. Yet Coppola's judicious hand ensures we are attracted and intrigued, not entirely overwhelmed.

During her Residency, Coppola remarked to Gary Catalano: "Here, Paris *does* leak into [my work], sometimes in an insidious way...If I'm working on a drawing and go and see a painting, some of what I've appreciated in that painting—its colour, a shadow, a detail—becomes incorporated in my drawing. I didn't expect to see Paris reflected in my work for about two years, because it takes time for influences to filter through. So I'm surprised at how much *has* infiltrated the work!"(*Imprint*, Vol 32, No. 4, Summer 1997-98, Melbourne)

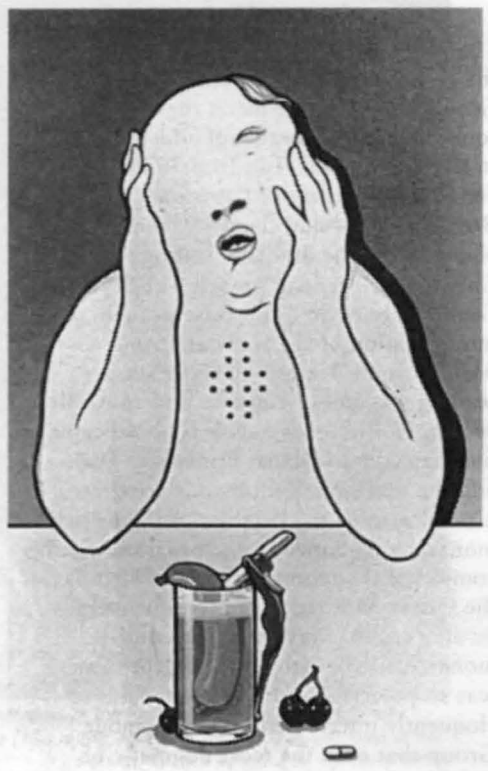
Coppola's meticulous, labour-intensive drawings and prints reflect her intuitive awareness of and active engagement with the major theoretical considerations of postmodernism and are informed, in particular, by the dichotomy of her Italo-Australian background. Coppola's work has, for some years, been considered by many commentators to be amongst the most exciting and intelligent art-making emanating from this state.

In late 1996 Coppola won the University of Tasmania's Rosamund McCulloch Residency to the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris.

Filomena Coppola: Solo Exhibitions: In The Garden of Evil (1995), Paradise Lost (1996), String of Pearls(1998) , *Dick Bett Gallery, Hobart.*

A gallery gets worn in

Nikki Miller reviews two exhibitions at the John Curtin Gallery, Perth



Guan Wei, *Efficacy of Medicine No. 5*

Australia's newest and largest university gallery has taken down its inaugural exhibitions and put up the next lot. Perhaps the most frequently expressed doubt about this venue is whether it will be able to develop an audience given that its location is out of the way. The gallery is trying to do the right thing and is offering an extensive range of free public programs to complement its exhibitions. Certainly the gallery is still attracting a fair number of visitors but they are not coming to the floor-talks, films and forums. Time will tell if these visitors were just sticky-beaks giving the John Curtin Gallery the once over or if they simply prefer their art without the education.

Sampling the gallery's second shows

Six young photographers and video artists based in Aotearoa/New Zealand explore elements of Pacific culture in the show *'inei/konei': The Pacific in Photo Art from Aotearoa*. Both Maori and Pakeha artists participate in this exhibition which successfully manages to distinguish itself from a National Geographic centrefold.

For me, the most striking images are the self portraits, especially those of Greg Semu. Semu's *Self Portrait with side of pe'a, Basque Rd, Newton Gully* shows his tattooed skin curving around his lower body. His hand discreetly shields his penis from view preventing pubic hair and genitalia from cluttering the clear design which elegantly traces the swells of muscle. It recalls those modernist photographs of female bodies imprinted with striped light filtering through venetian blinds—only Semu's body is more self-possessed than flaccid. This body stands, deliberately exhibiting its marked surface signifying manliness. The male tattoo, the pea'a, is a part of the initiation into adulthood. The catalogue declares the work a collaboration between Greg Semu, the subject and photographer and Suluape Paulo II, Tufuga ta Tatau, Master Tattooist.

Far removed from Semu's photographic insistence upon physicality are the repetitive designs of Lisa Reihana's colour laser copies. Honeycomb patterning and green swirling loops construct another space, otherworldly, clean, seemingly infinite and permitting endless variation; a fantasy zone enabled by the computer. It is a space that has little to do with conventional nationality and much more to do with new economic divisions.

Also occupying the gallery is *In & Out: Contemporary Chinese Art from China and Australia*. All 10 participating artists are of Chinese origin—six currently live in mainland China while four live in Australia. I mention this only because it is interesting that it is impossible to determine from the artworks where each artist resides. These artworks make no overt political statements. Indeed I found this art notoriously ambiguous, perhaps deliberately so. The glib wall texts were generally unhelpful. The works are interesting however precisely because of their ambiguity. For instance in Guan Wei's series of acrylic paintings titled *The Efficacy of Medicine*, pink pillowy figures toy with a variety of medicines—pills, alcohol and pretty capitalist paraphernalia. Is the title straight, satirical, are the fluid creatures an international species? I feel even further away from answering my own questions when I learn from the catalogue that the gesture of the hands and bodies in the paintings recall those of the Peking Opera—Guan Wei's father was a performer.

Giles Auty would hate the catalogues

The catalogue accompanying *In & Out* makes it clear that these artists are not making art for either China or Australia but for the "International Art Scene". Is it significant that many of these works cannot be shown in China? On the catalogue's beautifully thick bleached paper the word 'diaspora' is repeated over and over. The more I ponder this word the more I wonder who cannot be considered part of a diaspora of some sort? This show begs the question, precisely who constitutes the International Art Scene and what do they make of these works?

In the case of the Aotearoa/New Zealand Photography show I was glad I saw the work before reading the catalogue. Curator Blair French wrote one of those essays which spends most of its ink on saying what it is not trying to do; for instance, the show is "absolutely no attempt at any definitive statement" and so on. It is a style which attempts to address all criticisms before they can be made, making the show above reproach because it can't be pinned to a single interpretation. Such a method tends to understate and therefore undermine the achievements of the individual artworks and the exhibition as a whole. Surely in the 90s no-one expects a definitive exhibition any more, we all know this is impossible but we can stake some claims for artworks and exhibitions. This then provides a starting point for inevitable and important revisions. The actual artworks are more assertive—the result of artists' experiments with the camera and other visual technologies to devise new ways of seeing themselves as subjects.

The forum got personal

The promotional material for the forum *Location/Dislocation* correctly stated that both exhibitions "raise issues of interpretation and translation, and explore relationships between cultures of origin and of influence." The four speakers addressed this theme in a manner which was light on theory and heavily reliant on personal anecdotes, this made for easily listening and an enjoyable Sunday afternoon. I left feeling like I'd made four new friends.

A surprising confession came from curator Binghui Huangfu who said her experience of the exhibition is of providing a means for people to ask things they wanted to know about China. Who said that artists, especially diasporadic ones, are politically impotent?

'inei/konei': The Pacific in Photo Art from Aotearoa. *Artists: Glenn Jowitt, Lisa Reihana, Natalie Robertson, Greg Semu, Evotia Tamua, Veronica Vaevae. Curator: Blair French;* In & Out: Contemporary Chinese Art from China and Australia. Artists: Ah Xian, Guan Wei, Jiang Jie, Lie Tianyuan, Liu Xiao Xian, Wang Guangyi, Su Xingping, Wang Luyan, Wang Youshen, Wang Zhiyuan. Curator: Binghui Huangfu. April17 - May 17 1998, John Curtin Gallery, Perth; Forum, Location/Dislocation. *Speakers: Lisa Reihana, Binghui Huangfu, Brenda Croft, Stephanie Donald. John Curtin Gallery, April 18*

Mazed and amazed

Gretchen Miller at concerts by The Seymour Group and Synergy in Sydney

Street noises filter through the walls of the Newtown Theatre, but at The Seymour Group's first concert there, the outside sounds were frequently apt and well timed. In the world premier of Donald Hollier's *Six Songs to Poems of Christopher Brennan*, sirens and the dying roar of a jet plane dotted the dramatic settings of Christopher Brennan's texts. The Seymour Group were tight and precise in their interpretation of the score and American-born baritone Timothy DuFore's rich reading was full of emotion and controlled energy. Hollier's song cycle was dedicated unashamedly to Diana, Princess of Wales, and the text selection obviously reflected his concern for the troubles of the British monarchy (he noted in the program that he completed the score on the 97th birthday of the Queen Mother). Such sentiments may be almost incomprehensible to anti-monarchists (like myself), but, the music was so powerful and passionate, and so eloquently interpreted by the Seymour Group that even the most dogmatic of republicans could respect the drive behind it. Stylistically it also represents a dying era—the certainty of modernism—but it is still a beautiful work. The full orchestration, the bell tolling, the weeping of the brass in "The Banners of the King Unfold" was almost heartbreaking.

In "Dead Stars", the only inaccuracies of the night (apparent to me) were in the violins, who with pizzicato were perfect pointillist representations of the dry, dead stars of the text, but sometimes missed their unison. The brass chords and tremolo strings were shadows always threatening to break out while the suspenseful ending was subtly enhanced by sirens wailing down King Street. "In Pale Absence of the Ruin'd Rose" (an unfortunate connection is made with Elton John's bastardisation of his own song as *Goodbye England's Rose*, thus somewhat devaluing this elegant piece) the orchestration was almost film-like, with long, drawn-out tonal chords, shifting harmonies casting shafts of light. The song was something like a 30s film which the doomed hero is utterly overplayed, yet is touching in his passion, depth and distress. The final song, "Fairy Tales", proved Hollier is not without humour and was a welcome, if curious and unexpected end to such a troubled collection. A positively laughing wind section created a kind of musical up-yours to a God who dared to steal away a princess.

The sliding gestures and cries of the Australian premier of Jacob Druckman's *Come Round* were sometimes cartoonish, though this is a high modernist piece in both form and content, again very precisely played. I think it could become a modernist classic of contemporary music ensembles with its tight structure and intricate musical relationships building up slowly over the six variations and two ritornello's of the piece. The form, said Druckman (1928-96) in the program notes, came around in his working life every 12 or so years, producing a work of substance and weight. Particularly pleasurable was the contrast of a lyrical, lush, richly resonant and sustained ritornello that appeared at the beginning of the second movement, and at the third, where it was tinged with some sense of tragedy and suspense, before the sliding, crying textures of the first movement returned with more urgency, over repeated demi-semi-quavers passed through various instruments.

The piece that caused me some confusion was Raffaele Marcellino's *Maze*. This clearly programmatic work with pleasurable gestures spanning musical styles took an interesting concept for inspiration but almost seemed to run out of ideas when it came to representing the maze's centre or solution. The program notes describe the maze as a labyrinth which nonetheless contains within it "an unalterable passage to truth." Moments of clarity and purpose for the musical maze explorer seemed to be represented by the octave unison—the musical centre of the maze found at the end of the piece also being essentially a rhythmically fluctuating unison. For what it's worth Marcellino has been a role model for myself and other composers of my generation, but in this work I found the use of unison a rather obvious interpretation of truth as the one true note, some kind of tonic. It was an odd decision, given Marcellino was using the maze as a representation of the millennial condition of music. Surely if nothing else, the 20th century has given us philosophies that question the notion of a singular truth, and contemporary classical music has walked away from (or ought to have, surely by now) unison as being the representation of that notion. I'm quite sure Marcellino does not see harmony and unison as being the true light from which contemporary music has strayed and I don't understand why he has used it as such here.

When composers takes on concepts external to music—such as 'madness', as happened in Ramon Ramos' work in the Synergy concert—it becomes apparent that musicians rarely tune into contemporary cultural theory. The music may still wind up pleasurable to listen to, but soon stops being so if the listener actually reads the program notes. Maybe this is because so little time is spent in training institutions developing theory and concept. When I studied at the Conservatorium, not once in all my four years was the conceptual drive behind the works we studied given any serious consideration. It was all technique and the history of technique, with token gestures made towards 'great' moments in history that may have influenced the direction of musical style. The result of such an approach in institutions isolated from other artistic practices is composers who either search for their own philosophical approach and run the risk of re-inventing the wheel, or who ignore it altogether, blithely writing away in a conceptual vacuum, with no knowledge or care for the body of ideas that inform and develop most other artistic expression. A dearth of cultural studies literature on music also contributes to this lack of cultural thought in the music milieu.

In the same way, musicians who attempt to draw theatre into their work without any experience, training or interest in the development of theatre practice run the risk of an embarrassing performance—as happened at the Synergy concert on April 18 with the Ramos work *Tratado de la Locura* (Book of Madness). Great title, and energetic technical performances by Synergy and the guest artistic director, Jose Vicente. So long as you didn't actually look at them playing. Token theatricalisation was leant to the work which professed to contrast the state (represented by melodic mallet instruments) with the free individual—Vicente on drums, spatially separated from the group. Vicente's interpretation of madness—a clichéd glaring and the odd primal yell was mortifying. Musically, too, the gestures were predictable—a promising opening, with Synergy performers on lugubrious-sounding bottles and Vicente approaching from the back of the auditorium bowing an extraordinary, otherworldly instrument that wailed like a cat or sounded as if coming from deep space, soon turned into a play-off of 'mad' musical gestures on drums versus the controlling mallet wielders.

Tratado de la Locura and the Ruud Wiener's *Go Between* were the two disappointing works of the Synergy concert, whose program is indicative of an ever more popular approach: hence the Wiener (well received by the older members of the audience) for which drummer, David Jones, was brought in to play. I personally dislike this style—a kind of funky fusion of 'classical' and pop. The bump and grind of rock guitar cannot be imitated on mallet instruments no matter how hard you groove, and the complexity of contemporary classical is compromised by the driving rhythms of a drum kit. Pleasant to listen to, it provides no real musical challenge, nor is it sexy, and at the risk of being harsh, this was just a more sophisticated version of Kenny G. Vicente made performative gestures of the same category in his spectacular, if corny percussion duet with Jones. But ok, the audience loved it.

The concert opened beautifully, however, with Rafael Reina's subtle and careful *Ubangui Djembe*. The twinkle of bells and rattle of wooden pipes surrounded the audience as the players came on stage from all directions. Layering in a constant rumble of a giant gong and large bass drum, Vicente conducted like a dancer, his hands cutting the air like ice and the performers responding in kind. Modal melodies broke down and the off-beat was seductive. At the end of the first section the weight of the percussion as it increased in volume had an interesting effect; it seemed to cause gravity in the room to increase, dragging me down into a black hole of sound. I loved it.

The audience also loved the final work of the evening, Iannis Xenakis' *Idmen B* for percussionists and choir. Xenakis is the king of percussion writing so far as I'm concerned and Synergy played him with tremendous passion and verve—an incredibly exciting end to the program. The sight of five percussionists playing the huge bass drums in rhythmic unison was quite spectacular—I was particularly drawn to the precise moves of this year's associate artist Kevin Man, and here too Vicente showed the range of his skill, alternately cracking drums like whips or caressing them like a lover. The final section, with the Contemporary Singers crying out at the back of the audience, tapping stones like a Greek chorus with worry beads, brought the house down. This is what it would sound like if the city got up and walked. Musical mazes.

The Seymour Group, composers, Druckman, Marcellino, Hollier, Newtown Theatre, March 29. Synergy, composers, Reina, Ramos, Weiner, Xenakis, Eugene Goosens Hall, Sydney, April 18

Note management

Andy Arthurs tells Keith Gallasch about innovative developments in music at QUT

Andy Arthurs has produced, written and sung pop songs. He has worked with George Martin. When I meet Arthurs he's just savoured Martin conducting orchestral arrangements of Beatles songs in Sydney and been back for a second helping. He lived in the pop world of the 70s London and in the Punk era worked as engineer, producer, performer and writer.

Contact with two key figures of 20th century art changed all that. The inspiring meeting occurred in 1981 at Surrey university where Arthurs had completed a Bachelor Of Music Tonemaster Degree in record engineering and production in 1974. "A visit by John Cage and Merce Cunningham changed my perception of sound and music when they applied different music to the same movement and introduced synchronicity as a working principle. On day one, each composer in the workshop had to come up with a minute of music and each dancer with a minute of dance and put them together without any direct collaboration. The pieces were randomly juxtaposed without discussion before or after the event. On the 2nd day we had to come up with 2 minutes of work, on the 3rd with4, more and more until the strain began to show. People were competitive about the quality of their creations and what was happening to them. Some made very loud music to grab attention. But suddenly you reached a point where you thought 'It doesn't matter what others think', and you just worked."

As a consequence of this experience, Arthurs formed a music and dance ensemble, La Bouche, as one of two musicians creating music in performance and using, amongst other techniques, sampling. It was a life of touring, carrying the dance floor and sound equipment, the artist as roadie. By the end of the 80s a recording contract was signed with Sony, but a change of record company management dissolved the deal. He and his Australian dancer wife, Fiona Cullen, decided to move to Australia, settling in Brisbane where he taught at the Conservatorium.

In a bout of musical chairs in 1997 Arthurs moved from the Queensland Conservatorium to the Queensland University of Technology. Simone deHaan moved to the Conservatorium from the University of Tasmania. At the Conservatorium Arthurs had taught a degree in sound (Sonology), focussed on recording production and founded the Bachelor in Multimedia degree course. At QUT he was to bring his considerable experience in popular and artistic musical ventures to bear on developing courses and degrees "to make graduates more relevant and employable in the music and arts/entertainments industries."

At QUT, music is in the Academy of the Arts, allowing it direct interplay with dance, drama, communication design (multimedia) and the visual arts. It can also connect with CINOVA (Centre for Innovative Arts) postgraduate work. This connectedness allows for composers and producers to apply their skills directly in collaboration with artists from other forms. And although Arthurs has left the Conservatorium he's hoping that the two schools will work together to further contemporary music (Arthurs and de Haan have collaborated on a recording—see below).

I ask about the well-being of his department (given the current pressures on universities), but Arthurs describes it as very good—a faculty not under attack, or being downsized. "It's in the black", he quips. "It has two recording studios, three new media studios, one composition studio, all quite well equipped. We take 50 students a year to work in either performance or production, though either way they all have to play in ensembles, an important part of being aware of both sides of the process of making music."

The Production courses entail new media, recording production (both are new courses in 1997) and applied composition (new in 1998). Arthurs declares that it was a conscious decision to have this kind of focus on production because of a gap in these areas in tertiary education in music in Australia. "To be literate in the sound area of digital arts is to contribute to a musician's ability to be autonomous. New media has become part of a musician's life as composer or producer. Another outcome is a new media ensemble, Simulation, which visiting professor Richard Vella (previously professor of music at Latrobe) has launched.

"In recording production, the focus is directorial rather than button-pushing and includes developing skills in arranging, conducting and maybe composition. The graduating artist should be competent enough to produce a good recording of their own or others' music. In addition, training in sound design introduces the artists to film or new media where they mix sound with images."

In Applied Composition the attention is not to a style of composing but on situations for composing and the medium that the artist is working with, be it dance, theatre or new media—"not just the concert hall." The sites for music and sound are multiplying and with them opportunities for composition and production. Students are introduced to the options early on in their course. Arthurs cites a 30 second video featuring a mother pushing a baby in a pram where each student composes music to this same footage from a different point of view or mood with some surprising results. Arthurs emphasises that the courses are not rigid, allowing students to develop in directions they find strength in. "We have also developed a new approach to musicianship which emanates from a deep understanding of sound, and how it has been adapted by diverse cultures and in different eras to create a particular music."

George Martin, Andy Arthurs

As for Performance, "we don't have separate classical and jazz streams. Most students come in classically trained but they choose their own style, if logistically possible (depending on the availability of teachers) and with an open choice of instruments and could include some very unusual folk or ethnic instruments (like sitar or djembe) where the timbral palette can be explored. In these cases we seek out the right teacher. I've just worked with musician-composer Linsey Pollack who combines folk with MIDI triggers and samples—we're not hung up on a hierarchy of style or instrument or group. We're lucky not to have the pressures of a classically-based conservatorium. But a number of our graduates will eventually teach so of course we do pay attention to the quality of training in conventional instruments." In the area of performance, Arthurs is particularly pleased that new music ensemble Topology will rehearse at QUT in 1998.

I wonder if the degree on offer is a challenge to the musical status quo in universities. "No. We're not staging a revolution. We're simply reflecting what is happening across the music industry. And that, for instance, includes having a World Music elective with a focus on the kind of music you can experience in Australia given the country's multicultural origins."

As well as being Head of Music at QUT's Academy of the Arts, Arthurs continues to produce CDs (currently working with Sarajai) compose original music for dance (most recently for Graeme Watson's *The Naked Kiss* for Dance North) and theatre (Katherine Thomson's *Navigating* for QTC). You can hear him compose, sing and produce in fine form on *The Naked Kiss* (QUT/Dance North CD AAGW 11, available from the Australian Music Centre) which features some marvellous multi-tracked trombone (Simone deHaan), vocals from Karen Smyth and Arthurs (echoes of the Davids Bowie and Sylvian), Carmel Butler on fiddle and dense, rich percussion from Greg Sheehan. The combinations of instruments are distinctive and there's some eerie heavy-breathing sound work connecting with the dance's art/science theme. Arthurs is bound to become a role model for his students.

Associate Professor Andy Arthurs is Head of Music, Academy of the Arts, Queensland University of Technology,
http://www.academy.qut.edu.au/music/

The limits of the sociology of pop

Vikki Riley reviews new CDs

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Is there a soundtrack for what's going on in the country at the moment? What to make of Jennie George at East Swanson Dock dancing on the MUA stage to *Eagle Rock*? The what's naff columns in the Higher Ed. supplement recently reported a course, "Rocking the World: The politics of Popular Music," is to be introduced at Sunshine Coast University College, a "world first." Dr Ivan Molloy aims to "illustrate to students how music reflected and influenced political change…using everyone from the Beatles and Bob Dylan to the Spice Girls to get his point across"(Iain Shedden, "Rock politics blowin' in the wind", *The Australian*, May 20).

Just who exactly listens to what out there in society is an assumption the sociology of pop rarely challenges. *night vision*, the second LP from Melbourne Koori band Blackfire is the kind of sophisticated lyric-driven popular music you'd expect by now to hear on JJJ next to Jeff Buckley, instead the disc has incurred a deafening media silence. Produced by Paul Hester (Crowded House), resplendent with pumping rock, country, folk, reggae and even celtic influences, it's all about what's amiss in the culture at large, namely a functioning PA system for love, dreams, community in the face of scant spirituality and good will out there in the ether. Selwyn Burns' incredible blistering electric guitar weeps and stabs pierce the emotional landscape, conjures myriad losses in the face of unmovable faith—play the title track next to, say, ol' Neil Young's *Down by the River* and watch all your pithy conceptions of 'indigenous music' peel off the loungeroom walls like old plastic paint. Kutcha Edwards' voice plays a game of double take, managing to sound like Tom Petty, Luka Bloom and himself all at once with warm, sultry lullaby tones that catch the melodies off kilter. Interesting too, the band's use of traditional instruments (yiddaki, didgeridoo) as naturally ambient reverb 'effects' which wash in and out of the mix like a buzz track welded into the wiring forevermore. The mental images are potent-poisoned skies, night vision, people gone—the virtual reconciliation soundtrack for when you're not having a reconciliation.

kangarumba is also state-of-the-art Melbourne independent, of international standing minus local industry support. Local band Musiki Manjaro this time switch from punchy Zairen dance hits to a full-bodied cross-referencing of East African rumbas and sevens with traditional Tanzanian songs in funky patois. The album is the result of the one year 'residency' of guitarist and singer Shomari Ally, who with MM penned most of the material. A member of East African supergroup Vijana Jazz and accustomed to writing pop hits, ballads and dance anthems for the Top 40 back at home in Dar Es Salaam, Ally's songs are gems of creamy melodies overlapped with awesome guitar pickings. The themes are unexpected, like *Housegirl*: "A housegirl, mistreated by her employer, asserts her right to be treated fairly." Or *Mama Chi Chi*: "You like what's yours in a material world." It's all in Swahili, the cover's got mysterious arty photoshop collages and there's a jungle remix of *Housegirl*. It'd be strange if this disc didn't make inroads for African music the way that Cuban stuff already has in this country. As they say, 'it swings.'

Also from file under World comes Ed Pias's opus *Ancestor's Halo*, a solo work exploring a veritable world of percussion—Indian pakhawaj, tar, riq, tablas, gongs, ankle rattles but some in the context of drone and atonal patterns. Seattle based Pias was a former impro accompanist for people like John Cage and Julius Hemphill and I guess this is where this disc parts company with the likes of Trilok Gurtu or Talvin Singh, it's about an ur-soundscape of rhythm which melts into solids of colour, texture, music as invisible mist or eternal night, a Free Jazz notion of sustained flight in space. Whatever the mystical theory, it reminds me that some musics exist as isolated psychic projections, this disc one of the more intense examples, a kind of endless horizon of rubble keeps coming into frame.

The Unthinkable are an instrumental beast born out of "the whole world of possibilities far removed from the rigid traditions of those cheezy twangers of the early 60s" and the genius of Melbourne's own Dick Dale, Feedback Jack, formerly of cult post mod 80s group Shower Scene From Psycho. The movie and TV theme put through the bubble pop wrapper club edit is, these days, the alphabet of digi flared kids and all self respecting sound designers, the reason for dumb alt. Pulp Fiction 'theme' nights and a lot of bad pop, like Beck. Music as a cartoon, is it possible? Only if you can really play the notes, jam on the cells. Bert Kaempfert's *Strangers in the night* goes surf instro-rock, *Harlem Nocturne* 's film noir jazz score rips through the electric paranoia guitar pedal—this disc is the Morricone revival that never really arrived by guys who know too much and want to haunt our nervous systems with stinging hyperreal wordless renditions of just how weird it is out there.

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Just And Thongs generates a lyrical and sometimes unnerving domestic world, an interior of chat and laughter, a distant engaged phone signal, sudden angry yelling, a furiously sustained rattling of what sounds like cutlery, crockery and bottles (that you expect any moment to break), TV mumbling, a shower running. For all its familiarity it's a world made strange by the voiceplay of the composer (gutteral rumblings, sustained childlike squeals, a voice cracking on the edge of crying) and texts spoken (intoned, murmured, argued) by collaborating writer Linda Marie Walker (invariably heard in the near distance) or chorally with the composer ("Once I had a title"). Sometimes this play emanates from the intimate everyday—two voices crooning and falsettoing along to Robert Fripp's *North Star*—sometimes it sounds intensely private, untreated, a man vocally and abstractly musing in a room, doves cooing nearby, a finger tapping. Sometimes it's a sonic adventure (verging on the glorious cosmic sheet rain of the second composition on the disk, *Auf Blau zugehen*) as if the voice has taken off into some enormous interior, abandoning the everyday. Walker's texts are not on the surface of the work, they're heard in snatches or at a remove (as in "Lucy was Lisa/a real fantasy" against a languorous bass line and an intruding industrial shimmer: "while the bass bassed and girls came like rain and wind and clouds"). Some of the best writing is abandoned to sonic drama, as in "Standing ovation for red tomatoes": "and stars far up as usual/and the air quiet and the/bar closed and the sound/of grapes in his mouth/and the light touch of the tongue/and the soft crawl of the/fur and the fine gaze of the cat/and doing with feathers what won't/be heard and the trees in the leaves and the/last calls of the asian doves/in the bushes in the rooms..." But that's fine because the sleeve notes give you all the texts (inscribed with scribbled production notes) and the world of the texts is sometimes literally evoked—bass lines, doves calling—or 'dramatised' as in the lines yelled from "...red tomatoes". After a first listening, the subsequent interplay between reading and listening is a special pleasure. *Auf Blau zugehen* (Going Towards Blue), "A Voice Space Project" is a substantially different work offering vast, reflective, sometimes thrilling architectonic soundscapes but with aural jumpcuts, dead ends and rough transitions that prevent easy immersion. Even so it's a transporting experience, especially when a metallic rush of sound momentarily reveals in a shift of pitch and pulse a possible source (a swoop of birds, a rainstorm, a spraycan). Again, the composer's voice is a vital ingredient, for example in a murmuring across a bottle top against the high pitch of synthetic sheets of sound, or a Tibetanish nasal twang worked to the nth degree, or in a delicate falsetto. Finally, the sounds transmute into the 'real' New York "steps, jazz, sirens, rush hour, people (fullness/emptiness); then the resonance of New York on a Sunday morning in my hotel room" (Composer's note). *Just And Thongs* and *Auf Blau zugehen* offer rich, pleasurable play between verité and the composed, reveal extended possibilities for the voice in sound composition, and *Just And Thongs* is a welcome, scintillating collaboration between Australian and German artists.

KG

Sport

TEE OFF

with Vivienne Inch

As Sigrid Thornton (played by Andrea Stretton) launched her romantic comedy, Sea Change, on the floating barge outside the National Maritime Museum she groped for a word to describe just what it was she was selling—"festival" just didn't seem the right word, she said. And she was right. The event looks like it cost SOCOG less than the launch. Certainly less than the series. She went on to say that none of this (whatever it is) would be possible without the thousands of sports men and women who would be thundering into Sydney in the year 2000. Wouldn't it?, I whispered to my old golfing partner, the Minister for Everything, Michael Knight. Couldn't it? Most Sydney-siders don't like live sport. They prefer something relayed. One-days and edited highlights are more their speed. Give em re-runs, give em Leni Reifenstahl. They'll never know. Half of Sydney is packing up, turning their homes over to the tourists for exorbitant rents and watching it all on TV from Jupiters. Let's not waste our money, Michael. And if we're aiming to entertain the tourists why quarantine them in stadiums at Homebush? Give them an authentic Sydney experience. Simply turn traffic jams on Parramatta Road and queues at the Post Office into spectator events? Nobody can afford the opening ceremony and it's tacky anyway. Tell Ric Birch to throw a million dollars at the buskers at Circular Quay. And here's an idea. Let's introduce the first interactive event to the Olympics, invite the 2 million visitors to join in the City to Surf. Spend some money on art, Michael, I said. Give them an experience of Australia they'll never forget. He's thinking about it.

TOOTH AND CLAW

with Jack Rufus

This column returns after a two-issue suspension brought on by accumulated yellow cards. Discipline in sport is important, of course, but if it forces a leading player from the field, then surely justice has gone too far!

The very same thing is threatening this month's Soccer World Cup in France. Referees have been instructed to crack down on professional fouls, obstruction, tackles from behind—all the things, in fact, that make professional sport the great spectacle it is. Where would football be without the choppers, the hatchet-men and the butchers—the rough brutes and true characters of the game?

The obsession with law and order is ruining things off the field as well. French authorities have warned English fans to keep away from stadiums if they don't have a ticket. As everyone knows, England has the finest football hooligans in the world, and they won't be put off by a bluff like that. Nor will they respond to the French Government's invitation to enjoy French culture instead. Why settle for croissants, red wine and the Louvre when you could be inside the ground, cheering on your favourite hit-man as he chops away the legs of a fancy-Dan continental? That's what the World Cup is all about!