

RealTime

OnScreen

free

26

Next Wave

Tertiary Arts Education

Adrian Martin reviewed

Festival previews

The Boys/Bill Henson

Sydney Film Festival

Jeff Gibson's Telediction

Marina Abramovic performs

Dance studio practice

New music in Sydney

Allan Sekula

Forsythe/Stuart/Selwyn Norton

Kosky's O'Neill

Bad Rice



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Debord: "The spectacle does not realize philosophy.
it philosophizes reality."

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cover image: from *Rapt*

Justine Cooper, *Rapt*, installed at Sydney College of the Arts, March; video component screened in *D.Art*, dLux media arts' annual showcase of experimental digital film, digital video and computer animation art, 45th Sydney Film Festival, June 5 - 19 (see page 27) and touring nationally, including MAAP, Brisbane (see page 35).

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correction:

In "Taking up the fight", RealTime 25, the cinematographer referred to as Jane Spring, working on Michelle Mahrer's Urban Clan, about Bangarra Dance Theatre's Page Brothers, is in fact Jane Castle.

Editorial

The artist enabled and disabled

It was one of those shiver-up-the-spine-moments. I'd dropped into the Art Gallery of South Australia with a friend attending the launch (July 19) of the innovative SALA (South Australian Living Artists Week) and had been listening to gallery director Ron Radford proudly extolling the virtues of local artists, rattling off stats, highest number of artists per capita in Australia etc etc, a litany of well-warranted praise the South Australian in me thought, and addressed to an audience largely made up of those living artists of several generations (there was a great two-page spread of them in *The Advertiser*). Arts Minister Di Laidlaw praised SALA, listed sponsors, reminisced rapturously about her early introduction to art collecting, recent purchases and dreams of inheriting the family collection. I wandered into a small room nearby where Sarah Thomas had curated some fine local work from the archive—Fiona Hall, Hewson-Walker and...just as I was about to leave, I glimpsed on the narrow left wall by the door, a Regis Lansac photograph of Meryl Tankard, looking up—disturbed? alarmed?—her right eye oddly distorted, as if double-exposed, over-enlarged, disabled. What had sounded like deserved praise for the local, South Australian art, now rang in my ears like ugly parochialism. When asked my opinion about South Australia and the demise of successive Australian Dance Theatre artistic directors, I reply that it's not just the ADT, you have to look at the fate of artistic directors in state theatre and opera, and the perilous line some Adelaide Festival directors have been forced to walk. The notion of arms-length in Adelaide is something that is regularly withdrawn, reminding you that although historically one of the most liberal and progressive of states, it is also capable of incredible regression—two steps forward, three back.

Where were the cries of shame, the calls for the minister's resignation echoing through the gallery? (SA usually likes to demand resignations, it's a press favourite when it comes to the arts.) Why was the disgraceful mishandling of the company's affairs and the artistic director's future allowed to go on and on as it did, the ADT board hiding behind a spokesman and confidentiality clauses? Where was the Department of the Arts in all of this—happily confidential too? The longer it all went on the more wounding it was for all parties, right up to the legal resolution of the wrangle, the early termination of Tankard's contract, and the petty and vengeful release of a 100 page document solicited by the Minister from the ADT itemising Tankard's alleged managerial, corporate and other wrong-doings. Chairing the opening session of MAP (Movement and Performance dance season and Symposium in Melbourne, see *RealTime* 27), writer Robin Grove bewailed this "disabling" of an Australian artist. He called for us to look again at the relationship between boards and artistic directors. We were inevitably reminded, too, and once again, about boards of management where artist representation is nil or minimal, and about artistic directors who are only ever employees. The Labor Party in its arts launch promised to initiate a status of artists document, not a case of special pleading (bound to upset arts-hostile One Nation), but both a philosophical and practical recognition of the special circumstances of living and working as an artist, with ramifications for recognition, employment, funding and, after the Taxation Department's only recently resolved harassing of visual artists, taxation. It should also address the relationship between artists and boards of directors before the corporatisation of the arts wreaks more havoc.

The Australia Council is deservedly celebrating its 30th year, an organisation that has facilitated the work and success of thousands of artists and now promotes their work internationally. The Council is a great survivor, the near victim of both Liberal and Labor governments, the target of detractors who would either obliterate it or spend the money in fanciful ways. Internal reforms over recent years have weakened the fundamental role of peer assessment and exalted the role of Council in initiating policy, but much that is valuable is still achieved. What is distressing is the Council's limited funds which, over the decades, have not kept pace with a burgeoning arts scene—for many mature artists it's a very long time between grants, for others it's the end of the line. When additional money does come Council's way it's invariably tied to special projects (Keating's *Creative Nation*, Howard's regional arts boost—even these have now evaporated) rather than being allocated to the on-going and growing needs of the artform Funds. Labor's arts policy looks to rectify this to a degree. Just as problematic is the prospect of a GST and Arts Minister Richard Alston's apparent lack of interest in buffering the impact on artists and companies, where everything from materials to tickets will be subject to tax, making an already vulnerable 'industry' prey to audience adjustment to a GST. The Australia Council's celebration of its 30 years of work, much of it by, about and for artists, and, at the same time, "for all Australians", is timely, a moment in which Council might look to a much more assertive advocacy for the arts.

In October the Sydney Opera House is celebrating its 25th birthday in part with its "Industry Week" program. The Opera House will host *Head to Head*, the national physical theatre conference (see page 41), *Open Dialogues*, "prominent artists in open discussions", and the day-long *The Performing Arts in the 21st Century, an International Debate* (Friday October 9), in collaboration with the Australia Council, which is funding and formatting the events, and the ABC, which will broadcast them on radio and television and through online Chat Rooms. Along with The Performance Space's *Injection/Forum* (see page 50) on visual artist organisations and its *Autopsy* (see below), it looks like we're in for some significant re-thinking of the arts in Australia.

It's finally time to formally welcome Zane Trow to Sydney and The Performance Space. After over some 6 months of vigorous behind the scenes work, artistic director Trow has launched the space in new directions, with fresh gallery space, a multimedia studio and a greater focus on in-house activity and artist support, building on the space's strong tradition of experimentation and debate. Trow says, "The Performance Space has a growing responsibility to Australian contemporary artists to draw focus to 20th and 21st century performative art. To be available to artists at a local and national level and to extend their increasingly limited opportunities to engage in long term development processes. To offer affordable time, space, resources, platforms, networks and expertise." *RealTime* wishes Zane and his team well for this new stage in the influential life of The Performance Space and applauds the programming of *Autopsy*, an inquest into the state of the performing arts in Australia. (See page 37 for TPS program.)

Other things to celebrate. Congratulations to Jane Goodall for winning the Marlis Thiersch Award for best article in 1997 by a member of the ADSA (Australasian Drama Studies Association); Roland Manderson for being appointed artistic director of the 1999 Festival of Contemporary Arts in Canberra; choreographer Garry Stewart for winning the Robert Helpmann prize, which will allow him to work in New York; Linda Marie Walker for her appointment as director of South Australia's Contemporary Art Centre; and Josephine Wilson and Linda Carroli for winning First prize in the *Salt Hill Journal* Hypertext Contest.

4-9

Feature: Next Wave

Critically surveying selected exhibits and performances from Melbourne's Next Wave Festival, *RealTime* writers go the distance with new media, visual arts, performance, dance, sound works, and cross-cultural exchanges including Hiram To's *Bad Rice*.

9-15

Arts Education

In our annual arts education feature section, Steven Maras queries the term "media" in communications and new media education, Philip Kent and Sarah Miller offer insights into visual arts education issues, and Kerrie Schaefer reports on an intriguing experiment in performance studies in Toowoomba.

15-18

Festivals

Previews of the Melbourne and Brisbane Festivals raise some critical issues about festivals. Plus previews of works in *Carnivale*, *Sea Change* and Melbourne's Mallarmé Festival.

19-21

Culture

Diana Klaosen reports on the State of Arts in Tasmania seminar; Kirsten Krauth looks at the culture of mourning in a new book on Princess Diana; and a major conference at the Museum of Sydney on the digital in the museum is previewed.

21-22

Writing

Josephine Wilson on the texture of the text plus more writesites on the net.

23-35

OnScreen

Our feature on the Sydney Film Festival includes reports on short films, documentaries and features as well as selections from dLux media art's *D.Art* program. Noel King reviews a new book by Adrian Martin. Edward Scheer compares masculinities in Bill Henson and *The Boys*. Plus Philip Brophy's Cinesonic column, conference reports and film reviews and Telediction—Jeff Gibson writes the first of our regular TV columns. Brisbane's digital media event, MAAP, previewed.

36-43

Performance

Virginia Baxter reads the room at Marina Abramovic's recent MCA appearance. Aleks Sierz writes in the dark at the Battersea Arts Centre, Jan Lauwers speaks for himself, Roland Manderson buttonholes David Branson in Canberra, South African performance at Black Swan in WA, *A Life of Grace and Piety* in Cairns, Dorothy Porter's *The Monkey's Mask*, the Kosky-O'Neill *Mourning Becomes Elektra* and the Heilmann-Leiser *Room With No Air* performed in Sydney.

44-45

Dance

In the full version of the provocative paper she delivered at the recent MAP Symposium in Melbourne, Eleanor Brickhill argues the significance of studio practice. UK writer Sophie Hansen reports on new short works by William Forsythe, Meg Stuart, Michael Clark, Amanda Miller and Paul Selwyn Norton (soon to work with Melbourne's Chunky Move).

46-50

Visual Arts

Cassi Plate reports on the recent visit by Allan Sekula; John Barbour on Richard Grayson; Christopher Chapman on Andrew Osborne; Mark Jackson on *Sleepwalker*; Cate Jones on *Black Humour*; *Injection* at The Performance Space—the crisis for artist organisations; David Sequeira looks at selected works from the Adelaide Biennale; PICA's *Hatched* reviewed.

51-55

Music and Sound

Chris Dench asks why Messiaen, why Ligeti? Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Ensemble 24, Darlington School composers, Topology, all in 20th century music concerts. Nicholas Gebhardt on two new books on jazz; radio features compete in Warsaw; a new Nova Ensemble CD and Vikki Riley CD reviews Zonar, Sakamoto and Seraphic.

55

Sport

Jack Rufus relishes sporting clichés and Vivienne Inch wanders off the course into the cultural wasteland of fundraising.

In *RealTime* 27, October-November

- *RealTime* reports MAP
RealTime was the guest publication at Melbourne's first Movement and Performance dance season and symposium. We present extensive commentary plus reviews of Dancehouse, Danceworks, Company in Space, the AICD Awards and the Australian Ballet
- Barbara Karpinski and photographer Heidrun Löhr meet Lydia Lunch
- Edward Scheer on the challenges for Performance Studies
- Sophie Hansen on the role of The Place in British dance culture
- First reports on the Brisbane Festival and Sydney Biennale
- Keri Glastonbury interviews novelist Glenda Adams about her new play for Griffin
- Plus: The Performance Space's *Open Week*, Urban Theatre Project's Harley Strum in Kenya, skadada's new film, Synergy in concert with WA's Nova Ensemble and NT's Drum Drum, Dean Kiley on hypertext genres, reports on the Brisbane and Melbourne Film Festivals, Jo Law on Australian-Asian cultural exchange, Philip Brophy's Cinesonic conference, Darren Tofts on *Mousetrap* and new media issues; and much more.

Performing time, space, race and place

Suzanne Spinner queries *Next Wave* performance

The strictly performance category of the *Next Wave* comprised *The Vacant Plot* season at La Mama of two double bills, *Horizons* and *Kickin' Up Dust*, a double bill of Indigenous theatre, a youth circus project *Taboo* in Footscray and, in the associated program, *Radio City* presented by St Martins Youth Theatre. The theme of *Next Wave* was distance, a tangential theme at the best of times, and it strains the imagination to find it expressed in these disparate works, however two of the most interesting works to emerge, *6 Sided City* at La Mama and *Radio City*, shared some ground and distance of sorts was a feature.

It is difficult to see the guiding curatorial principle behind the performance component of *Next Wave*. One expected the best of the new. Given that *Next Wave* has a two year lead time (and every year Melbourne has the Fringe Festival) the program selection was odd. More than half of these pieces would have sat more comfortably in the Fringe, or even something more open and less demanding than *Next Wave* or the Fringe. They were often first attempts and should not have been headlined in this way. The situation bespeaks the uncomfortable and ambivalent place of this category "performance." In crude terms theatre is not kosher in the *Next Wave* rubric, so what we saw was often nothing more than very basic performance poetry with a bit of music, or unformed and indifferent theatre that had some slides so it somehow qualified as not spoken word and was meant to pass as "more than theatre", to wit performance.

Buried amongst it all was a rare and adventurous new work of great imagination and virtuosity, *6 Sided City*, which appeared at the end of the La Mama season before a poor house, when it warranted the full support and profile that *Next Wave* can offer. In many ways new writers and directors in theatre are already well served at La Mama.

Atkins; in between Tanya Ellis makes cups of tea. As the program notes, Watson is arguably Australia's leading Indigenous storyteller and Atkins is an accomplished didge player (also arguably one of the best) so in what sense they are emerging artists is beyond me. REM describes itself as integrating all of the performing arts into "a vibrant cross cultural cross artform theatre", however this work is so non-theatrical it was distinctly awkward to watch in a theatre. It felt more like an interlude at a conference and needed that sort of interaction with the performers and audience as issues arising from the content might have been elaborated in further discussion. As storytelling and didge playing it was fine, but vibrant cross artform theatre is something else again.

Horizons on the other hand was definitely emerging though not new in form or content. It was a group-devised performance project involving recent graduates and current students of the Indigenous Performing Arts Course at Swinburne University of Technology and directed by Peter Oysten and Jill Romanis. *Horizons* was a well intentioned mishmash of agit prop about the British invasion of Australia, a lounge room scenario of a group of urban Kooris in Melbourne fighting eviction from a group house (with digressions into cameo pieces from the performers' lives in other parts of Australia) plus the obligatory indulgent sing song where everyone could show off their favourite pop impersonations from Elvis to Abba. Not new and innovative theatre by any stretch of the imagination, however it did reveal some performers of potential and some performances in the storytelling vein that were strong and interesting, such as Elliot Maynard's reminiscence about mutton birding in Tasmania.

In watching this double bill I kept recalling the comments made by Rhoda Roberts in launching *The Festival of The*

had a beguiling quality due to the freshness of the performance by Joanna Davidson and the fine playing of Fiona Roake. It was light and dreamy full of girly revelations about love and dreams and devoid of pretension, whereas *Takin' Up Ground*, also a performance in poetry, music and song, was long-winded, indifferently performed, portentous and empty of anything but references to other poets and performers with more insight and originality.

Rear Vision by Theatre Membrane was described as text, music and installation exploring Australian suburbia which sounds au courant enough for *Next Wave* but it was actually embarrassingly old hat theatre with indifferent slides badly projected onto a venetian blind. All 3 pieces ignored the particular space that is La Mama, a profoundly untheatrical response in itself, so it was a welcome relief to watch the fire.



Jason Cavanagh aboard the bus in *Radio City - A Mystery Tour* Duncan Ward

6 Sided City was, however, a work of great originality, consummate art and original insights that introduced a whole swag of exciting new artists. It was a collaboration paying homage to Italo Calvino, a reverie on time and space, and a true hybrid ie an opera. Co-directors Dianne Peters and Edwina Preston were also the composer and librettist. Preston's libretto and narration was taut, poetic and full of interesting ideas about urban design and the growth of cities and Peters' score was original and exciting contemporary music. It was a genuine miniature, a fine jewel that employed the full resources of the genre in an abbreviated form: a narrator, Edwina Preston, a singer, soprano Annika Lindberg, a dancer/choreographer Patrick Cerini (also the designer) and 3 musicians—a violinist, Steph O'Hara, a cellist, Phil McLeod and a harpist, the composer, Dianne Peters.

In *6 Sided City*, La Mama was transformed, every part of the space, every exit and entrance, every possible level was utilised. All are talented new artists with everything to offer, most notably skills and ideas and a passionate commitment to shared vision executed with wit and great flair. I was utterly enthralled and privileged to be at the premiere performance and look forward to seeing more of all these artists. Since the festival, the work has had the second season it so richly deserved, moving to Revolver in Prahran.

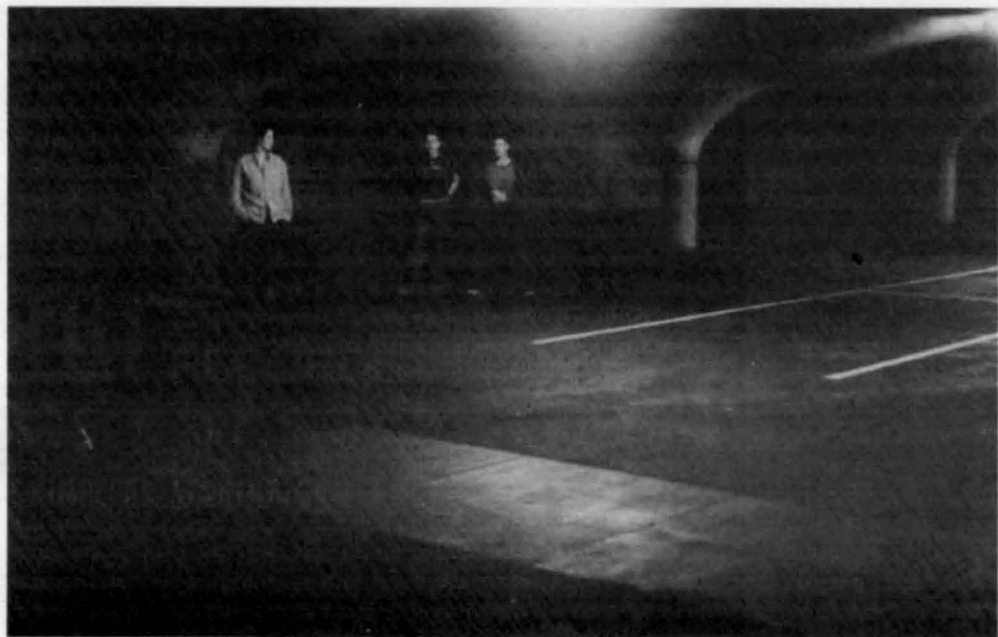
Taboo: a youth multi media project drew on the stories of 30 young people from the inner Western suburbs of Melbourne to

present their concept of the forbidden and was staged at the Melbourne Showgrounds. It showcased the work of 4 key artists—physical director Andrea Ousley, musical director Marianne Permezel, video director Tony Le Nguyen and artistic director Debby Maziarz. The cast of 20 plus performers and band were in the majority young women, which is not surprising given its genesis in Westside Circus, established by Maziarz in 1995 to target the homeless and long term unemployed young women from the high rise housing estates in the area. Maziarz, Ousley and Permezel share a background in the Women's Circus while Le Nguyen is the driving force behind Vietnamese Youth Media and *Taboo's* style and form showed these influences. It was dynamic circus performance with lively original music, stunning theatricality, utilising video projection and lighting to create a fast moving, stylish, sophisticated show.

Together they created a strong mythic story line about the fall from grace—which touched on Eve and the apple, Pandora and the box—and interwove it with the particular stories and experiences of a group from diverse ethnic backgrounds. It utilised all the circus skills—trapezes, slack ropes, fire—and through superb staging and visual effects made everything look as flash and dangerous as possible. *Taboo* was quite spectacular in its level of performance, its tight direction, high energy, sheer speed and the multiplicity of dazzling images; there were no weak performances or longeurs. It was wonderful to see a youth arts project that had clearly been given the resources and hence been able to buy the time and expertise to develop to such a high standard.

Radio City—A Mystery Tour presented by St Martins Youth Theatre was developed by director Caitlin Newton-Broad with 7 young writers and 9 performers. It took the form of a bus tour to two sites around Melbourne to provoke a response to the city. Its strength ultimately lay in the choice of the sites—the underground carpark at Melbourne University and the grandstand at Fitzroy Football ground. En route en bus, we heard radio scenarios and characters joined the bus at various points throughout the city. Underground we were in the dark and felt vulnerable, like displaced people waiting to find out what would happen next. Cars became performers and, like *Duel*, suddenly seemed very malevolent; we wondered how we were going to get out. Later in the grandstand we relaxed taking in the expansiveness of the night sky and the beauty of the city outlined before us; we watched fire dancers out on the oval and listened to nostalgic songs. At the end we had experienced two surprising extremes of the city and the distance between them seemed enormous.

Takin' Up Ground artists Kerry Loughrey, Tom Ball, Jim Gamack, La Mama, May 27 - 31; *Taboo: A Youth Multi Media Project*, Meaklin Pavilion, Royal Melbourne Showgrounds, May 14 - 17 & 21 - 23; *6 Sided City: an Opera*, artists Edwina Preston, Diane Peters, James Cecil, La Mama, May 27 - 31; *Rear Vision*, Theatre Membrane, artists Anna den Hartog, Talei Wolfgram, Sandra Long, Boaz Schacher, Mike Metzner, La Mama, May 20 - 24; *Polaroids and Gramophones*, artists Joanna Davidson, Fiona Roake, La Mama, May 20 - 24; *Horizons and Kickin' Up Dust*, Swinburne Indigenous Performing Arts course, REM Theatre, David Williamson Theatre, Swinburne University of Technology, May 21 - 30, *Radio City*, St Martins Youth Theatre, May 29 - June 7



Sophie Kelly, Hannah Norris and Madeline Hodge in *Radio City - A Mystery Tour*

Duncan Ward

Similarly the youth theatre works are not about new and emerging artists in terms of performers or writers and can only be considered in this way in relation to directors. The texts are group-devised and the performances are by young people who are not emerging from anything other than adolescence and, while not gainsaying their right to express themselves, again there are other banners more appropriate eg *LOUD*.

The double bill of Indigenous theatre, *Horizons* and *Kickin' Up Dust* presented at Swinburne, occupied an ambivalent and uncomfortable place in *Next Wave*. *Kickin' Up Dust*, presented by REM Theatre, is a showcase for storyteller Maureen Watson to relate stories of her life, interspersed with some virtuoso didgeridoo playing by Mark

Dreaming, that it does no service to Indigenous artists not to subject them to the same sort of criticism that is made of non-Indigenous work. However, works like these provoke a response that is outside criticism as they present the performers' own stories and veracity is the only yardstick and it's a given.

While watching many of the offerings in *Vacant Plot*, I was frequently drawn to the perpetual installation that is the La Mama fireplace and the compelling drama of the burning logs for want of anything more interesting happening "on stage", for this season of 4 works (with one notable exception) was an enormous disappointment.

Polaroids & Gramophones was poetry, songs, stories and instrumental music and

Finding the coordinates

Dean Kiley graphs new writing at *Next Wave*

The *Next Wave Festival* theme was Distance, a saleably vague rubric that generated some rococo rhetoric, much fatuous advertorial, and a splendid crockery set of high-gloss print products: my favourites are, respectively, Zane Trow's reverentially-reproduced disconnected jottings on 1998 planning, the hazy hype impeding *FlightPaths* takeoff, and an inexpressibly cute star-chart-style location map.

But I do like a good metaphor, so let's stretch Distance out of shape. Imagine the *Next Wave* literary program as a graph. Performances in theatres, galleries and other venues of performed-text, multimediated-text, art-text, TV-text, etc...all these would be small separate clusters constellating the periphery. Workshops and seminars would be neat trapezoids lined up down the bottom. Issues, trends, practices, histories, genres and so on would form points scattered all across (and sometimes off) the page, like lost co-ordinates. Apparently, the shortest distance between any of these points is a forum. So, solidly in the middle of everything and the centre of nothing, there's a Rorschach smudge called the *Context Writers Day*, May 16 in the Lower Town Hall: a conference by any other name.

The day began (badly) with *Teaching the Writer*, drawing on professional writing courses for teacher and student perspectives. Deakin's Judith Rodriguez seriously misread her audience, patronising us with cartoon parables about bats and elephants, and Ben Zipper banally whined about hypertext as choose-your-own-adventure cyberhype, leaving Philippa Burne to belatedly address substantial pedagogical issues. At least the *Public Poetry* forum stimulated some debate: John Mateer eulogised poetry as a panhistorical universal Esperanto dealing with Life Itself, which collided with Coral Hull's politicised position that poets need professionalisation—preferably with a union and minimum wage—to survive the major publishers' downsizing and the impracticability of self-publishing. Adrian Wiggins, caught unprepared in the crossfire, did a winsome possum-in-headlights impression and concluded that "TV and publishers are your enemy."

While Mark Davis is interviewed briefly in the (excellent) festival catalogue on the topic of media shutout and generational stereotyping, nothing else in the program dealt with the functions or state of media, new or otherwise. Oh, unless you count, and I don't, *Thinking Magazines*, the obligatory how-we-run-them-&-how-to-get-stuff-in

forum on literary journals with myself (*overland*) and Maria Hyland (*Nocturnal Submissions*), sans the hospitalised Peter Minter (*Cordite*).

The 'Spoken Word' and 'Magazine Production' workshops, run by Edwina Preston and Adrian Wiggins respectively, were productive, tautly-organised and effective, as were the Six Pack seminars based on student collaborations in particular TAFE, RMIT and VUT writing courses. These were run in separate dispersed venues, and—while I appreciate the logistics problem—this disjunction between Idea (forums), Practical (workshop) and Learning Praxis (seminars) could have been better incorporated to the program and participation pattern.



Kerry Loughrey and Jim Gamack perform at *Word* at the Continental

Vicki Jones

Context Day performances were similarly corralled in 'interlude' sections, juggling the well-known, the animated, the tedious, the emergent and the misfired. Jim Buck was a highlight, Moira Burke wasn't, David Hornblow was engagingly hilarious and acerbic ("Anatomy of a Heroin Deal or How to Kill Kittens" an audience hit), Dan Disney's reflexive micro-plays were terrific, and Phil Norton moved sinuously from lyric into song, puppetry, soundscape and show. Ania Walwicz gave us a richly-accented refrain-driven breathless reading, spiky with enjambment and close to recitative, like Katherine Hepburn on bad speed. Rosalinda Mercuri played all the parts in her vividly dramatic prose piece, while Frances Tang gave us the quintessential Performance Poet

experience, complete with tin-ear-drum synthesiser, deafening backing-tape, and a coma's worth of clichés. We finally got a few laughs courtesy of Peter Salmon and his deadpan-surreal 19th century epic dealing episodically with Carlo the "moist Cuban revolutionary." All in all, nothing out of the usual nor unusually excruciating.

Where *Context* did badly fail it was via endemic 'conference management' problems of timing, agenda balance, segues, sound, and basic organisation. Session chairs were mostly unprepared (despite good pre-briefing), disorganised, dilatory, accidentally self-promotional, or (as in *Thinking Magazines*) incoherent. Some sessions were painfully elastic-sided, others started absurdly late, others guillotined just when discussion gained impetus. No-one ever seemed to realise the inefficacy of a forum procedure limited to "Questions? Anyone? No? OK." While the launch of *Transcending the Medium* was well stagemanaged and modestly dramatic, the experiment of a *FlightPaths* Radio National simulcast was an unmitigated disaster. Again, this had to do

not only with the static vacuum presented by an empty stage but also with the lack of (ironically enough) context: an abrupt, non-explanatory introduction that gave us no background or thematics. What followed was like an alarm clock with a dysfunctional snooze button. Next-up performers treated it as a set-up opportunity and the audience wandered off.

This diffusion set the tone for the rest of the day. The *Context* 'Contact Centre' on the Town Hall mezzanine level was essentially an assemblage of CWA stalls for the plethora of magazines, small publishers, theatre groups, spoken word groups etc to publicise themselves and sell their wares. By the time the *Text and Context* forum on multi-artform works began, the audience had

dwindled to around 25, outnumbered 2:1 by the Contact Centre, who became so naughty-kid-in-church LOUD that we couldn't hear properly, despite amplification. What I did manage to catch was Chris Gregory, backed by Phil Norton, outlining issues of collaboration, logistics, cross-translation between genre conventions, commercialisation, the collision of design ideas with technical ignorance, and the idiocy of Dale Spender.

As for related art events...the Town Hall installations were cramped but fun, especially Phil Norton's witty postcard-poems and 'Eye Test' (complete with binoculars) and Paul White's intricately textural collages. Other exhibitions needed reminding that 'interactive' isn't a Brownie badge awarded to anything entailing movement-on-screen. So *Transcending the Medium*, to be blunt and punny, didn't. Four TVs, each with a looped video, set up so they faced each other, even when one of the spoken word artists involved is a New Yawker, doth not interactivity make. The best thing about this 'installation' was its setting: The Public Office, as a free/cheap-access venue and workspace hub for the Festival and beyond, is a superbly practical idea from Six Degrees, the group who came up with the cute Location Guide.

The *Next Wave Cordite* issue, entertainingly launched at the close of *Context Day*, is indistinguishable from Issues #1 and #2 except for a cheerfully demagogic mission statement from Kerry Watson (the text co-ordinator for *Next Wave*), an editorial that focuses on the precarious but depoliticised character of new and emerging poetry, and a closer Venn diagram overlap between *Next Wave* participants and *Cordite* contributors. It made for a startlingly good read, densely packed with (consistently engaging) poems from stalwarts like John Tranter through to surprises like Thuy On, laid-out so that well-argued articles, incisive reviews, combative letters and an excellent interview with Dorothy Porter all wound around and through the poetry, so I could read associatively and hypertextually. As the editorial says, it's published "with a jaunty whistle, a timely wink, a keen ear and a pluralistic heart", apt for *Next Wave*.

Let's do the un-expected and return to our graph metaphor for a terse overview: too many dots, not enough lines; too many closed forms, not enough vectors; an overemphasis on the grid rather than the axes of analysis; an atrophy of basic organisational skills and a reluctance to try a gestalt view. The result is still a decent diagram of Writing Now, just not one that explains or does much.

Context: *Next Wave Writers' Day*, Lower Town Hall, Melbourne, May 16

Promiscuous media

Shiralee Saul savours new media at *Next Wave*

Ironically, in a festival exploring the permutations of distance, 1998's *Next Wave Festival* demonstrated the promiscuous intermingling of artforms and the dissolution of traditional barriers between them. With a program comprising more than 100 separate events, *Next Wave* abandoned discrete artform streams in favour of a recognition of the increasingly hybrid and cross-disciplinary nature of contemporary art practice.

Next Wave's art and technology program has consistently provided one of the highlights of the festival, generating high levels of publicity and pulling punters eager to take advantage of the opportunity to actually see new media art for themselves. Though tempting it would be

a mistake to see this year's refusal to replay the artworld apartheid scenario as a symptom of the increasing acceptance of new media into the mainstream contemporary arts world. Most galleries pay the barest of lip service to supporting this and other many new artforms. Perhaps now that most art schools have glossy new multi/new media courses which are already pumping out the graduates, these galleries will be forced to rethink their attitudes and begin to present technologically demanding works as a consistent part of their normal programming.

More pragmatically, the integration meant that one tended to stumble over projects

incorporating new media. Equally, given the geographical dispersion of *Next Wave* events with many in rural Victoria as well as in diverse parts of Melbourne and suburbs, the car-less viewer certainly felt the tyranny of Australian distances. Most of the actual projects, though, concentrated on psychological and emotional distance, producing a strangely melancholic and nostalgic undercurrent as they explored human yearning for closeness and understanding and the impossibility of achieving it.

Company In Space's futuristic installation *I@here, You@there (email order bride)* at Gallery 101, all shiny stainless steel and glass surfaces, assorted techno-gadgets and lonely

reminders of the natural world, was pressed into dual service for a 3-up performance in which there was plenty of technology-mediated looking but minimal contact as the participants remained trapped reflections of each other in a masturbatory pas de deux. *I@here, You@there (email order bride)* contained moments of great poignancy and beauty but was flawed by the logic of the installation layout which at times transformed the performers into product demonstrators showing off the features of one gadget after another. (See also, "I@Here, You@There", *RealTime* 25, page 14)

In his elegant minimalist installation *self remembering—home* in the vaults at Old Treasury (one of the most beautiful and challenging indoor installation spaces in Melbourne) James Verdon exposed his 'self' and the audience in a series of mnemonic loci of sexy surveillance gear, soft-focus video and multilayered digital images dispersed within the chilly shadows of bluestone vaults

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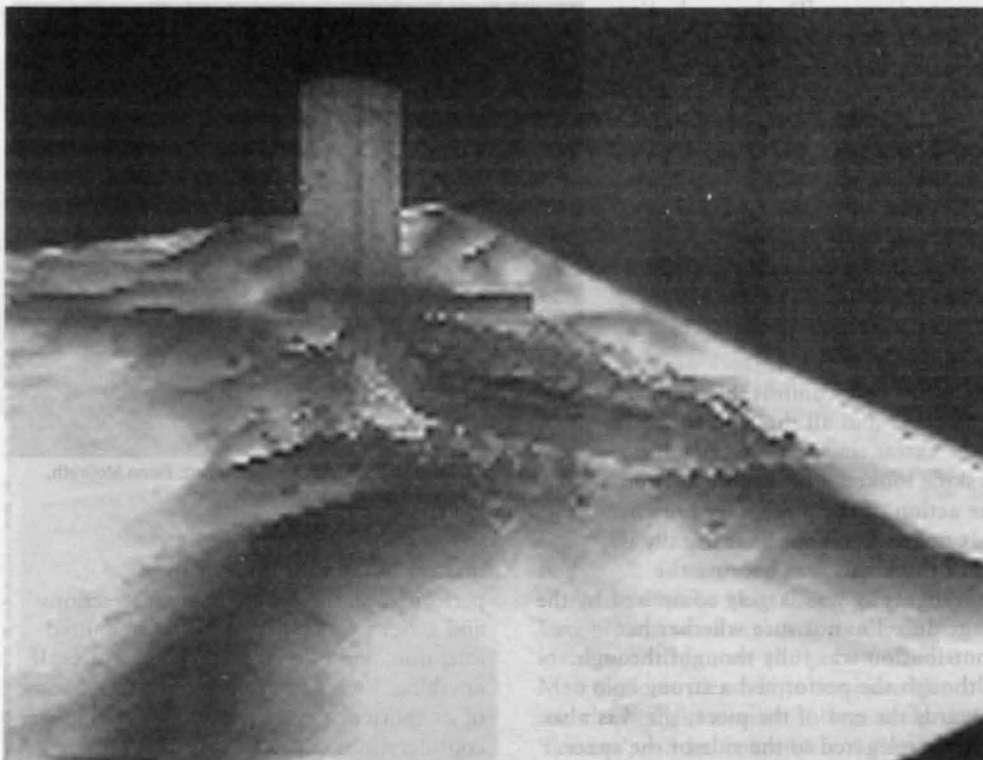
Some place like Sarajevo

Vikki Riley moves into the sound rooms of Next Wave

The compulsion to construct and consume non-narrative sound environments—post ambient, uneasy listening—is back as a group synergistic experience, the local cafes, the disco and anything outside of the lifestyle zone is the ubiquitous multimedia spectacle on and off screen in the neurocined dawn of our lives. Out there it's like KLF's *3am Eternal* whether the World Cup's on or not. More importantly, there's a backlog of recordings, manifestoes and unused good and bad Altered States energies left over from Prog Rock, psychedelica, dub, Music Concrete, 80s Industrial, all that Kraut stuff and an infinity of cinescore tape and found weird shit to be sampled or simulated.

In the official arts world the 'performerless' sound event is fast turning out to be the mythological white room of art's current conceptual fix on the eargasm and all *objets sonique*—conferences, gallery gigs, hobbycore art which 'plays' by itself. At a festival like Next Wave it's the concept for the ubiquitous 'emerging artist' using the new gear. It's hard not ask yourself why you've been summoned there as Ross Bencina takes to the mixing desk to present his lush computer-created piece *Scattered to the Wind*. Bencina downloads a waterfall of sound files which fill out the vacant ornate ceiling of the South Melbourne Town Hall, whizzing around speakers stationed at correct intervals, unleashing surges and bypasses of crystalline lines and washes, as if all thirty of us there, sitting under the bright lights, were in some place like Sarajevo witnessing the last official electroacoustic gala before the siren destroys the heritage, an empty stage on view and the last student alone with the finished opus. A cosmic composition, entrancing and florid with an inner narrative journey, it instantly reminds me of Italian group Goblin or Popul Vuh, Prog Rock era capitulation into the distant Ur garden beyond the speed of light.

James Hullick's *sS@ VvVij* was more head music material, the toxic aggressive metallic disturbances which you hear breeding in Aphex Twin or old Non records. Kathryn O'Neill's *O Presule* was the only piece which moulded the sound into a structure rather than the wizardry of pushing up and around and made into a curt atonal deluge; but remixing Hildegard of Bingen? I believe Eleni Karaindrou, Ann Dudley, Diamanda Galas are three 'female' electronic sound composers who are still alive. Being at this National Academy of Music made me wish I'd seen Pink Floyd when they came to town and set up quadrophonic speakers at Melbourne's



Adam Broinowski and Simon Terrill, *Ant Heaven (Sugar Casino)*

Mitchell Harris

Festival Hall. A macabre remnant of Keating's Creative Nation funding, the Academy's devoted to furthering notions of genius and talent by privileging them with lessons from bigwig European classically trained musicians (Dame Joan Sutherland and so on.) Strange that Next Wave chose to use them as hip venue and eerie given that people like Ross Bencina come out of Latrobe University Music department which taught 20th century music, now being closed down for golf turf management courses.

*e*static*, Terry McDermott's 'international collection of new unpublished electroacoustic works' event, promised to induce a kind of 'ecstasy of communication' and advertised itself with a flier with familiar AMOK/RE Search catalogue Nation lay out, the whole 50s world of Martin Denny and sci-fi crossed with link-up Bridge Festival style pretensions to New York global status proportions, and an overbearing allusion to the spectre of Pierre Schaeffer, the catalogue even footnoting in detail Schaeffereseque terms like 'acousmatic'. The venue is the new Public Office, an ambient conscious space for meeting, doing business, working, taking in a performance event, bar inclusive, oddly situated behind the new Remand Centre. McDermott sits behind a desk with a few helpers and onlookers doing the sound file mix, the rest of us sat in chairs in the half lit

room. A litany of gems, annoyances, drudgeries and perplexities swim around the room, over the lukewarm lattes in people's hands and over their part-stooped heads and polite chatter. We move to lie along the floor, to hear, as my headmusic partner tells me later, the 'endless horizons of destruction' that the piece as a whole is beginning to conjure, the devastating screenal projection unfolding inside, a more appropriate organic and apocalyptic take I decide, as McDermott manages to put through the homogeniser the 30 or so sound artists from Tokyo, Italy, Canada and Brazil. Isolated sounds back to back never sounded so esperanto, or unemotional, invoking a lab studio experiment putting on an audience survey—auteurs in white coats next time please for this line on world electronica.

*e*static* called up a nostalgia for Throbbing Gristle era noise appreciation meets, the sound event as a happening of extreme metal industrial onslaught, the terrordome of perpetual epiphanous statements, prophecies of doom sans the bad drugs and ugly people. Still, there's a seated audience there, something of an anathema to the culture, and overtones of cine-soundtrack media spectacles add to the general air of missed expectation about. Having undergone an association-driven endurance test of the mind you can only leave with an equally lengthy list of guilty responses left unfelt—

am I changed, did it work, did I get excited about the emotive powers of 8 channel diffusion?

Bucket of Blood Hotel by artists Adam Broinowski and Simon Terrill staged in a wood-pannelled unoccupied office showroom space in the city centre offered an entirely other world sound experience. A walk-thru installation series of empty interiors housed in cupboards and connecting unlit rooms mysteriously began as a maze invite but ended up as a living, haunted biosphere of dormant domestic work space, a sound environment Ruin to literally get lost in, with all kinds of sound recordings emitting from lo-fi op shop-bought players embedded in the walls and positioned around the grimy carpeted floors. In the first room three flatbed sculptures; a sugar cube model of an atrophied Casino, ants at times swarming underneath, next to an optic fibre forest and faux lawn bed. Like the Giggie Palace the next room tilted down into darkness to a den of garbled phone message recordings, another in-transit room playing a manifesto leads to a cupboard with a cacophony of Speaker's Corner spoken word tirades, disputes, then an empty room of nothing but a dirty pane rising damp and a manifesto being read—the Sarajevo effect again, this time I suddenly was thinking of Susan Sontag's theatrical settings, her search for the ideal venue. [Sontag directed *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo during the siege—eds.]

At the end, where your ears are now giant microphones and spatialisation is about negotiation of orientating unknown future space, a room opens onto a camera eye device set in a mirrored dressing table, a conceit of 'Do you dare look' at it as the invisible performer, lost in space—it's what everybody wants to be, up close to near silence, what writer Gaston Bachelard calls an 'intimate immensity.' The final porticle found, you're faced with a nest of bees harmoniously whirring and breathing, brought in and out for the duration of the 2-week event everyday by a beekeeper, a mud boiling tape accompanied the live action. *Bucket of Blood Hotel* was unfamiliar residences indeed, an arte povera spin on where to put sound and the poetics of traumatically beautiful theta-waved spaces. When you burst out of its hidden exit, into the light, the sound of other human voices was chillingly fresh, the globes flickered with power.

Next Wave, *Computer Music Concerts*, South Melbourne Town Hall, May 20 - 21; *e*static*, The Public Office, May 22 - 23; *Bucket of Blood Hotel*, Flinders House, May 16 - 30

Promiscuous media

• from previous page

originally intended to protect the monetary assets (and secrets) of a young colonial administration. Exploring questions of subjectivity and surveillance, the work generated a sexual subtext of voyeurism and exhibitionism as viewers spied on each other, swapping gossip—secure in the knowledge that the gossiped about were safely ensconced in another cell—and puzzled out the narrative clues of a self, rendered partial and out of focus by the passage of time and the vagaries of memory. Memory, the private construction of the self through self-surveillance and re-presentation of the past became equated with the social and economic forces, deploying an ever greater range of surreptitious monitoring technologies, which enforce appropriate public self-presentation—identity as a product of context.

@ curated by Kate Shaw was a welcome revisiting of the terrain of video art—which was, as you will remember, going to be the next big thing in the early 80s, but withered through lack of exhibition and critical support. @ firmly positioned video art as a subset of visual art—none of that annoying investment of time of which Robyn McKenzie so vociferously complained at the Binary Code Conference was inconsiderately demanded by interactive media therefore preventing it from being considered an artform. Nosirree. @'s works (by David Noonan, Meri Blazeovski and Leslie Eastman) paid out fast, evoking the alienation endemic to a fast-moving society fragmented by physical and social mobility at the very moment that physical space is being collapsed by global telecommunications. All movement (whether it was Noonan's revisiting of the roadmovie, Blazeovski's elegiac elevator loop or Eastman's movement of light from across the world via video-conferencing to illuminate the corners of 200 Gertrude

Street), but no destination. It seems all roads, URL or virtual, lead nowhere—but the scenery is very pretty and reason enough to start the journey.

Map 1, Garth Paine's most recent investigation of immersive interactivity, eschewed the more common privileging of the visual in favour of encouraging the audience to construct their own cartographies of aural space. Activating the installation's responses by their movement through it, *Map 1* immersed the audience in a rich sonic field which encouraged communication as individuals collaborated to map the area and then 'play' it like an instrument. Rather than represent distance symbolically, Paine's work both activates and collapses space—breaking down the polite 'look but don't touch' of most art work by only springing into full existence when physically triggered by a corporeal presence traversing its parameters, and by encouraging and rewarding communication between the participants. As such, Paine's

work foregoes involvement in continuing assessments of the capacity of technologies to perpetuate existing and create new regimes of social control. Instead it offers an optimistic technophilic vision of a more humane technology which will allow new insights into our world and new ways to express them.

I@here, You@there (email order bride), *Company in Space*, Gallery 101, May 1 - 28; *Map 1*, artist Gary Paine, SPAN Galleries Melbourne, May 5 - 23; self remembering—home, artist James Verdon, Gold Vaults, Old Treasury Melbourne, May 1 - 31; @, curated by Kate Shaw, artists Meri Blazeovski, Leslie Eastman, David Noonan, 200 Gertrude St Fitzroy, May 8 - 30

Shiralee Saul is a freelance curator and consultant specialising in the media arts. She is currently researching navigational strategies for use in on-line and hardspace cultural environments.

Dancing across waves

Philipa Rothfield experiences *Contamination* and *Distance at Next Wave*



Kate Denborough and Gerard Van Dyck in *Contamination*

Although Melbourne's *Next Wave* festival is for emerging artists, not all its performers are all that young or, for that matter, emerging. *Contamination* was a case in point. Produced by Kage Theatre (Kate Denborough and Gerard Van Dyck), elements of this piece had sophistication and polish. Firstly, the design of the space: the theme was white. White costumes, white walls, white light—the lighting beautifully enacted by Ben Cobham whose work I admire. This time, he erected a wall of white plastic road barriers stage left, and gave them a warm, cream glow. Secondly, in a flash of surreal inspiration, Denborough and Van Dyck had their fathers appear in a back room, dressed in cream lounge suits, play chess, read the papers, and offer the odd comment over the length of the piece. Thirdly, the opening:

three performers (Denborough, Van Dyck and Shona Erskine, all highly competent) enter and hang themselves upside down from three meat hooks, twisting and twining with a refined beauty. A hard act to follow but follow it they did, with a series of short pieces consisting of dance, talk, and comedy.

Some of the pieces were lovely, some funny, some not. There was some fine material in the movement. Denborough and Van Dyck are obviously very comfortable with each other and all three performed some entrancing sections. At times, Erskine looked a bit excluded from the action of the piece. Her presence was not as luminous as it usually is, and I think this was because the choreography was largely composed by the Kage duo. I'm not sure whether her contribution was fully thought through. Although she performed a strong solo towards the end of the piece, she was also latterly relegated to the side of the space. Also, the comedy skits were largely between the other two who obviously have the theatre skills and enjoy bouncing off each other.

There were some genuinely funny moments, such as the intervention of Van Dyck's mobile phone, the appearance of the two older men, preparations for some Afro-Funk groove, and a Meatloaf impersonation to the repetitions of a drum machine (the music was skilfully created and managed by Garth Skinner). Other cameos were not to my taste, dependent as they were upon our

laughing at ungainly representations of suburban, working class people.

Contamination was a rich work, with vivid moments and kinetic finesse. Structurally, I don't know what the whole piece was 'about' but I'm not sure that



Damien Hinds, Viviana Sacchero, Helen Grogan, Fiona McGrath, Elise Peart, Emma Fitzsimons and Zoe Scoglio in *Distance, Be Your Best*

matters. Within the hour or so of performance, there were many interactions and actions which demanded a committed attention, and offered aesthetic pleasures. If anything, I would have preferred to see some of its shorter moments developed into longer considerations.

Whereas *Contamination* was not a work of emerging but emerged practitioners, *Distance, Be Your Best* was jam-packed with young artists with a horizon of future work. A collaboration between Danceworks (director Sandra Parker) and Stompin Youth Dance Company (director Jerril Rechter), *Distance* brought together two groups of young people from the two sides of the Bass Strait. Indeed, the slowly modulated video shown on the back wall had its dancers tread both beaches of this rough and stormy expanse.

The work began with the two groups of dancers at opposite ends of a very big concrete hall. Slowly, slowly, they worked towards each other, in time, weaving, threading, assimilating and finally, separating. Clothed in silver, red and grey, these vibrant movers performed for well over an hour. Their movements simple, dancery and well-executed, they looked comfortable in themselves and with each other.

One of the themes was isolation, both urban and semi-rural. The choreography was such that a rich texture of singular but linked movement was established and maintained, conveying a sense of autonomy (many bodies working independently). Towards the latter half of the piece, a series of duets transpired...washing in and out like the sea. Up the back, two women danced solos (or was it a duet?) in front of video projections. And predictably, the two groups finally regained their distinct identities. If this was a work about isolation and distance (certainly its conditions of production bespeak geographic separation), then its participants did not look the worse for it. There is something refreshing about seeing a lot of young people perform with integrity and vigour. Perhaps it has to do with the constructive effects of a collaborative project—one that ultimately defeats the alienation and isolation that formed the initiating theme of the piece.

Contamination, Kage Physical Theatre, Karyn Lovegrove Gallery, May 22 - 31; *Distance, Be Your Best*, Danceworks and Stompin Youth Dance Company, VCA School of Art, The Unallocated Space, May 2

Philipa Rothfield lectures in Philosophy at La Trobe University and is editor of *Hysteric, Body, Medicine, Text*. Her most recent dancework was *Logic*, shown in *Mixed Metaphor* at Dancehouse in July.

New art zones

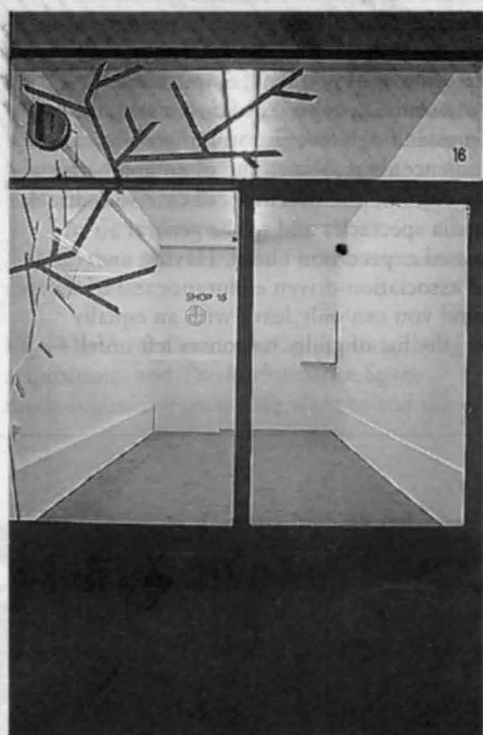
Zara Stanhope journeys through the Grey Area at *Next Wave*

...so far—a concise and eloquent connotation for a series of collaborative exhibitions created for this year's *Next Wave* festival in Melbourne during the second half of May. 'So far and yet so near' is the type of aphorism that could be extrapolated from the title, the potential synergism of partnerships—the most dynamic collaborations seeming to be made in either heaven or hell.

There's the suggestion of fruitful co-existence, endurance or challenges met in the phrase 'so far, so good.' Similarly, to 'have come so far' indicates tenacity in travelling a sizeable distance, to have journeyed across environments and encounters culminating in rich experiences or recognition of a sense of achievement.

The curators of the 4 exhibitions comprising ...so far at Melbourne's Grey Area Art Space, Kim Donaldson and Emma Woolley are neighbours, a circumstance being so characteristically Australian it should almost be apocryphal. With 'distance' being the theme of the 1998 *Next Wave* Festival (its mission to address the relative spaces between methodologies of work, geographical location, cultural and gender differences), Donaldson and Woolley's geographical proximity stimulated a dialogue broaching the separateness of individual careers and creative practices.

With partnerships between 3 of their peers and the alliance between Donaldson and Woolley, a series of 4 exhibitions were created for this CBD shopfront space. By pairing an established and a younger practitioner, the exhibitions had the potential for drawing artists out of familiar territory toward spaces of connectivity and dialogue.



Kim Donaldson and Emma Woolley, ...so far

Sue Dodd and Jane Trengove are both cat owners. *Peking George Chin Chin* confronted the habitual patterns of communication between girl and beast—cats' eyes and human calls. The windows of Grey Area were papered over with fake cat fur and viewers peered voyeuristically through two peepholes into the eyes of each cat defiantly staring back. We could recognise those feline gazes; brassy, devilish, the hunter who suddenly relaxes into a purring soft toy. The accompanying soundtrack repeated our familiar and inane attempts at dialogue with these kingly beasts: "Here puss, puss, puss."

The making of new work was integral to the project's directive of assuming degrees of joint responsibility. Monochrome images by Colin Duncan and David O'Bryan faced each other across the space in *Blur*. O'Bryan's large scale black and white photograph depicted a woman on a lounge room floor, probably resting after exercising. We look at her, she glances at us but we have no idea who she is, her personality, her life story, her relationship to this former arcade shop turned artspace. The ovoid forms of Colin Duncan's airbrushed painting are minimal but image an abstract slice of life—a much enlarged sample from a DNA graph. Out of the flux of possibilities arising in the juxtaposition of these two works, notions of individuality, portraiture and genetic and psychological mapping start to cohere.

Viewers could engage with the conjunction of sensuous experience and conceptual content in Bianca Hester and Jan Nelson's *Sync*. Faced with Hester's Super 8 projection of the syncopated rhythm of cars driving across a jointed road bridge, a range of associations came into play. Travel, boredom, duration, passage or environmental degradation were subsumed in the repetitious staccato of the film but interrupted by another persistent and unsynchronous sound emitting from Nelson's video monitors. With screens inaccessibly facing the wall, viewers contorted their necks to gain a glimpse of what appeared to be bodies in a martial arts roll, in a rapid loop. For viewers identifying and juxtaposing sounds and images, the works proposed allusive connections across the mutual space.

Like Dodd and Trengove, Kim Donaldson and Emma Woolley took advantage of the glazed facade of Grey Area. A schematic tree, made from lengths of hardware pine, parasitically climbed across walls and window. Lying forlornly on the carpet was a lost or deciduous bough of *Creeper*. For those who initially imagined

the piece as having come unstuck, realisation that its placement was intentional was to be made aware of our viewing assumptions. The stray branch was intentional; nature disposing of redundant 'dead wood', the arborist's pruning or the failed black sheep or prodigal son. The associative nature of the work was reinforced by the references to *Black Death* in the catalogue, but visually the comic/tragic nature of *Creeper* was strategically understated.

While career collaborations of the likes of Gilbert and George or Komar and Melamid are not for most people, the opportunity to position a practice in relation to another's way of working, to negotiate a larger endeavour, can be a stimulant for both artists and audiences. That a series of exhibitions could be germinated by contact over the backyard fence is an encouraging sign of communication in a time when neighbours are often strangers to each other. Although one of the objectives of *Next Wave* as a biennial festival of young and emerging artists is the encouragement of mentoring, collaborations such as ...so far offer room to step beyond unilateral relations and accustomed practices in the generation of productive reciprocal dialogue. For artists like Donaldson and Woolley or Dodd and Trengove, who "stepped sideways" new artistic and professional zones were explored. The extent to which one is willing to shift practice determines how much is gained from collaborative experience and the distance travelled—whether near or ...so far.

...so far, curators Kim Donaldson & Emma Woolley; *Peking George Chin Chin* May 12 - 16; *Blur* May 19 - 23; *Sync* May 26 - 30; *Creeper* June 2 - 6, Grey Area Art Space, Melbourne

Zara Stanhope is Assistant Director at Monash University Gallery, Melbourne.

An unexpected meal

Rachel Kent tastes *Bad Rice* at Next Wave

Bad Rice...fooling the Gods represents one of over 100 offerings in the 1998 Next Wave Festival for emergent artists and artforms. Curated by artist and writer Hiram To, a former resident of Brisbane who lives in Hong Kong, it comprises works by a group of Hong Kong-based artists and one Australian.

Bad Rice does not fall into the trap of attempting to represent one distinctive Hong Kong Chinese aesthetic. Rather, as To states, it "seeks to puncture such expectations of cultural consumption." He explains, "In pre-1997 handover Hong Kong, many of the packaged art exhibitions that travelled overseas have either been lauded as 'representing or grappling with a Hong Kong identity', or sold and promoted as 'a celebration of the strength and uniqueness of cultural consumption'."

Bad Rice presents an array of works, in diverse media, which play upon stereotypical notions of what constitutes contemporary art in Hong Kong today. Developed in response to the festival's curatorial theme of 'distance', it explores ideas relating to geographical and, more specifically, personal identity. To's interest in *Bad Rice* is in the ambivalence of identity, both cultural and sexual, and the grey areas that fall outside conventional constructions of "Asian-ness." Participating artists exist outside of the art institutional "mainstream", in To's words, while themes are frequently of a culturally "problematic" nature.

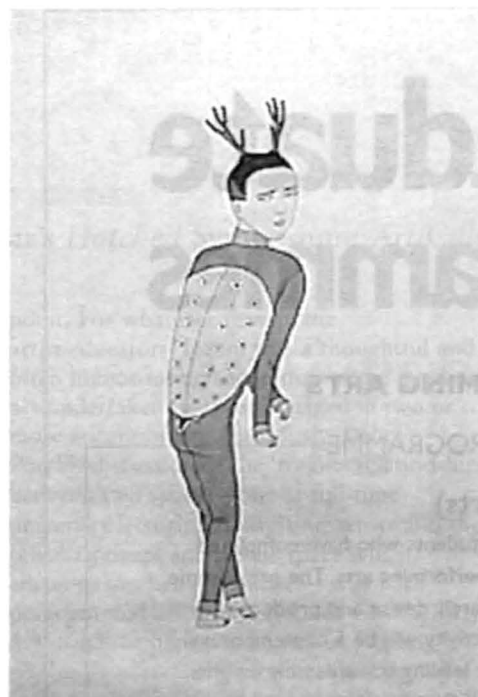
Ideas relating to sexuality, desire,

perversion and illicit behaviour are recurrent in works by Wilson Shieh Ka-ho, Patrick Lee Chee-fong and Kary Kwok Ka-chee. Wilson Shieh explores ideas about sexual expression in a delicate suite of erotic paintings on silk, in which tiny male caricatures masquerade in fishnet stockings and lipstick. Shieh's works combine the exquisite and the perverse with considerable success, making them one of the highlights of the exhibition. Patrick Lee explores issues relating to gay male sexuality in Hong Kong via images of a young hustler,



Vera Chan and Cheung King Hung Vicki Jones

Ah Keung, while photographer and performance artist Kary Kwok presents the viewer with a group of large format photographs depicting himself in costume. There is a strong element of camp in Kwok's photographs, public and private personas converging in a sequence of constructed narratives. Kwok's photographs question the stability of personal and gendered identity, their overt theatricality contrasted against the



Wilson Shieh Vicki Jones

artist's semi-naked and inherently vulnerable body.

Artists Phoebe Man Ching-ying and Jo Law present works relating to female identity, both private and public. Phoebe Man explores ideas about feminine identity and the body in a series of large sculptural 'flowers', entitled collectively *A Present for her growth*, which are constructed from sanitary napkins and dyed red egg shells. Dispersed across the gallery floor, Man's surreal flowers defy taboo with their references to womanhood and menstruation. Jo Law, who was born in Hong Kong and presently lives in Perth, instead explores media depictions of women in a kinetic piece made with a revolving turntable, angled mirrors and wall projections intercut with fragments of text.

Duo VC and KH (Vera Chan and Cheung King Hung) have collaborated to produce an

installation comprising a grey rubber welcome mat with humming tea-trolley and cups. Incised into the mat is the question "Shall we dance?", its invitation reiterated by the jiggling of the two cups upon their saucers. While references to the world of film and musicals are obvious in the work, a more indirect reference to Hong Kong's new relationship with mainland China is also perhaps implied. On a different note, Choi Yan-chi's photographic documentation of high-school desktop graffiti reveals a world of pubescent fantasy, desire and speculation. Yan-chi's work destabilises commonly held perceptions of Chinese children as hardworking and studious, revealing an adolescent subculture in which swear-words, cartoons, and references to popular culture and sex are prevalent.

The inclusion of Brisbane artist Scott Redford in *Bad Rice* alongside participating Hong Kong artists seems somewhat incongruous at first glance. The only non-Chinese artist and permanent Australian resident within the exhibition, Redford has produced a large wall work which states in bold capitals that "KEANU IS EURASIAN." Part of an ongoing body of work by the artist inspired by contemporary male film stars, Redford's statement confounds the standard definition of Hollywood superstardom as light-skinned and western in origin.

Bad Rice...fooling the Gods is timely in terms of Hong Kong's recently changed political situation but also, more pertinently, in its exposure of clichés and stereotypes that inform common perceptions of Chinese culture. By presenting subversive work that exists beyond the mainstream of artistic production, To's exhibition highlights the ambiguities of cultural and sexual identity in Hong Kong today.

Bad Rice...fooling the Gods, Span Galleries, Melbourne, May 5 - 23

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The brave and the brutalised

Sarah Miller discusses visual arts education from the perspective of this year's *Hatched Symposium: Art/Culture/Media/Education*

The *Hatched: Healthway National Graduate Show* is probably one of the exhibitions I've enjoyed producing most over my time at PICA. This annual survey of recent graduates (BA, BA Hons and sometimes MA) from university art schools around Australia—whilst obviously not all encompassing—covers a lot of bases, from painting to multimedia as we like to say. As the participating artists are selected by their respective institutions, we never quite know—despite copious correspondence, description and documentation—just what we're going to get when we open those packing crates which have come from as far afield as the James Cook University in Townsville and the University of Tasmania. And it's a lot of fun—if a wee bit stressful—installing the work of around 50 artists.

Hatched is the perfect rebuttal to those tedious, mean-minded and tendentious critics who take up enormous amounts of newspaper space attacking the art school system. What is obvious—from *Hatched* at least—is the opportunity to celebrate the idiosyncratic, the speculative and the imaginative in tandem with the skilled and the critical. It seems that these graduates emerge from their respective institutions armed not only with a variety of technical competencies but also with critical/creative and investigative skills—OK not all of them, but overall the calibre of work is high.

Nevertheless, it would be fair to say that over the past decade, and particularly since the amalgamation of art schools into the university system, arts education (both creative and liberal) has been under increasing attack. Such attacks have been compounded by the restructuring (downsizing) of the university sector and the reintroduction of fees. It is argued that universities (including their poor art school cousins) have never suffered so much. They are ridiculed in the press; sneered at by politicians and dismissed by industry (the real world) and are under increasing pressure to perform in an economically rational climate (ie without any money). Their performance is to be measured, of course, both in terms of student intake (numbers); and student output (employment) understood less as vocational, which is after all divinely inspired, than in terms of jobs, real jobs, paying real taxes.

This is the brave new world in which we find ourselves. Students pay and, according to current political wisdom, what you pay for, you value. It all sounds perfectly reasonable until you realise that students, having a brain or two, have that one worked out: having paid for it, they expect to get it. That's the contract in a user-pays world. I give you the money, you give me the goods—in this case, a degree or higher degree and, yes, thank you very much, I expect a high distinction, first class honours and probably a postgraduate scholarship as well. This segues nicely into current university conditions. If a department or school is to be funded on the numbers of students—now known as 'clients'—it attracts, then we'll take all the clients we can get. And we certainly won't want to fail them (particularly not the overseas clients because they pay more) because then we might lose our WASUs (weight associated student unit) or EFTSUs (whatever they are), which is after all how we measure our fiscal worthiness and what other kind of worthiness is there after all?

These issues and many more have for the past 7 years formed the *raison d'être* of PICA's *Hatched Symposium* which accompanies the *Hatched: Healthway National Graduate Show*, an annual survey of recent graduates from Australian universities. In the 5 symposia I have put

together, the aim has been to achieve some recognition of the ways in which the professional and educational arts worlds overlap, and the many and various issues that we all have to deal with. At times, this has been a little like trying to convince people of the relationship between sport and politics. Nevertheless I persevere because I profoundly believe that art is integral to the world it inhabits and, as such, engages with the world, whether it will or not. Consequently the forums we have undertaken have addressed everything from cultural policy (Professor Fazal Rizvi and Francesca Cubillo Alberts) to racism (Dr Ian McLean and Dr David McNeill), research within the university art school system (Professor Geoff Parr), hybridity (Brenda Croft, William Yang and Noelle Janaczewska), the impact of digital technologies (Nola Farman, Amanda McDonald Crowley), history and the environment (Ross Gibson), censorship (Jay Younger) and studio practice (Bernice Murphy, Jon Cattapan, Su Baker, Julie Dowling) and much, much more. Overwhelmingly, two things have emerged.

Firstly, there is no area with which artists and art-making cannot engage meaningfully. Secondly, the decline in the morale and confidence of artist/educators over an extended period is now a given. Artist educators, as in any other area of the arts or education, are overstretched and overworked. Their accountability and workloads tend to increase in inverse proportion to budget cuts and on top of that, they are alienated within their own institutions.

Plus ça change. Writing in the last issue of *RealTime* on the outcomes of the Australia Council forum, "Are there too many arts graduates", I cited, somewhat dismissively, comments by the recently retired Director of the WA Academy of Performing Arts, Dr Geoff Gibbs, who claimed that the fundamental difference between universities and art schools was that the former were about the intellect and the latter were about imagination. Whilst I would still argue that Dr Gibbs' comments were overly simplistic, there is no doubt that he did touch on a functional reality that affects the way art schools operate within universities. It is a reality that is lived out daily in terms of available resources, funding and respect for diverse knowledge. The classic instance is in the failure of university art schools to attract postgraduate research funding. Art schools claim that universities are incapable of respecting or even recognising the calibre of their research or even that it is research. University managements, on the other hand, find it hard to see anything remotely resembling research in the so-called creative arts. Creative practice is not typically regarded as research although the fight goes on to have original creative work (a novel for instance or an exhibition or a performance season) rated at least as highly on the academic scale as a research project on the coloured toothbrush most likely to encourage children to clean their teeth. The issues are various and differ widely across art forms which is another of the reasons (given their different histories within the tertiary education sector) why the Australia Council forum was unable to come to terms with many of the issues at stake.

For some reason, this year's *Hatched Symposium* reflected a tentative optimism which, given the current climate, seemed nothing short of miraculous. Perhaps McKenzie Wark's keynote address, "Art/Culture/Media/Education", in suggesting that it was time to recover the initiative in conceptualising these terms for the future, provided an appropriate starting

point. For whatever reason, the artist/educators' forum was a thoughtful and often humorous consideration of the juggling act undertaken by those engaged in two or more vocations simultaneously. Debra Porch's discussion of the 'fragile' relationship between two spaces—one of full-time university lecturing to aspiring artists and the other a private and public space which encompasses her art practice—was both poignant and affirming. Rodney Glick's witty performative paper, "The Act of Juggling", selected 5 objects for juggling: the burning torch (or brilliant academic career), a razor sharp axe (a rigorous art practice), an over-ripe rockmelon (his public art commissions), a bunch of sunflowers (differing community and family engagements) and finally the operating chainsaw (or the task of successfully administering and financing an empire)! It was quite an act. Paul Moncrieff addressed the pleasures of achieving the seemingly impossible whilst Vivienne Binns took a somewhat different but nonetheless engaging trip through the book she is undertaking as an artist and teacher with theorist and art historian Gordon Bull.

Other speakers were invited to address the always emotionally and intellectually fraught sites of art criticism. While Sarah Follent of *Eyeline* magazine provided a thoughtful, fascinating and useful overview of both the philosophical and practical issues pertaining to small specialist art journals, Kevin Murray

explored—among other things—the prospects of online criticism. He asked whether, given the democratic aspirations of cyberspace, we might well be looking to online facilitators or moderators as opposed to the old authorial concept of the critic. It was however, the newly appointed and in his own terms—very junior—midweek critic for the *West Australian*, Robert Cook, who brought the house down with his witty and ironically self-deprecating paper on the trials and tribulations of swimming in the mainstream.

I dunno. If these speakers, who have occupied individually and severally the spaces of student, artist, educator, writer and curator are anything to go by, then it seems to me that arts education in this country is in incredibly healthy shape. Some days I don't think so but perhaps that's why events like *Hatched* are so important. In a climate where nothing is as certain as ongoing funding cuts to the arts and education sectors, the sheer energy, commitment and diversity of formal, conceptual, expressive and physical processes is critical in reminding us—without romanticising the situation—of the persistence and power of art-making and the value—not simply fiscal—of an education in the arts.

Hatched: Healthway National Graduate Show: Co-ordinator, Katie Major; Hatched Symposium: Art/Culture/Media/Education, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts: June 19 - 20

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Grading the making of art

Phillip Kent reports on the standing of visual arts education

Visual arts as a university discipline has been in constant contention since art schools were absorbed into Australian universities during the late 1980s. Indeed the very name of the discipline under review—visual arts—is an indication of the problems studio-based art practice has faced since its submergence within the university.

The problems of this adjustment are evidenced by the ongoing quest to find an appellation with the right resonance within the university environment, hence visual arts is increasingly being replaced by the term 'fine arts' (my own institution made this change in 1997). Subsequently, visual arts' annexation of fine arts, a label which traditionally in Australia referred to studies in art history, has forced a number of what were once fine arts departments to rename themselves, frequently opting for 'art history and theory' (the University of Sydney's Department of Fine Arts underwent such a transformation in 1997).

This issue of nomenclature is part of the quest to legitimise the study of visual arts within universities, and brings the term fine arts into alignment with accepted practice in the United States (the western tertiary-education system that has the longest tradition of including studio-based art practice amongst its university disciplines). For the remainder of this article I will refer to studies that are assessed primarily on the basis of the creation of a work of art as 'fine arts.'

The positioning of fine arts within universities has been discussed repeatedly in Australian art and cultural journals over the last decade. One of the first to write on this issue was John McDonald in *The*

Independent Monthly (IMB Publishing Pty Ltd, Surry Hills, March 1991). McDonald's main concerns were the problems associated with fine arts becoming a university discipline and the subsequent effect this might have upon the making of art. He begins with the premise that art schools in universities and art-history departments are "failing to produce artists and art writers of quality." The reason for this sorry state?—art theory, or more specifically art theory reliant on French post-structuralism (his particular bête noir is Jean Baudrillard).

Such theories, he posits, produce "art world zombies", students who have been "ground down by their lecturers" who McDonald refers to as "aging hulks of 60s radicalism." Art history departments are faulted for not teaching enough "art history", by which McDonald seems to mean art of various periods such as the Renaissance and the Neo-Classical age. Art schools (fine arts departments), he argues, give too much emphasis to "professional development" which produces students more adept at compiling curricula vitae than making art. Furthermore, such an education props up an art world based on grant writing and institutional funding from organisations like the Australia Council, which in turn has led to unbridled nepotism. Moreover, art theory has produced artists who spout "mind-numbing jargon" and immunised "students against aesthetic experience."

This continues to be the main form of faultfinding levelled against fine arts within a university structure. There are problems with these criticisms, however, if only on a percentage basis, since art theory/history usually constitutes a mere 20-25 percent of a

fine arts BA. Most fine arts curricula in universities still introduce undergraduate students to a wide range of media and students only tend to focus intensely upon one area from their second year onwards (although this broad spread is increasingly difficult to maintain as the number of media has expanded to include more recent arrivals such as animation and multimedia). Still, most fine arts undergraduates exit university having a wide knowledge of a number of media and sufficient skills appropriate to their chosen expertise. Furthermore, as a provider of some art-history/theory components of a fine arts degree, I'm always struck by the number of students who gain high marks for their art-history/theory and also score high grades for their studio work, and vice versa.

The BA (Fine Arts) is also criticised for not equipping students with the usual skills associated with a generic Bachelor of Arts, such as being verbally proficient and having a command of the written language. These skills used to ensure that BA graduates from disciplines as diverse as sociology and English literature could find employment as clerks and teachers. These skills, however, were never expected from art-school students, but have always been required from university BA graduates. The issue here is expectation and fulfilment.

McDonald and later critics who have waded into the fine arts-in-university mire (see in particular Alan Lee, "Art schools and academe", *Art Monthly Australia*, No. 86, February 1996) note that if the aim of the BA (Fine Arts) is to produce artists, then it has failed miserably. In part these criticisms are due to fine arts academics' desire to have a fine arts specific degree. The BA (Fine Arts) is promoted as a vocational degree. A BA (Fine Arts) implies that it will produce artists; this is not the case, however, with a generic BA—no one expects an English major to be a novelist. While the BA (Fine Arts) continues to be a vocational degree it will always suffer from these attacks. (Interestingly, many BA [Fine Arts] graduates, as with other students with discipline-specific BAs, have come to realise that the discipline handle on their degree can work against gainful employment, and drop it when applying for jobs. Yet it also has to be admitted that students prefer degrees professing a specific discipline, they only see it as a possible hindrance upon entering the job market).

Many of these issues regarding the skills and knowledge components of a fine arts degree cluster around debates concerning what constitutes fine arts research. These debates have become especially potent in

respect to the research component of post-graduate fine arts degrees. Some have argued that artists have always researched and that no work of art can be created without research. Following from this, it is argued that the written component of a Fine Arts MA or PhD should not be a thesis but rather an exegesis which "through words...explains the [art] work and puts it into context" (Peter Hill, "Is there a doctor in the art school?", *Art Monthly Australia*, No. 84, October 1995). Others have argued, however, that an exegesis does not constitute post-graduate work—"no one produces a PhD thesis and then goes on to produce an exegesis that tells the examiners just how good or important the thesis is." (Alan Lee, "Art schools and academe", *Art Monthly Australia*, No. 86, February 1996) Recently these debates have re-emerged in the pages of *Art Monthly Australia* concerning fine arts professional doctorates.

I believe that this problem could be easily solved if Doctorates of Creative Arts, rather than PhDs, constituted the highest fine arts post-graduate qualification. It seems likely that if PhDs in the creative arts become common, then the traditional PhD will be renamed. A scenario similar occurred when MAs by course-work commenced in Australian universities, many of the 'sandstones' renamed their traditional Masters of Arts by thesis only as a Masters of Philosophy (this also occurred at Oxford). Although having said this, I should also note that recently a number of British universities have begun to offer a MPhil in Fine Arts/Visual Arts (eg The University of Kent at Canterbury). While surveying international comparisons it should also be remembered that in the United States the MFA is the highest post-graduate degree awarded in fine arts.

Issues of research go to the heart of what criteria of assessment is used when grading a work of art. This is an area which fine arts educators have never satisfactorily addressed, and until they do, will haunt fine arts in its quest to become a legitimate university discipline (the continuing illegitimacy of fine arts is evidenced by the refusal of the Department of Employment, Education, Training & Youth Affairs, and its attendant research-funding arm, the Australian Research Council, to recognise much fine arts output and research). These hurdles will not be cleared until fine arts educators precisely articulate what determines a good work of art and clearly expound the criteria of assessment they use to evaluate art.

Phillip Kent is an art and architectural lecturer at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean.

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Troubleshooting

Steven Maras explores skilling, interdisciplinarity and capital M media in Communications and Media Studies

A series of recent articles in the Higher Education Supplement of *The Australian* have once again raised the problem of skilling in Communications and Media, and its status in an academic context. Behind the 'boom' rhetoric surrounding the growth of Communications and Media in this country, and despite at least 20 years of debate about theory and practice, what we can call 'the skilling problem' calls for attention as insistently as ever—especially in the area of digital media.

By way of definition, the skilling problem has to do with instilling competency in students, in particular 'media' and 'communications' skills, however they may be defined. The definition of skills is a central issue. As a media educator, for example, a key aspect of my job is troubleshooting. This involves working in computer labs with minimal technical assistance, surrounded by students working at different 'speeds'.

If things are going well, students are undemanding. If the technology is playing up, I can expect numerous calls for help. With tricky problems, 'help' involves assuming control of the computer, and rectifying the situation as soon as possible. At this point, the student usually steps back from the machine, or has a break. Recently, however, my assumptions about this scene were challenged when a student commented, "That looks like a really useful skill." While troubleshooting is part of my own stock of tools as a teacher, crucial to assisting students, I had not considered using these moments to bring troubleshooting into the curriculum.

Anxiety about the skilling problem raises important questions about the definition of skilling, and the links between Communications, other areas of arts practice, and Humanities thinking. Particular modes of skilling can place these links in jeopardy, especially through segmentation of the production process. There is a tendency to think about skilling in Communications as an activity with its own unique set of procedures, concepts and truths, following its own industrial imperative, and with few links to other media or arts contexts. This tendency can in turn feed into an idea of Communications as something that stands detached from other kinds of artistic, technical and theoretical practice.

There are perhaps traces of this phenomenon in the name change of the Sydney Intermedia Network to dLux media/arts. One of the arguments supplied for the change was that developments in communications had given 'network' a different meaning (eg a mobile phone network). The assertion of media/arts in the new name can be read as a gesture against a particular image of communications. Similarly, as a Humanities academic it is

worrying to watch Communications become detached from the (media) arts, or the Humanities, and connected instead to, say, electronic commerce, or information systems.

Yet, what if one of the causes of this detachment was the skilling problem, and its baggage? What if skilling happened differently? The experience of helping establish a Communications degree at the University of Western Sydney (Hawkesbury) caused me to question the development of Communications, and the parameters laid down for training in that area.

Disciplinary, transdisciplinary, and 'non-academic' disciplines

Rather than succumb to the education-industry dichotomy—the struggle between 'professional training and critical studies' that typifies many Communications programs—it is possible to displace these dualities by examining the disciplining effects of institutions (including our own), industry, and the professions. According to this view, 'the industry' is a gathering of disciplines, formed in a broader disciplinary field, that should be approached in the spirit of transdisciplinarity. A practical example of this approach relates to what are sometimes known as 'production subjects': the problem of how to situate video and multimedia subjects in relation to one another is not simply a problem of connecting two practical areas, but of recognising the disciplinarity of these areas, and of negotiating their passage through the academic domain.

The question of the disciplinary status of traditionally 'non-academic' media production subjects is often elided in the university, particularly when coupled to notions of training for industry. It is one thing to construct inter-disciplinarity in the academic domain, but how does inter-disciplinarity apply to a traditionally 'non-academic' discipline like video? Production subjects represent an existing and long term disciplinary problem internal to many Communications programs, usually expressed in terms of a chasm between 'production' and 'analysis' (eg the divide between media production and screen studies).

But clearly what we've designated as non-academic disciplines can be rigorous in an academic sense. Production subjects can, in liaison with others, trace a complex interaction between audio-visual literacy, practice, the digital, genre, words and bodies, in a theoretically informed way. Production subjects need not be about setting up video and multimedia as discrete domains, but exploring the in-between of these disciplines. Two subjects I have been involved with are worth mentioning here.

A subject such as *Multimedia Communication* can become a lens through

which the ambitions of multimedia can be examined, as well as a vehicle for questioning different models of communication. A subject like *Transdisciplinary Video* can take up the problem of disciplinarity by questioning video as an essential entity, and instead seeing it as being marked by and within a range of other disciplines (Broadcasting, Cinema, Sound, the Digital, Painting). Both subjects, along with others, can collaborate in an extended conception of multi- and mixed media communication that disturbs the conventional segregations between different media. This approach would go beyond the usual deterministic exploration of the 'impact' of technological change, or 'digital media'.

I would suggest that accepted categories such as the 'capital M Media' are themselves part of the problem. New practices have brought into question the way in which the category 'Media' gathers together a field and flattens out a diverse ensemble of practices. Today, we can no longer be certain about what we mean by media even if increased reporting of the media by the media masks this uncertainty to some extent.

Non-linear digital editing provides an example of the ambiguity of media. In the *Media 100* digital editing system, media relates to the partitioning of the supplementary hard drives necessary to deal with large video files. (Thus a 17 gigabyte drive is partitioned into 4 x 4 GB media plus one other.) This is very different from conventional understandings of media as a channel, and marks an interpenetration of artistic and technical ideas.

This use of media gives rise to new understandings of the term. Media is referred to as a block, in a broader process of construction. In a different sense, media is seen as a material you work with (or allocate) to achieve an effect.

The tendency to use the plural form 'media' to designate a singularity emerges, in my view, out of a digital understanding of forms, where digital files can be articulated in a range of formats for presentation. There is sense in this use of the plural, in that it highlights the way media is being redefined as a multiplicity. But this conception runs at odds to capital M media, with its relation to a homogenising mass. This makes the conventional understanding of media problematic in ways that strike at the core of Media Studies.

Philosophy/conceptual practice

Implicit in the idea that traditionally non-academic disciplines can be accommodated within interdisciplinarity is an affirmation of different forms of conceptual practice—that is, an acknowledgement of *diversity* on the level of conceptual practice.

What is referred to as 'transdisciplinarity' has to do with the interaction and interference between different disciplines and conceptual practices. It is worth elaborating on this idea of conceptual practice in more depth. In Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy?* (Columbia University Press, 1994), philosophy is defined as the creation of concepts. In Deleuze's *Cinema 2*

(University of Minnesota Press, 1989), theory is something that is made. It "is itself a practice, just as much as its object", and so cannot be assumed to be "pre-existent, ready-made in a prefabricated sky."

Deleuze and Guattari grant philosophy an exclusive right to concept creation. Nevertheless, as Paul Patton argues in an article in the *Oxford Literary Review* (18:1-2, 1996), this does not mean that it is metaphysically pre-eminent or epistemologically privileged in regards to other activities—Art, Science, Cinema. For example, in relation to the cinema, Deleuze suggests that while the practice of cinema has to do with images and signs, the elaboration and articulation of that practice by filmmakers and critics involves a theoretical work—a conceptual work specific to cinema. While this practice may not be philosophy, it is without question a conceptual practice.

A valuable aspect of Deleuze's writing on the cinema is the way he defines the significance of this conceptual practice for philosophy. "So there is always a time, a midday-midnight, when we must no longer ask ourselves, 'what is cinema?', but 'what is philosophy?'" Deleuze's work enables a questioning of philosophy's ownership of conceptual practice.

As Patton points out, the creation of concepts does not simply mean the creation of novel or new concepts. It also means the creation of untimely concepts, acting against our time, or acting on our time. Transposed into the space of Communications, the notion of conceptual practice allows us to interfere in the way Communications imagines itself as a discipline of ideas. Deleuze and Guattari themselves take up the abuse of "the idea" by "the disciplines of communication."

More specifically in the media arts, their approach facilitates a questioning of the status of conceptual work in the production of programs and works. Most media handbooks provide an extremely circumscribed account of the role of ideas in the production process. Following a '25 words or less' model, ideas are subjugated to a brief phase in the pre-production stage of a project. "You should be able to write the main concept down in a few sentences, sometimes in just one." (Mollison, *Producing Videos*, Allen and Unwin, 1997)

In a context in which a mentality of manufacture has marginalised the concept and ideas—even while bemoaning their absence—the notion of conceptual practice provides tools with which to contest our definitions of production, composition and assembly. In particular, it can help in questioning the usual segmentation of conception and execution typical of manufacture, and now entrenched in our 'normal' modes of media skilling.

Steven Maras teaches in the Humanities at the University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury. This article draws from a larger work on the philosophy of communications to be published in the journal *Continuum*.

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Amputating hate

Kerrie Schaefer reports on the Carmelo Bene-inspired re-working of Stephen Sewell's play *Hate* and its implications for performance studies

In May 1998, Timothy Reuther, a professionally trained actor researching (post-)modern actor training methods and performance techniques as part of a Masters degree in Performing Arts (Charles Sturt University), facilitated a performance project based on Stephen Sewell's *Hate* (1988) with Theatre Studies students at the University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba.

Hate is set in the Gleason family country house on the Easter weekend following the 'great stock market crash' of 1987. John Gleason, patriarch, wealthy businessman and right-wing politician, has summoned his adult children—Raymond, Celia and Michael—to the family's country estate for the holiday weekend to make an important announcement. He has decided to run for PM and must hand over directorship of the family business, Gleason Enterprises, to one of his offspring. The events of the weekend are framed by a fierce power struggle between Raymond and John as the son challenges his father's political position and his control of the business. The entire family is entangled in a thick web of hate, lies and deceit as Raymond attempts to secure the company votes of Eloise and Michael against their husband and father respectively, and as John positions Celia against Raymond as a rival for the director's job.

With Sewell's permission, Reuther adapted *Hate* according to the textual and performance methods of Italian actor and director Carmelo Bene (1937-) an important protagonist in contemporary theatre who is best known for his reworkings of Shakespeare in the 1980s. Reuther came to Bene's work through Gilles Deleuze. In his essay, "One Manifesto Less", Deleuze asserts that Bene's theatre exemplifies a cluster of concepts central to his philosophical system: the notion of the rhizome, of multiplicity, of desiring machines, of assemblages, of becoming and of minority. He characterises the workings of Bene's theatre in terms of 'amputation' or 'subtraction', and describes the actor in Bene's theatre as an 'operator', creating character as "a scenic assemblage of colours, lights, gestures and words." (Gilles Deleuze in *The Deleuze Reader*, ed Constantin Boundas, Columbia University Press, New York, 1993)

Reuther's experiment with the theory and practice of 'amputation' sought to maximize moments of thematic intensity in Sewell's *Hate* by taking away or subtracting from the original text rather than adding to it. In the amputated text, the role of John Gleason is cut altogether. This subtraction of a major character is designed to enable the operators to explore the possibilities for 'becoming' of the minor characters in the play. Reuther also reworked scenes in the original text in order to curtail "psychological development or denouement, and the language of living room drama." He "picked up the scene in the middle, or the in-between, where things pick up speed and the language is heightened or poetic." In the amputated text these condensed scenes are often played simultaneously to create moments of coherence or juxtaposition. For example, in Act One Scene Two operators playing Raymond (connected by a tie stretched between them that each holds in his hand) attempt to win the company votes of Eloise and Michael. While one operator works on Eloise the other attempts to persuade Michael. In each case, Raymond casts Celia (who lies sleeping on the floor between them) as the scheming sibling working to insinuate herself into her father's favour and the

company directorship, which Raymond believes is rightfully his. He urges his mother and brother to take a stand, to take his side against Celia and John. In another instance, Reuther juxtaposes two separate dialogues between Eloise and Celia. The two different conversations concerning love, marriage, children, family are interwoven in such a way as to reveal particular relationships within the Gleason family unit (an incestuous relationship between father and daughter and rivalry between mother and daughter for John's love).

As a professionally trained actor, Reuther's main concern was to empower the creative ensemble. To this end he provided the operators with a set of performance

voice and her own resources. Eventually she takes control of the conversation and steers it to an end, cueing the next scene.

This scene is contrasted with one later in the performance. Michael (perched on a tall black box a few feet from the ceiling) attempts to persuade Celia (standing front centre stage looking directly at the audience) to reject the directorship and to leave the house, to get far away from their father and his control over them. As Celia explains to Michael why she can't leave, Raymond stands at her back echoing her words in a whisper into her ear. At first his tone is sarcastic but as the dialogue builds in intensity the tone changes, it becomes more authentic. At this point, Raymond usurps

Celia becomes him by default or because she can't find the strength to struggle against him. She is helpless or powerless against the kind of power her father wields. In this way, Celia is perhaps more like Michael who spends the entire performance marooned atop a tall black box a few feet from the ceiling. He seems to have removed himself from the situation and prefers to daydream or to reinterpret biblical stories in an attempt to understand his own family, to protect Celia. But his perch is only a few feet from the ceiling, which suggests that he is crushed or weighed down, unable to take a stand, to act.

This performance interpretation raises questions concerning the theory/practice of amputation. The removal of the main character, John Gleason, seemed to amplify his power. He was even more present and powerful off stage. In his absence, the other characters seemed unable to challenge or subvert his power and control over them. Individually and as a family, they imploded—a negative 'becoming' perhaps? At the same time, if the aim of the amputation was to intensify or to bring to the surface what was latent in Sewell's text, then the exercise was more than successful. The *Hate* amputation presented a very stylized and grotesque image of a particular kind of public/private culture in Australia in the 80s and 90s. Finally, I think the amputation project signals the importance of performance-based research in the realm of the tertiary institution. It raises critical questions concerning the use and combination of theory and practice, and concerning the new interpretations of texts and new bodies of work that they produce. These are pressing questions that need to be encouraged and debated in

drama/theatre/performance departments in our universities.

Thanks Dr Jocelyn McKinnon (founder/co-ordinator of La Salle 1996-7) who picked up the project and worked with Tim Reuther on some of the conceptual and practical aspects of the performance.

Hate Amputated, directed by Tim Reuther, produced by La Salle student theatre company, University of Southern Queensland. Operators: Catherine Bayer, Melissa Blackmore, Michael Byrne, Shannon Parsons, Terry Phillips, Timothy Reuther, Sharmyn Rowe and Wayne Staniland, May 27 - 30



Shannon Parsons, Sharmyn Rowe, and Catherine Bayer in *Hate*

Debbie Commerford

techniques to use in the creative process. The eight operators working on the *Hate* amputation were encouraged to move beyond the restrictions of psychological character. They were "free to explore and experiment with the theatre space (levels and proximity or distance); with voice variation, with body movement and interaction, with language, with dialogue created during improvised performances, and with processes such as role sharing and usurpation." In the performance itself, the technical operators manipulated theatre technologies in full view of the audience, while commenting on the stage action.

The performance of the *Hate* amputation anticipated a number of questions. To what extent would the amputation of a major character alter power relations between the other characters? What would the other characters 'become' in the absence of the patriarch, John Gleason? Would the techniques of amputation provide the students/operators with the means to explore and even challenge or subvert certain structures of power inherent in the original text?

The performance certainly did seem to open up possibilities for the operators. In one instance, Raymond confronts Celia shortly after their arrival at the house. This meeting takes the form of an improvised dialogue. Lines taken from the original text cue the beginning and end of the improvisation. The operator playing Raymond is able to take words freely from the text and to use them to threaten and undermine Celia. Celia, on the other hand, didn't really have a reply to his bullying in the original text. In the amputated version, because the operator playing Celia isn't tied to or constrained by the text, she is able to reply using her own

Celia's position and speaks to Michael in his own voice. Celia stands behind Raymond echoing his words in a whisper. Towards the end of the dialogue Celia retakes her original position and states forcefully to Michael that she has chosen to stay and to take the directorship. She states that she loves her father and cannot leave, even if that means sacrificing herself to him.

In this latter example a parallel is drawn between Celia and Raymond who seem to be directly pitched against each other in the *Hate* amputation. The amputation suggests that their father's power and control fascinate both characters. But this fascination takes different forms. Raymond wants to be just like his father, to become him, while

RealTime 27: The challenge for performance studies

In our October-November edition, Edward Scheer, University of Newcastle, offers some timely challenges to performance studies in Australia. Here's an excerpt:

I've just been on a research trip to Wales in the UK to meet up with Richard Gough and the people at CPR (Centre for Performance Research) who are doing very interesting work in practical performance teaching and especially in bringing practitioners from all over the place to Aberystwyth on the Welsh coast to work with students. They've had everyone from Barba and Boal to Grotowski visit there and, most recently, members of Anne Bogart's and Tadashi Suzuki's Saratoga Institute were there doing the viewpoints training. While ADSA (Australasian Drama Studies Association) had Bogart visit for the conference last year there were far too many Australian voices calling for the usual compulsory isolationism of the discipline (ie Drama) from other forms of research. This is counterproductive in the extreme. The great potential of performance studies in Australia is precisely in crossing these artificial barriers to thought and practice which is why I think Australia needs to develop a more systematic approach to the organisation of performance practitioners and teachers working both here and elsewhere.

Tempted south

Keith Gallasch previews the 1998 Melbourne Festival and overviews the ongoing arts festivals debate

Notable for a festival launch outside of Adelaide, the artistic director seems happy to talk issues. While promising enjoyment and exhilaration, Sue Nattrass is also happy to talk "immigration, multiculturalism, the family, Indigenous arts, and equality" as "the topical issues that interest our community today and...are reflected in this year's festival." Not only that, but the 1998 Melbourne Festival has more character and sense of the contemporary in its programming than it's had for many a year. Compared with Adelaide it's still a restrained, rather modest looking affair with some parts of the program clearly superior to others, but it appears less determinedly middle-brow and more adventurous than its predecessors.

Nattrass says, she's "wanted to produce a festival that could be experienced at more than one level" with "threads that link events together. One could, for example, look at Aboriginal culture through an organ and didgeridoo concert at Trinity College, 3 plays—one *Stolen*, a world premiere, a concert by Goanna, Aboriginal music and performers in the opening celebrations, an art installation at the Magistrate's Court exhibitions, exhibitions at the Koori Heritage Trust and the National Gallery of Victoria, a symposium at the Victorian College of the Arts, and two photographic exhibitions—one of urban Aboriginals, and, in contrast, one of communities in central Australia." She indicates you can also follow an Italian cultural strand, or pursue themes of (anti-) violence, or the family, or multiculturalism through the weave of the festival. For Melbourne, this connection with community and issues promises to offer the festival some of the distinctiveness that it has hitherto lacked in going for broad appeal.

Festivals and their ingredients were a hot topic at the recent *Imagining the Market* conference in Sydney. Robert Fitzpatrick, director of Los Angeles Olympic Arts Festival in 1988—one of the rare Olympics arts events outside opening and closing ceremonies to be highly regarded—hoed into middle-brow complacency about Cultural Olympiad programming: "Atlanta botched it, Barcelona did it only slightly better. This is an occasion for Australia's arts mitzvah

...Safe programming and a low profile will not achieve the desired effect." He also derided "giving people what they wanted" as "a formula for boredom" and invoked art's power to "astonish and delight." In Fitzpatrick's moral universe, the safe bet "reduces the producer/presenter to being a poll taker, a pimp for present values." You can only hope that word got back to the directorate of the Cultural Olympiad in their Sydney bunker, but their resistance is probably already up as Barrie Kosky weighed in once again, at the same marketing conference, arguing for truly distinctive festivals and declaring the arts in the Olympics "a complete waste of time, money and venues." He was vigorously applauded.

The Melbourne Festival is not the Cultural Olympiad, but with Leo Schofield's elevation from one to the other (with the Sydney Festival thrown in), issues of time, money and venues have become irritatingly prevalent. Schofield's smug promotion of financially responsible festival management as the artistic criterion for success (with middle-brow programs to match) has led to slanging matches about box-office success. In Adelaide this year the press was on red alert for early box office figures and announced likely success on the first day of the festival. The recent report of Archer's success having erased the debt of the 1996 festival and achieving a \$300,000 surplus must have been gallingly to pragmatist directors who detest festivals with ideas and which look upon them as "experimentation in a playpen."

Sue Nattrass has managed to maintain the traditional elements of the Melbourne Festival—the kind of things you'd expect to see any time of the year but with a bigger talent, eg not just any old soprano, but Sumi Jo, current queen of the coloraturas—but alongside more provocative material. The program includes a Bill Viola video installation, a strong line-up of international and Australian visual artists curated by Maudie Palmer in a challenging site, the Old Magistrates' Court and City Watch House, Louis Nowra and Graeme Koehn's detested and admired opera *Love Burns* (based on the same 'true story' that inspired the cult movie *The Honeymoon Killers*), hot UK choreographer Paul Selwyn Norton (see page

45) working with Chunky Move, the limit-stretching dance-physical theatre show *Streb* from the USA, from France Ballet Preljocaj's *Romeo and Juliet* in a totalitarian state setting, Paul Capsis in the Kosky-directed "grunge" *Burlesque*, plus the festival's continuing engagement with and



Christine Douglas, *Love Burns*

Julian Watt

reassessment of the works of Percy Grainger, this time on the electronic music connection.

As with the Brisbane Festival, the dance program of the Melbourne Festival stands out: Nederlands Dans Theater III, Ballet Preljocaj, Tango Pasi6n, *Streb*, and, from Melbourne, Chunky Move's *Fleshmeet* and Company in Space's *A Trial by Video*, an interactive dance work. Nederlands Dans Theater III comprises four older and incredibly experienced dancers in works by



Sabine Kupferberg, Gérard Lemaître and Gary Chryst, Nederlands Dans Theater III

the company's artistic director, Jiri Kylian, and should encourage choreographers and a generation of mature Australian dancers to work together. The dance program offers an interesting overview of contemporary dance from just how contemporary a ballet company can be in the form of Ballet Frankfurt's great challenge to all other dance forms in the 1994 Adelaide Festival), to the riches of age, and the power of new media and popular culture.

The music program has its riches too, but in terms of scale and challenge is less scintillating—predictable servings of Beethoven et al with full orchestras while new music (and not so new) is relegated to smaller ensembles and concerts. The Chamber Music Sunset series is titled *Music for the Millennium* but its offering of Ravel, Shostakovich, Ives, Bartok, Janacek, Schoenberg and Debussy, while truly worthwhile (some rarely heard works) is more backward looking than millennial, save for the inclusion of Rhim and Schnittke, the only living (barely in Schnittke's case) composers in the series. *Electric-Eye* places Percy Grainger in the history of electronic music, featuring Martin Wesley Smith and Ros Bandt discussing Grainger's work, and with Bandt curating new Australian electroacoustic works and performances of Grainger's Free Music for multiple theremins. Brisbane's Elision are offering two concerts of contemporary works by Liza Lim, Franco Donatoni, Brian Ferneyhough, Mary Finsterer and others. *Guitar Miniatures* features Geoffrey Morris and Norio Sato playing an extensive list of works by, among

others, Michael Atherton, Gerard Brophy, Chris Dench, Elena Kats Chernin, Raffaele Marcellino, Warren Burt and a selection of Japanese composers. The Rachmaninoff Vespers, a hit at the 1998 Adelaide Festival, is presented in Melbourne with, and this is unusual-to-odd, saxophone and percussion interludes.

In theatre, the Irish are coming, again, this time with the Abbey Theatre production of Thomas Kilroy's *The Secret Fall of Constance White*, the story of Oscar Wilde's wife, but, quite unexpectedly, performed in a blend of "Kabuki, Bunraku and European minimalism." Gesher Theatre of Israel's *K'Far* (Village) by Joshua Sobol was seen by *RealTime* at LIFT97 (London International Festival of Theatre). Although by no means Sobol at his best, this ambling, discursive play is well-served by a remarkable variation on the revolve-set and some astonishingly informal but precise ensemble playing that could only come out of a Russian theatre tradition. The translation experience is something else. Melbourne's IRAA, another company working firmly within a European tradition, is presenting a new work *Teatro*, while Arena Theatre's *Panacea* engages with steroids, youth and sport. Corcadorca Theatre Company's production of Enda Walsh's *Disco Pigs*, a winner at Edinburgh and *Observer* Play of the Year, is "a violent love story of dispossessed, disco-crazed seventeen year-olds".

Former Kooemba Jdarra artistic director Wesley Enoch directs *Stolen* by Victorian writer Jane Harrison, a play about the Stolen Generation co-produced with Victoria's Indigenous theatre group Ilbijierrri. Deborah Cheetham in *White Baptist Abba Fan* and

Leah Purcell in *Box the Pony* present Indigenous performances premiered at the Festival of the Dreaming that are steadily making their way around the festival circuit—Purcell in particular is not to be missed. Andreas Litras' one-man show, *Odyssey*, in Greek and English, interplays Homer and the journey of a migrant woman to Australia. From Perth, Gerald Lepowski's *Dark* is an account of the life of photographer Diane Arbus. *Red*, by Lucy Taylor, Rachel Spiers and Mark Shannon has emerged from the 1997 Melbourne Fringe, where it impressed Nattrass, into the festival mainstream with projections, live music and a lost memory with an obsession for...red. The cultural diversity of the theatre program, its commitment to the Indigenous, and to young audiences is clearer than anywhere else in the festival program. So too is its encouraging assemblage of diverse theatre and performance forms.

For the first time in several years I've been tempted by a Melbourne Festival—the last time was for the Glass-Wilson *Einstein on the Beach*, one of the great experiences, and then for Robert Ashley's *Don Leaves Linda* with Chamber Made Opera. Melbourne doesn't usually feature this kind of work, but there's enough sense of adventure and inspiration across the board this time, enough sense of issues, ideas and forms, even if smaller in scale than deserved, as in the music program, to tempt me south.

Melbourne Festival,
October 15 - November 1, tel 1300 655 567
<http://www.melbournefestival.com.au>

Enter training

In the wake of the election of the Howard government, the extensive job training and creating schemes developed and nurtured by Labor were largely abolished. One of the survivors was TEAME, now more appropriately titled Enter Artsmedia. *RealTime* was curious about progress in this problematic area and approached Helen McCulloch at Enter Artsmedia for a progress report.

In October last year, Enter Artsmedia announced a scheme to create jobs for young people in the multimedia industries. Under this scheme, participants are employed by Enter Arts who place them with individual companies and organise flexible training support along with ongoing monitoring and mentoring. Twelve months on and off the job training qualifies you for a nationally accredited Certificate II in Arts (Interactive Media).

This year 160 young people have been placed Australia-wide including 40 Aboriginal trainees. The scheme has attracted young people with skills in photography, music, TV production, theatre, audio, radio, computer design and graffiti art. Most placements have been in small businesses in the multimedia industry followed by arts administration, music, video and community radio.

Beginning in Melbourne in September Enter Arts will trial an 11 week pre-traineeship course in preparation for the year-long program. The course integrates core skill areas—job seeking, workplace communications, writing and numeracy as well as computer literacy, multimedia interface and design, industry context and future directions, introduction to multimedia authoring, visual design for industry, research skills and introduction to film and video, multimedia and the internet.

As well as traineeships for young people, Enter Arts provides group training and recruitment services to employers in the areas of multimedia, arts administration, marketing and management, television and video production, information technology, business administration, media journalism, music business, libraries and information technology and community radio.

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Tempted north

An impressive music program dominates the Brisbane Festival

The abolition of the Brisbane Biennial of Music and its replacement by the annual Brisbane Festival (a conventional arts festival built on the foundations of the Warana Festival) was met with despair by composers, musicians and many artists who, like Barrie Kosky, bemoan the lack of identity in Australian festivals outside Adelaide, Perth and Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. The programs of the Biennial, initially boldly curated by Anthony Steel and then more cautiously by the Mills boys Richard and Jonathan, showed enormous promise, with a potential to galvanise and inspire the Australian music community in an international context. Now Labor in Queensland is talking about bringing back the Biennial. Ironically this has been touted at the very moment that the Brisbane Festival shows its only consistent bit of nouse—in its music program.

This is not to say that other parts of the Brisbane Festival are without interest: the dance component with 5 companies presenting major works looks strong. However, the dance program is 4 parts overseas companies, while the music program allows for a creative and informative juxtaposition of new Australian and UK works in both concert and music theatre formats. As Kosky said at the *Imagining the Market* conference in Sydney in June, "At least 50% of festivals have to be Australian work, even if it's awful." This is something that Melbourne, Brisbane and the new management in Sydney have not embraced. Theatre in the Brisbane Festival achieves a reasonable balance, but where are significant works from the likes of Jenny Kemp, Nigel Kellaway, Barrie Kosky, Nikki Heywood, Sidetrack and any number of physical theatre companies? Well, Sidetrack is on the bill, but tucked away in the *Volt* ("challenging visual arts") program. *Volt* rates a mention in the back pages of the festival booklet along with Brisbane-based Frank Production's *Heavy Metal Hamlet* (no dates, no venue, no billing).

The standout in the conventional side of the music program, amidst the Mahlers,

Elgars and Beethovens (surely guest soloists violinist Gil Shaham and cellist Julian Lloyd Webber could have been allowed some more recent expositions of their considerable talents), is Harry Christophers and his choral group The Sixteen with the Symphony of Harmony and Invention. They'll present as one of their four concerts Handel's *The Messiah* (currently subject to some interesting reinterpretations on CD), but less familiar and much more attractive for festival adventurers is the composer's *Alexander's Feast*, set to Dryden's *An Ode, in Honour of St Cecilia's Day*.

The UK contingent includes Sir Neville Marriner and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, Julian Lloyd Webber, percussionist Evelyn Glennie, new music ensemble the Steve Martland Band and prominent young composer Thomas Adès. Glennie will premiere Brisbane composer Gerard Brophy's *trance...Dakar* with the Queensland Philharmonia Orchestra in a program of Australian music (Julian Yu, Peter Sculthorpe, Robert Davidson). Pianist Michael Kieran Harvey will perform works by Carl Vine, Stuart Campbell (a festival commission) and Adès. Adès, in a solo piano recital, plays Nancarrow, Ligeti, Knussen and his own work. Paul Grabowsky will present a solo recital of his own works. Australian composer Sean Michael O'Boyle will conduct the premier of his *Dreams Are Forever* with soloist Riley Lee (improvising on shakuhachi) and the Queensland Youth Symphony, Griffith University Chorus and Conservatorium Youth Choir. The same concert will also feature Topology (see page 52), Winds of the Southern Cross II and Two Complete Lunatics. The "industrial strength" Steve Martland Band will focus on Martland's own compositions. There's a nice sense of exchange in Glennie premiering Brophy and Kieran Harvey playing Adès' *Still Sorrowing*.

It's equally pleasing to see music theatre playing a prominent role Adès will also conduct his chamber opera, *Powder Her Face* ("inspired by the 1950s divorce of the sexually compulsive Duchess of Argyll").



Compagnie Marie Chouinard, *The Rite of Spring*

There's a concert version of Cole Porter's *Kiss Me Kate* featuring Thomas Allen and Yvonne Kenny; the premiere of Australian composer Richard Vella's *Bodysongs* (see page 17); and, from Tasmania, IHOS Opera's *The Divine Kiss—The Evil is Always and Everywhere* (composed and directed by Constantine Koukias "exploring the imagery of the Seven Saving Virtues...and questioning the role of these traditional concepts as we approach the new millennium").

Composers' week, the surviving element of the Biennial of Music, will feature a contemporary music program, workshops, forums and the AMC (Australian Music Centre) Audiotheque of recordings of contemporary Australian music. A special program will focus on Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and Australian Aboriginal rituals and liturgies.

Five companies make up an intriguing dance program: from the USA, Streb, with gravity defying dance from choreographer Elizabeth Streb (also appearing at the Melbourne Festival); from Canada, Compagnie Marie Chouinard with two major works including *The Rite of Spring* and *The Almond and the Diamond* ("erotic and exotic"); from France, the Mathilde Monnier Company with *Arrêtez Arrêtons Arrête* in the round, a 70 minute work performed to a live monologue; from South Africa, Vusa Dance Company's *African Moves*; and a joint production by

Queensland's Expressions Dance company and Hong Kong's The City Contemporary Dance Company in *Attitude* ("vignettes and fascinating images from family and cultural histories woven together") a 75 minute work with choreography by Maggie Sietsma, music by Abel Vallis and video projections by Randall Wood.

The balance of local to international is better on the theatre front with Queensland Theatre Company's Neil Armfield-Geoffrey Rush adaptation of Beaumarchais' *The Marriage of Figaro*; UK company Shared Experience Theatre's rendering of Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*; and Australian writers featuring in Theatre UpNorth's production of Alana Valentine's *Ozone* ("Four Australians flying home, the presence of an American Professor of Atmospheric Chemistry...inspires desperate action and compelling revelations..."); La Boite Theatre's *A Beautiful Life* by Michael Fitcher and Helen Howard ("passion, prejudice, love and freedom spanning the two worlds of Iran and Australia..."); and Kooemba Jdarra's *Black Shorts*, plays by leading Indigenous playwrights. The festival is producing director David Brown's *Kill Everything You Love* ("high energy multimedia theatre exploring the sudden impact and lasting shockwaves of youth suicide"). On the performance front there's Sidetrack Performance Group's *Nobody's Daughter*, Arthur Wicks' *Degrees of Freedom: Escape Velocity*, and Frank Productions' *Heavy Metal Hamlet*.

In terms of scale, Brisbane's is a modest festival. In terms of overall coherence of ideas and themes it doesn't even begin. However, it is redeemed by a good music program and some international dance visitors that arouse curiosity. The temptation to fly north to see Adès, Martland, Vella, Koukias, Glennie and Kieran Harvey at work is very strong. Let's hope that the Brisbane Festival (or a resurrected Biennial) continues on its way to create a distinctly musical festival, or one like Robyn Archer's 1998 Adelaide Festival where original composition and live music flowed out into all parts of the festival. It's interesting then to note that John Rodgers is composing for the QTC's *Figaro*. KG

Brisbane Festival 1998, Artistic Director, Tony Gould; August 28 - September 20; enquiries: Festival Hotline tel 07 3840 7189; Freecall (outside Brisbane): tel 1800 777 699

Room for chance

Maryanne Lynch previews Brisbane Festival's *Volt*

With a 100% increase in funding since its inaugural appearance in 1996, *Volt*, the visual arts program of the Brisbane Festival, is obviously seen by the powers-that-be as something worth supporting in an otherwise mostly safe and distinctly dull festival. For the rest of us, it's a chance to see or to present contemporary work, the sort of stuff that idealists such as myself might have thought was the lifeblood of any major arts festival.

Volt, produced again by performance artist Maree Cunningham, enters its second incarnation with an obvious relationship to the first. This is marked most strongly in Cunningham's interest in pushing her brief to encompass what might as well be called performance, as well as her emphasis on performance art. This year sees a dominance of gallery spaces but a similar array of artists and interests to 1996. This year also sees Cunningham drawing on an advisory group of 5, most of whom are from the visual arts but all with an interest in interdisciplinary practice, and a corresponding shift away from the curatorial role that Cunningham assumed last time round.

Opening night kicks off with several events at the Institute of Modern Art, one of the key *Volt* sites. This cavernous brick

building that everyone but me seems to hate is housing *Fifty Record Players* curated by Melbourne sound artists Nathan Grey and Dylan Krasevac, *Griller Girls*, curated by local Di Ball, and *Swarm*, a sound work by American sound sculptor Ed Osborn from the 12th—although other smaller-scale *Volt* events are taking place in the same space before and after this date.

Fifty Record Players is another homage to vinyl, this one by the founders of Snawklor Records, where audio, visual and other artists from around Australia have been invited to contribute music and sound towards an installation comprising, you guessed it, 50 record players fitted with headsets. On opening night, Melbourne artist Michael Greaves and (unnamed) local artists will give a live sound performance. *Griller Girls* is a 'technofemme' exhibition of works by local female artists working with media technologies, and it'll be interesting to see just what relationship the artists have to their American sisters, the Guerilla Girls. Osborn is utilising the movements of people and objects via ultrasound sensors to create a series of unstable yet organised audio patternings. This preoccupation with chance is a common theme in the *Volt* program.

At other galleries around town, artists share another of *Volt*'s implicit interests: multimedia installation. Over at the City Hall Gallery, local artist Jay Younger's *The Impossible Promise of Protection* uses audiovisual technologies in a series of installations examining the positioning of the female body in public and private spaces. *ex.cat.*, a group artist show at smith and stoneley, engages with the experience of Catholicism from a variety of viewpoints and through a variety of means. Another local, Franz Ehmann, continues his exploration of 'the culture of forgetting' at the Soapbox, with installation and performance.

Elsewhere, *Dust*, produced by the Brisbane company Arterial, focuses on two sites in Fortitude Valley, the slightly seedy inner-city suburb in which the IMA is located, utilising images, text, sound and performance to depict generational changes in the area. In a city which until recently specialised in institutionalised neglect of its past, this project carries a significance well beyond its public art perimeters. Ralph Tyrell, local composer, is venturing out to an archery range in nearby Albion for *Sports Scores*. In a similar set-up to Osborn, Tyrell has organised that the striking of targets by arrows will trigger sounds, music, imagery and lighting in unplanned sequences. Fiona Hall will create another of her horticultural artworks at the Botanical Gardens-Mt Cootth, 7 kilometres from the CBD. Again, nature as much as culture plays a hand in the work.

Sidetrack Performance Group is bringing *Nobody's Daughter* to town, a solo performance work with video and sound by Vahid Vahed. Performer Mémé Thorne is also making occasional appearances around town, as is Arthur Wicks, the Brisbane performer, with a fascination for the mapping of chance. His performance work, *Degrees of Freedom: Escape Velocity*, can be found in the Queen Street Mall.

Other *Volt* events include two symposia, "Performing the Body" and "Sound and Vision", under the rubric *Discourse for the next millennium*, the 3rd Artists' Books and Multiples Fair, a book launch, and works by young artists Adam Donovan and Jondi Keane in an "Emerging Artists" sub-category of the program.

Cunningham has big visions for the year 2000, seeing *Volt* as central to the festival's continuing endeavour to define itself. This year's increased funding is certainly positive but there is still some way to go before art and commerce sit comfortably beside each other in the Brisbane Festival. At the moment it's the latter that holds the winning hand when the chips are down. This is not to detract from the 1998 *Volt* program, which demonstrates that there are plenty of people who think there is more to life (and art) than winning or losing—and that chance is as much a player as certainty.

Volt: new visions, new performance, visual arts program of the Brisbane Festival, August 28 - September 20

Until the fat man sings

Robert Davidson interviews Richard Vella about his new work for the Brisbane Festival

The newest production by Calculated Risks Opera Productions is Bodysongs, a collaboration with Melbourne's Theatreworks for the Brisbane Festival. Taking Shakespeare's Falstaff as a starting point, the show is centred on the Fat Man, an invented rock singer who sings about his body and his life. The show's composer, Richard Vella, talked with Robert Davidson.

RD How did you originally get into music?

RV I went to university to study psychology and had to pick up an extra subject—music was the best option. I was one of the lucky people of the 70s when education was free and had a different philosophy than today. It was about broadening out rather than closing in. I didn't have to audition because there was a concern to include people of disadvantaged musical backgrounds such as myself. Today people like me wouldn't get in.

RD Can you identify ways in which your psychology studies have influenced your compositional work?

RV Well I was always interested in interdisciplinary things, and how you can understand one thing through something else. That led me into ideas of music and modelling which then led me into film, music theatre, and the work I did at Macquarie University looking at music and science and philosophy. A lot of the things I do are concerned with these issues of music and ethos, and how music encodes these ways of knowing.

RD How does Bodysongs express an ethos?

RV Bodysongs started off being about the mythology of the character Falstaff who was this very large, well-endowed male near the end of his life, who suffers humiliation because he tries to play games on some women, and ends up with a whole different perspective on his life and on his body as a result. Robert Draffin, who's directing the show and who had the original idea of using Falstaff, had always wanted to have rock music in it somewhere, so I said "why don't we do it as a dance/pop night and invent a new character around a rock and roll singer?" I had felt that the character of Falstaff was somewhat remote, and that this was a way to bring him to life in a contemporary way. We already have a cultural history with this figure.



Ponch Hawkes

RD That is the Fat Man, the generic fat rock singer.

RV Yes, the generic rock singer. But the most important thing is not that the man's fat, but that the fat is being used to symbolise a concept of body-ness.

RD It seems to follow on neatly from your last music theatre work for Calculated Risks, The Last Supper which featured a pregnant performer and had a lot to do with cookery.

RV (Laughs) Well she actually got pregnant unintentionally, and we wrote it into the script. Yes, both shows are very Epicurian, both take a very sensuous approach to things. *Tales of Love* (1990) was the same too. I

guess probably because my musical training was in more of an abstract area, my theatre and film and other types of work come out in a much more physical way. Calculated Risks is about this; it's about circus really, it's about fun. So through that it looks at a whole discourse around the body, and the body in space. That's not a unique thing; the Sydney Front used to do similar things. It was very much something coming out of the 80s aesthetic internationally, about the location of the body as a site of theatre.

RD It was a general trend for artists to place their own bodies into their work.

RV Yes. Stelarc's another one of course. What's interesting in Bodysongs is

that we're looking at someone who's been through a life of a body and we are now getting different perspectives of what that may mean in terms of one's own understanding of self in the world. We get that from different people in the show, from a young girl, a young boy, an old woman, an old man. Basically you can't go beyond the body; once you go beyond the body you're dead. Or you become enlightened! So the body is the threshold between ourselves and the world—it goes back to the mind/body split. That's really what the show's about and that's why we use the metaphor of the Fat Man. There's no moral judgement on the concept of fatness, but we're taking something to an extreme to talk about something which we all have.

RD You were given a brief for dance/pop music for the show. Were you in a sense borrowing by using these traditions? Do they form your vernacular?

RV It's not my vernacular in that I don't earn a living from it. I've earned my living by writing other types of music. But it's never too far away; I mean you just have to turn on the radio. It's all around you, like birdsong.

RD Without putting you in this category, I sometimes find it particularly cloying when 'classically trained' composers decide to make use of pop and other genres with which they have only a dabbler's relationship. A patronising attitude can sometimes creep in, as if the composer is legitimising a lower art form.

RV Well that's right. But for me, I won't put any moral judgements on anyone because I think people have the right to do what they like in music. It is really an amoral area. But what interests me in my work—it's not an intentional thing—is some kind of tension between style and content. It's not really straight dance/pop music, but then it is dance/pop music because you can dance to it. When you dance, your body's listening to the music. Concert music is not music listened to by the body, it's listened to by the brain. Bodysongs tries to do both. That's why the show's all about the mind/body split, to take it back to the original ethos.

RD Do the various collaborators share this ethos?

RV Yes. We're all writing our relationship to the mind/body split. Humphrey Bower is writing his relationship to it in his text, and Robert Draffin is doing it through his direction, and the designer Ina Shannan will be doing her relationship to the concept, so in a certain sense there won't be any type of central focus. It's more like 4 layers which collide and interrupt each other in counterpoint—more like a rock video than anything!

Bodysongs, Tivoli Theatre, Brisbane Festival, September 10, 11, 12, 9.00pm. It will then appear at Theatreworks in Melbourne.

Robert Davidson is currently completing compositions for the Brisbane Festival, and directing the new music quintet Topology, in which he plays double bass.

Mallarmé's second homeland

Melbourne celebrates an artist with a profound influence on 20th century poetry, music, painting, dance and ideas

It's the centenary of the death of Stéphane Mallarmé (1842 - 1898) and a festival celebrating his work and its impact will be held in Melbourne. The event is titled *Melbourne, Mallarmé and the 20th Century*. Projected works include Jude Walton, Lisa Barmby, Ros Warby, Brighid Lehmann and Paul Rogers creating *Seam*, a dance in response to the poet's *Les Noces d'Hériodiade: Mystère*. Russell Walsh is coordinating a collaborative performance work, *Axel*, based on the play by Villiers d'Isle-Adam, which in turn is based on Mallarmé's *Igitur*—"rarely performed", says the press release, but reckoned to be "a major work of Symbolist drama." The

Centre for Drama and Theatre Studies at Monash University will produce Gertrude Stein's *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*. Mallarmé's prose and critical writings will be the focus of a 4 day conference at the Department of French and Italian Studies at the University of Melbourne. It will also consider the Australian tradition of Mallarmé scholarship (Australia as Mallarmé's "second homeland"—Bertrand Marchel) and be accompanied by an exhibition in the Baillieu Library including poet Christopher Brennan's annotated collection of Mallarmé publications. Mallarmé's influence on John Cage's ideas about music and chance will be celebrated

in a concert of Cage's work. An exhibition at the Monash University Gallery will display works by contemporaries of Mallarmé and modern Australian painters including Susan Norrie, Imants Tillers, Jackie Dunn and others. And there'll be a 2 day Mallarmé Writers' Event. The convenors point out that "Over the last twenty years, eminent Australian writers who have engaged with Mallarmé have included Robert Adamson, David Brooks, Lee Cataldi, John Forbes, Martin Harrison, Kevin Hart, John Kinsella and John Scott." Last, but by no means least in the realm of Mallarmé's influence on and through Apollinaire to the present, is *Chances*

are...An International Exhibition of Contemporary Visual Poetry, to be held at Spencer Street Station with contributions from 200 visual poets. Of course, don't forget to be at the Great Hall of the National Gallery of Victoria on August 9 for Tuesday, an evocation (on a somewhat larger scale) of Mallarmé's legendary Tuesday night gatherings in his apartment at 89, rue de Rome, Paris. RT

Melbourne, Mallarmé and the 20th Century, contact, Michael Graf, tel 03 9534 3642 fax 03 9528 1236

Intercultural pleasures

Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, Gracias a la Vida, Thirteen Moons and MusiK KabaU in Sydney's Carnivale '98

The Carnivale '98 press release tells us that "Sydney is set to buzz": it's certainly set to resonate with some fine music. "Over 140 world cultures will kick up a storm of multicultural celebration." Director Lex Marinos says, "Carnivale's relevance is emphasised in these times when cultural diversity (and the value of the arts) is being challenged. Carnivale will continue to promote tolerance and understanding among all of our communities." Music will play its usual pivotal role in the festival, headlined by Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, master of the Mohan Veena, an Indian version of the 12-string guitar. His best-selling collaboration with Ry Cooder on bottleneck guitar for Water Lily Acoustics (WLA-CS-29-CD) was a groundbreaker, and has been followed by other insightful cross-cultural teamings.

In the informal setting of a lunchtime picnic and then an evening concert in the Great Hall of the Addison Road Community Centre, musical director Matthew Fargher and associate director Hernan Flores will gather choirs from Sydney's communities to encourage musical and cultural communication. To make this effective, Fargher and Flores, both experienced composers and performers, are coordinating workshops prior to the event to introduce singers to the practices of other vocal traditions.

Hernan Flores explains that three experts will conduct the workshops prior to the event: Robin Hunter (Gaelic mouth music), Laksmi Ramen (ragas from Southern India) and Sylvia Encheva (Bulgarian song). He also emphasises the informality and principle of exchange fundamental to the event. Matthew Fargher says that the concert will include the Mexis Choir (conducted by Greek musician Themis Mexis), Koleda (Croatian), Hanau Kore An (East Timorese) and Voices From

The Vacant Lot. Sylvia Encheva will also perform. The picnic program will feature community choirs including Indonesian, Latvian, Pacific Islander and Italian choral and musical groups.

For Matthew Fargher the peculiar power of the event is to be found in the workshops, in going direct to the source of cultural expertise in singing. In Sydney, he says, "there's not a real lot of tapping into cultural richness." The event itself also benefits from not being about exoticism, the mere display of cultural difference. Participants attend both workshops and a weekend forum where they get to speak about the experience as well as to sing together, and they collectively work on a song, overall coming to grasp other cultural approaches to song and extending their own range and interests.

On the day, says Flores, the schedule of performances for the picnic will be open-ended and allow for choirs to collaborate in what should be a musically remarkable day, titled *Gracias a la Vida* (Thanks to Life).

Also on the Carnivale '98 program Fairfield Community Arts Network will present a short documentary reflecting on life and art in Cabramatta in Sydney's west. The film documents the Thirteen Moons Festival, a year long project co-ordinated by the ever innovative FCAN, in which artists and community members work to counter the narrow range of media images of one of Australia's most culturally diverse communities. The film will screen to city audiences daily on platforms 5 and 6 of Town Hall Railway Station (September 14 - 21) and at sunset on the viewing cube outside the Museum of Sydney (September 14 - October 5).

Thirteen Moons has seen a range of spontaneous and planned arts activities involve the community in creating a "sacred

space" in Cabramatta's CBD. Events have included a youth art and music event in which visual and performance artists created onsite works in the Freedom Plaza. In September a wall art project involving young artists will be launched at Cabramatta Railway Station. At the opening of the festival in February, local artist Carlos Barrios worked for 6 hours on a chalk drawing that almost covered the Plaza. By the next morning, diligent Council workers had hosed it away. Fairfield Community Arts Network and the Cabramatta community are hoping that the images generated by Thirteen Moons will be much longer-lasting.

Performance-maker Indija Mahjoeddin established MusiK KabaU in 1993 with the aim of exploring the dance, music and randai (folk opera) traditions of West Sumatra. MusiK KabaU's production *The Horned Matriarch* was staged in Brisbane in 1995. With assistance from Asialink, Indija travelled to Sumatra last year to do further research on the randai tradition and to collaborate with artists at the Theatre Jenjang in Padang. Thanks to Carnivale and Sea Change, Sydney can see the new production in September.

Staged outdoors, the work incorporates story-telling, music and dance combining the ancient circular martial arts dance (silat) and traditional storytelling of Minangkabau (kaba). A chorus of dancers performs refrains of rhythmic body percussion known as tapuak galombang. "I wanted to create an art form whose roots are especially relevant to the Asia-Pacific region," says Indija. "Randai theatre with its very entertaining physical theatre style, astounding percussion and witty language I think can influence and introduce new elements to Australian contemporary arts practice."

Minangkabau society is uniquely matrilineal. For the protection of domestic stability, daughters are the beneficiaries of inheritance and wealth and the voice of the most senior woman holds sway in her own family and in business life. The story of *The Horned Matriarch* concerns Reno Nilam, a Minangkabau girl on a quest to find her place in the modern world.

The opera is performed in English and features a vocal narrative written by Indija Mahjoeddin with music by MusiK KabaU and visiting Indonesian artist-musicians Edy Asmara and New Zealand Minangkabau music specialist Megan Collins. Performers include Indija herself along with Dana Diaz-Tutaan, Eliane Morel, Monica Wulff, Ruani Dias-Jayasinha, Paul Cordeiro and Desman Hamdl with members of the Sydney Minangkabau community. RT

The Horned Matriarch, Addison Road Community Centre, Marrickville September 4 - 6; Royal Botanic Gardens, September 11 - 13; Bondi Pavilion Amphitheatre, September 18 - 20 tel 02 9294 5060

Thirteen Moons Festival: contact Samiramis Ziyeh, Fairfield Community Arts Network tel 02 9727 0477 fax 02 9728 6080

Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, *The Basement*, Wednesday September 30, \$20, other dates TBA

Gracias a la Vida, Addison Road Community Centre, 142 Addison Road, Marrickville, Sydney; September 19, picnic 12 noon; concert 7.00 - 9.00pm

Carnivale '98, September 12 - October 5, Sydney. Enquiries: 02 9294 5060

Room to view

Don Mamouny talks with Keith Gallasch about Sidetrack's *Marrickville Eyes*

Sidetrack's collaborative performance works have entailed design, choreography, sound and video, as well as performance as installation. In an interesting development which artistic director Don Mamouny declares a synthesis of Sidetrack's earliest and most recent artistic and social impulses, the company is presenting *Marrickville Eyes*, a work combining the company's recent explorations with the expectation of a community audience so pivotal to the early years.

Marrickville Eyes is, in fact, a set of resonating works in different media and settings. *Five Rooms* "reconstructs in precise detail the actual living rooms of people who settled in Marrickville (inner western Sydney) in the early years of the post-war migration boom." These rooms are built into the Sidetrack Theatre and can be entered by the audience. Rear projection screens in each room will carry images including those of performers involved in the project. To spend reflective time in each room will offer the audience a subjective feel for another's personal space, an "experience (of) the world through the eyes of each room's owner." Composer Rik Rue will be adding distinctive soundscapes to the rooms.

The Widows are five performers (one of them male) deploying themselves throughout Marrickville in the manner of widowed women in traditional black. This good-



Con Gioulis and friends (Con seated next to driver), St Peters, NSW, 1955

courtesy Gioulis family

humoured celebration of a multicultural icon will help open Carnivale, appear at *Gracias a la Vida* (see "Intercultural pleasures" above), at *Five Rooms* and at various sites, the widows "shopping, caring for children and working in their gardens." "Don't be surprised," says the Sidetrack website, "to see one silhouetted against the dying sun

standing on top of Banana Joe's Fruit Mart or abseiling down the face of the Marrickville Town Hall or if a group of them suddenly burst into a plaintive song or lift their skirts to dance." "Yes", says Don, "they'll be dancing—choreography by Kylie Tonellato—and singing a capella."

Another event accessible from the street

is *Weddings, Birthdays, Anything*. Curated by Effy Alexakis, it's an exhibition of family and amateur photographs (many of them remarkable, says Don) from the 50s to the present displayed in the hall linking the *Five Rooms*, as well as in the Marrickville Metro and other shops. Also in the course of *Marrickville Eyes*, Leonard Janiszewski will be collecting oral histories of the period and, in association with the event, Radio Skid Row will present interviews and music (*Marrickville Ears*. 2RSER 88.9FM).

Don was surprised to find that Marrickville Council has very little documentation of the last 50 years. Given that *Marrickville Eyes* has been produced in collaboration with the council, and that Sidetrack has had such a long association with the area, Don has decided to donate to them all the material used in or towards the realisation of the work. The great promise of *Marrickville Eyes* is, however, not only archival, but the evocation of "an insider's view of Marrickville" through photographs, sounds, stories, and performance, on the streets and in those five magical rooms.

Marrickville Eyes: Five Rooms, Exhibition/Installation, Sidetrack Studio, 142 Addison Rd Marrickville, September 23 - October 10, 2.00 - 9.00pm, \$5. Enquiries tel 02 9560 1255; Weddings, Birthdays, Anything, Photographic Exhibition, Marrickville Metro and Marrickville Rd, September 12 - October 10, shopping hours; The Widows, outdoor performances, Marrickville Metro and Marrickville Rd, September 17 - October 10. Presented as part of the Sea Change program of the Cultural Olympiad.

Mugged by history

Kirsten Krauth on the resurrection of a princess in *Planet Diana: Cultural Studies and Global Mourning*

We watched all day the slow cortege move along familiar streets strange with crowds of saddened people. The aeroplanes that flew across our telly screen flew simultaneously across our window panes...Next day our home was strangely quiet. The other children in the block had come to commiserate.

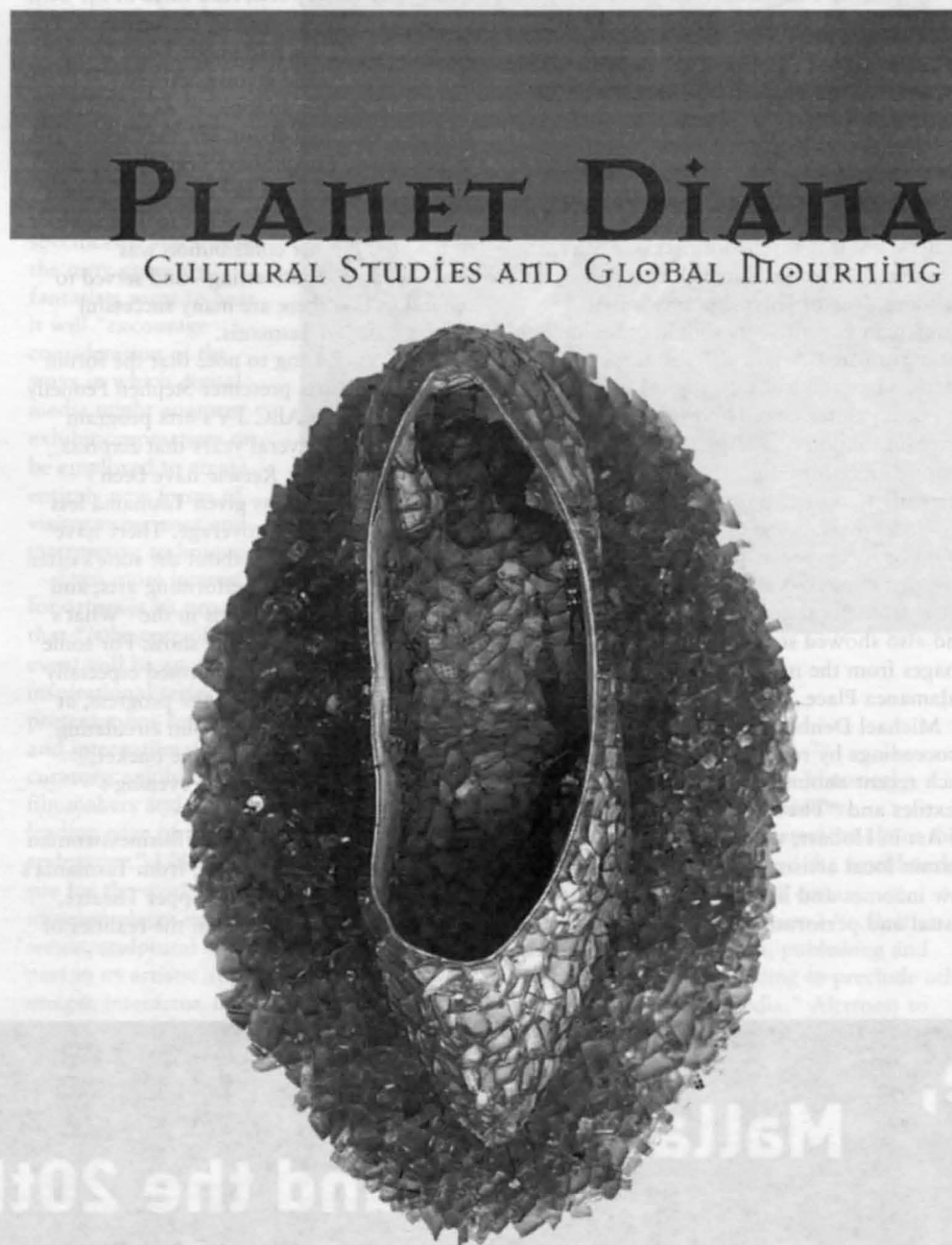
Barbara Blackman on the funeral of Winston Churchill, *Glass After Glass*, Penguin Books Australia, 1997

Planet Diana: Cultural Studies and Global Mourning explores the impact of Diana's death (and life) on contemporary culture, her place in postmodernism as popular, gay and even feminist icon, and the mourning of her death at a personal, political and social level. Split into 3 sections—"Nation and Emotion"; "Mourning, Ritual, Religiosity"; "Beautiful Woman Dies"—it also discusses the endeavour and ability of cultural studies to grapple with and understand such events. Cultural studies is about margins; the relation between feminism and postmodernism, an attempt to break down boundaries between art and life, masculine and feminine, high and popular art, an opposition to neutrality, objectivity, reason, and rational Western values. (Curti, L., "What is Real and What is Not: Female Fabulations in Cultural Analysis", *Cultural Studies*, Routledge, New York, 1992) *Planet Diana* revolves around these concepts; searching for, and trying to position the people's princess within these cultural constructs.

The weakness of *Planet Diana* as a collection is its use of the terms "global" and "global mourning", with little evidence that Diana's death was, indeed, mourned worldwide. Roland Boer (one of the few writers to offer a definition) in "Iconic Death and the Question of Civil Religion" explains 'global' as the English speaking world with ready media access, and the concept of globalisation as the worldwide spread of US culture—Hollywood film and junk food—via new forums like the internet. This seems a peculiarly Anglo-centric way of looking at the world and throughout the book there is only scant mention of major global players like Russia, USA and China, the latter who ignored Diana's death completely. Global looks more like England and Australia.

The most interesting essays depart from this assumption to challenge the terms directly or place Diana's death in a different context. Rosanne Kennedy in "Global Mourning, Local Politics," questions the global nature of Diana's death, focusing instead on its exclusivity, the ways in which the media privileges feelings for certain people and not for others. A media that rewards individualism, beauty and idealised femininity encourages a false sense of "knowing" and mass identification, in turn creating a culture unable to mourn larger, more complex tragedies. She asks why we do not grieve in the same way for the stolen children, an issue closer to home, and questions a cultural studies that takes part in exclusionary mourning.

Mandy Thomas, in the collection's most interesting essay, "'Beautiful Woman Dies': Diana in Vietnam and in the Diaspora", reveals the impact that media have on the nature of response when she analyses and compares the reaction of Vietnamese communities, living in and outside of Vietnam, to Diana's death. By showing a culture where Diana is not mourned, more is revealed about the behind-the-scenes



Edited by Re:Public

mechanisms of the media and the differences in response are telling. In Vietnam, images of Diana were too expensive for the tabloids so she was little known. In fact, the Vietnamese media found the response in other parts of the world quite bizarre. In contrast, the Vietnamese press in Australia gave the death a great deal of attention and interviews with Vietnamese women reveal Diana had become a "marker of differentiation" for those new to Australia, symbolic of hope and beauty in the west: "Fairy tales like that don't happen in Vietnam or at least we were never told about them."

Many essays are concerned more with national character than global mourning and in particular British and Australian responses. Essays by writers in and out of England—David Burchell, Harry Irwin, Jean Duruz and Carol Johnson, Peter Griffith—reveal more about the writers and their preconceptions than the nature of collective grief. Rosalie Brunt argues that cultural studies tends to construct audiences as "imagined communities" with people standing in to illustrate larger segments of society ("Engaging with the Popular: Audiences for Mass Culture and What to Say about Them", *Cultural Studies*). In *Planet Diana*, we are often onlookers to those lining the streets and watching TV but there is no real recognition of whose faces we are watching, who is shedding tears. The writers as postmodern anthropologists collect and take samples of human behaviour from a distance, sifting and

cataloguing ritual. Such exploration of national character is murky and stereotyped, particularly in analyses of London mourners. There are passing references to multiculturalism—Mica Nava maintains that racial and cultural diversity of response was visible within Britain where Di had support from those who felt disenfranchised: the young, unemployed and ethnic minorities—but you have to wonder about all the people who weren't lining the streets.

1983

We walk for miles in a scraggly group. Strathmore Primary School Grade 6. No shade. No regulatory hats or sunscreen. Hot asphalt sticky as gum. We are standing alongside the Tullamarine Freeway with little plastic Aussie flags. We practise raising them above our heads in sync along with the regal Queen—giggle giggle—wave. I am ready to meet Diana. I've seen her on tele, extending her hand graciously. We have a lot in common. She's also a fan of Duran Duran. Our teacher is more excited than all us kids put together. I practise my curtsy, in my head, secretly, so no-one will notice.

Charles and Di are late. Kids are beginning to melt into the footpath. We are only two deep now so I will definitely get to have a chat. Here they come. The cheers go out. Arms up. Frantic flag waving. A crusade of grey vehicles hurtles past (Diana always

travelled fast)...which one's she in? which one's she in? which one's she in? which one's she in? which one's she in?...a mantra of disappointment. I leave my flag behind and cannot even pretend I've seen her.

Stylistically, Jennifer Rutherford's essay "Diana: The Hour of Our Death" is the most experimental and gutsy. By shifting the focus and situating Diana's funeral in the cultural context of 20th century deaths, she questions its long term impact, placing the event and response in perspective: "1914...Death: the leitmotif of the century. Its image proliferating in the anonymous death of millions. An external event, the event of 'others'...narrative gives way to this death, and to the enormity of its numbers, to the amassing of its bodies. We see bodies made trash, exhumed from mass graves."

Her writing is lyrical and unselfconscious, and the use of first person narrative brings a real sense of tragedy and grief missing in other essays—tragedy minus the hype. Sarah Knox in "Coincidence, or, The Last Days" also places Diana's death in a social context, seeing the funeral attendees as people "mugged by History" with links to JFK and that signifying, eternal question: where were you when...? A new generation now has that question to answer.

1997

Saturday night. Driving towards the dinosaur skeleton of the Olympics stadium. The passenger seat. Where is everybody? I ask. The restaurants are empty. The bars are lifeless. The street is alight with the continual flickering of television screens, a silent wailing wall through the windscreen. Everyone, it seems, has a Date with Ray tonight.

In *Planet Diana* the "people's princess" is carved, dissected, served on a platter with an apple in her mouth, mutated and purged. She is redefined endlessly. Although the true nature of Diana remains elusive, her spirit is captured best in Catharine Lumby's description of her as photogenic, literally a source of light, this single word highlighting her appeal and contradictions: *a visual impression which continues after the withdrawal of the object which produces it, leaving an after-image.*

Planet Diana: Cultural Studies and Global Mourning, edited by Re:Public (Ien Ang, Ruth Barcan, Helen Grace, Elaine Lally, Justine Lloyd, Zoe Sofoulis), Research Centre in Intercommunal Studies, UWS Nepean, Sydney, 1997.

Channelling expertise into action

Diana Klaosen attends a forum on the artistic future of Tasmania

It was definitely a good idea—one that was well overdue—to hold an open discussion on the future of the arts in Tasmania. The state has a flourishing visual and performing arts sector but it is beset by many problems, not simply because of its isolation, lack of venues and funding, but other factors including a lack of administrative professionalism and expertise, its small population and the consequent small-town politics, the difficulty of attracting corporate sector sponsorship, and a tendency for interstate media to ignore Tasmanian art activities. These are the sorts of problems that need addressing and the *Forum: The Artistic Future of Tasmania* promised to do so. By the time the forum began it was standing room only in the meeting's venue, the bar of the Republic Hotel, a popular bistro in North Hobart's restaurant strip.

With its striking poster designed by eminent printmaker Raymond Arnold and its potentially significant program, the forum attracted a lot of speculation in the weeks leading up to it. On the night, the audience—most of the local visual arts community—clearly anticipated something worthwhile. Notable by their absence were most staff of the local School of Art and senior curators and administrators from the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, the Hobart Council and various municipal arts centres. The word had gone out, however, that some of these organisations were to be in the firing line at the forum, so it's not surprising that they chose to stay away.

After a general introduction from the forum organiser, Michael Denholm, a local writer who was founding editor of the literary journal *Island*, School of Art lecturer Bob Jenyns' impassioned speech opened the

proceedings. He spoke on the possibility of establishing a Museum of Contemporary Art in Hobart—in the same spirit, perhaps, as the off-shoot of the Tate Gallery in St. Ives in the UK or the recently opened Guggenheim in Bilbao. This idea has been in the air here since the early 90s when it was mooted by Scottish writer, academic and artist, Peter Hill, currently based in Hobart.

Jenyns is part of a committee that is, finally, actively investigating what could be a vital new part of Hobart and Tasmania's cultural and tourism infrastructure. There is apparently some resistance from some of the powers-that-be at Hobart's Museum and Art Gallery, but it is surely not necessarily a proposal that would diminish that gallery's standing. One of Jenyns' points is that Tasmanian governments should cease looking for unrealistic "cargo cult" solutions to the state's economic and sociological problems.

Local painter Greg Hind spoke on the under-utilisation of a large number of historic Hobart buildings, most of which are currently unoccupied or used as offices for public servants. Some of these buildings could be revamped as public art spaces. Hind screened numerous slides of these buildings—many from photographs taken last century—and also showed some "then" and "now" images from the main local arts precinct Salamanca Place.

Michael Denholm punctuated the proceedings by reminding the audience of such recent anomalies as the closure of Textiles and "The Papermill" at the School of Art in Hobart; the animosity felt by certain local artists towards the School; the low incomes and limited opportunities for visual and performing artists; and the

demise of several regular arts events, festivals and local arts journals. None of this was news to the assembled multitude—and I didn't hear any solutions being suggested to any of them.

Next, Sarah Day, one of Tasmania's most widely published poets, read three of her own poems, in a short, engaging performance. The forum's advertising had implied that Day's participation would involve actively addressing the forum topic(s). As she did *not* present an address about, say, the literary arts in Tasmania, it might have been appropriate for Day to select from her repertoire, poems that made some real reference to Tasmania or to the arts. But her contribution was entertaining and interesting—and served to remind us that there are many successful writers based in Tasmania.

It was interesting to note that the forum had attracted arts presenter Stephen Fennelly and a crew from ABC TV's arts program *Express*. In the several years that *Express* and its predecessor *Review* have been running, the show has given Tasmania less than its fair share of coverage. There have been almost no stories about the state's often innovative visual and performing arts, and only a handful of mentions in the "What's On" section that closes the show. For some reason, *Express's* camera seemed especially interested in documenting the progress, at interval, of organiser Denholm circulating around the crowd with a large bucket, soliciting funds to offset the evening's expenses!

After interval, Tasmanian Businesswoman of the Year, Annette Downs, from Tasmania's long-established Terrapin Puppet Theatre, gave an inspiring address on the realities of

"making it" in the "real world" with examples from Terrapin's experiences. This was a useful address, relevant to arts groups and individuals alike.

The open, questions-from-the-floor session which concluded the formal section of the forum raised only a few (predictable) relevant comments and some red herrings before, unfortunately, degenerating into unpleasant spectacle such as *ad hominem* name-calling directed at the arts writer from Hobart's daily newspaper. And apart from some live music, that was that.

The forum's media release claimed the event would be "the most important artistic statement to have taken place in Tasmania since Sir John and Lady Jane Franklin (in the early days of settlement) founded a museum, now known as the Lady Franklin Museum on a private basis...as a result of Lady Franklin's vision of Hobart Town as that of a city of cultural achievement and learning." I may be missing something, but I found this a strange analogy to draw; whatever the Franklins' aspirations, I am not aware of their having any ongoing impact on the contemporary arts, and the Lady Franklin Museum these days is an under-utilised, under-equipped suburban gallery intermittently used as an exhibition venue for Sunday painters in the realist style.

It is difficult to assess the success or ultimate value of the forum. It was a brave attempt and better than no public meeting at all. It raised some important points—but where are the working parties and follow-up meetings that it ought to have generated? There is a lot of enthusiasm and expertise in Tasmania waiting to be channelled. Perhaps the forum may yet inspire some entrepreneurial locals to galvanise some of this potential into meaningful action.

Forum: The Artistic Future of Tasmania, Speakers: Michael Denholm (chair) Bob Jenyns, Greg Hind, Sarah Day, Annette Downs. Empire Hotel, June 23

Melbourne, Mallarmé and the 20th Century

1998 is the centenary of the death of the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842 – 1898).

Although his work has never been read by a wide public, Mallarmé's impact on the artistic and intellectual development of this century is profound and widespread.

The Melbourne based festival will explore many areas of contemporary cultural production in relation to Mallarmé's work, and also celebrate the close connections between Mallarmé and Australia, past and present.

Several new and rarely seen works will be featured at the festival involving artists from around Australia and overseas.

Tuesday

The Great Hall, National Gallery of Victoria
Sunday, August 9 11 am – 4 pm
Telephone : 9534 3642

Multiple readers over a five hour period will create a soundscape in the Great Hall, National Gallery of Victoria, evoking the famous Tuesday evening gatherings at Mallarmé's apartment at 89, rue de Rome in Paris.

On the ashes of the stars...

Stéphane Mallarmé - a celebration
Monash University Gallery
August 24 – September 26
tel: (03) 9905 421 Website: <http://www.monash.edu.au/mongall/monash.html>

Monash University Gallery is presenting an exhibition of Mallarmé and the visual arts organised by guest curator Michael Graf. The exhibition will consist of 19th and early 20th century works by artists closely associated with Mallarmé, and recent contemporary art relating to, or inspired by, Mallarmé's writing and ideas.

Mallarmé and Australia

Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne
September 7 – October 9
Telephone : 9344 7793

This exhibition will explore the important but little known connections between Mallarmé and Australia. The exhibition will include autograph manuscripts, letters and rare books relating to the Sydney poet Christopher Brennan, and the Australian-born Mallarmé scholars A R Chisholm, Gardner Davies, Lloyd Austin and others.

Axel by Villiers d'Isle-Adam

Telephone : (03) 9534 3642

Axel is a new performance work coordinated by Russell Walsh based on the Symbolist drama by Villiers d'Isle-Adam. It will be performed in late 1998 at a series of venues yet to be confirmed.

John Cage: a tribute to Stéphane Mallarmé

Music Auditorium, Monash University
8 pm Friday September 25
Telephone: (03) 9905 3228

re-sound, the contemporary music ensemble at Monash University, is presenting a concert exploring the interaction between the music of John Cage, chance and Mallarmé.

Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights by Gertrude Stein

The Centre for Drama and Theatre Studies, Monash University
Telephone : (03) 9905 9031

Third Year students from the Centre for Drama and Theatre Studies at Monash University are presenting Stein's 1938 play *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*.

CHANCES ARE. An International Exhibition of Contemporary Visual Poetry

Platform, Spencer Street Station
28 September – 29 October
Telephone : (03) 9654 8559

The exhibition, curated by Pete Spence, will feature work by almost 200 visual poets.

Seam

Alliance française de Melbourne, 17 Robe Street, St Kilda
October 3 – 6
Telephone: (03) 9525 3463

Seam is a new multimedia performance made by Jude Walton in collaboration with Lisa Barby, Brigid Lehmann, Paul Rogers and Ros Warby based on the notes Mallarmé wrote to accompany his unfinished poem, *Les Noces d'Hérodiade. Mystère*.

Australian Divagations: Mallarmé and the Twentieth Century

The Graduate Centre, University of Melbourne

October 4 – 7
Telephone: (03) 9344 5183 Fax: (03) 9347 2489
email: j.anderson@language.unimelb.edu.au

The Department of French and Italian Studies at the University of Melbourne is hosting an international conference: 'Australian Divagations: Mallarmé and the Twentieth Century'. The four-day conference, convened by Dr Jill Anderson, will be held at the University's Graduate Centre.

Key-note speakers at the conference will include Mary Ann Caws (City University of New York) and eminent French poets Michel Deguy and Jean-Luc Steinmetz.

full registration (4 days) \$140/\$55
one day: \$50/\$25

conference homepage @ <http://www.arts.unimelb.edu.au/Dept/Frits/mall.html>

Mallarmé Writers' Event

October 8 – 9

Alliance française de Melbourne, 17 Robe Street, St Kilda

Tickets for individual sessions: \$5/\$10 (Day); \$7/\$12 (Evening)

Two-day passes (admission to all sessions): \$25/\$40

Telephone : (03) 9344 7235 fax: (03) 9347 7731

email: c.feik@arts.unimelb.edu.au

homepage: <http://www.arts.unimelb.edu.au/Dept/AusCnt/Mallarme.html>

Writers from around Australia will be joined by prominent international poets Michel Deguy and Jean-Luc Steinmetz, in a two day project of readings, forums and

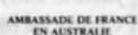
performances investigating the heritage of French Symbolism for contemporary Australian writing.

For further information about the festival, please contact:

Michael Graf, Festival Development Coordinator

14/14 Chapel Street, St Kilda, VIC 3182

Telephone: (03) 9534 3642 Fax: (03) 9528 1236



Digital museuming

A unique interdisciplinary conference on digital media at the Museum of Sydney

As a child I was enamoured of the spooky, musty South Australian Museum. You could almost smell the mummies: there was more than a little of the morgue of history about the place with its stern elderly uniformed attendants and shadowy well-trod stairwells. The bird room in the Sydney Museum still has some of that Victorian gothic flavour, and the Macleay Museum (now being promoted for its exotica by the Historic Houses Trust) in the University of Sydney plunges you back quite astonishingly into a 19th century museum culture. These were and remain to a degree places to dream in: it was enough to look (and smell and wander), perhaps to press the odd button to illuminate a tableau. The Museum of Sydney shares that virtual with its slide-out drawers of old Sydney pipes, coins and bric a brac, but there is no smell of formalin or moth balls or dust and ageing wood. The Museum of Sydney has a video wall and it has a "Bond Store" packed with not-quite-but-almost hologrammatic characters from early Sydney (more everyday than famous and played convincingly by actors) ghostily telling their lives and singing songs against dimly glimpsed layers of sea and landscape. It's a room that benefits from a long and reflective visit, and has the requisite museum eeriness (of which education is only a secondary benefit), especially if you're in it for a long time and preferably alone. It's not a space for whizz-bangery and impatience.

Three years after introducing itself as a museum uniquely predicated on the virtues of new media technologies, the Museum of Sydney is reviewing the engagement between the past and the new both here and overseas in a 2 day conference featuring international guests. Curated by Gary Warner, Director of CDP MEDIA (which specialises in

multimedia projects for museums, galleries and the likes of the Botanic Gardens), *SITE-TIME-MEDIA-SPACE*, is billed as cross-disciplinary. It is broadly "intended to contribute to development of understanding and appreciation of the wider creative potentials offered by new media technologies." More specifically, and this is the nitty gritty we fantasists want to hear, it will "encourage consideration of the ways in which digital media might augment exhibition practices or be employed to create entirely new forms of visitor experience and interpretive techniques."

Even more interesting for artists is its promise that "(t)he core of the event will be an inspirational series of presentations from local and international curators, exhibition designers, media artists, filmmakers and other professionals at the leading edge of museum and technological endeavour." I like "inspirational". As a new site for the working artist, the modern museum places itself ahead of the graphic, scenic, sculptural and taxidemic arts of the past in its artistic appeal for the animator, imager, interactor, interfacer. And, doubtless, the conference will attract the museologist, for whom the sharply changing nature of the



The Bond Store, Museum of Sydney

Ray Joyce

museum offers one of those historical moments of enviable perspective.

According to a draft statement about the conference, the internet and the world wide web have tended to favour certain developments in the museum—"collection management, promotion, publishing and communication"—"tending to preclude other applications of new media." Alertness to "local imperatives" and "staff members' special abilities and interests" and the

prospect of "unusual, innovative, eccentric and specialist exhibition projects" are the new focus. A measure of the conference's success will be the degree to which it conjures possible ways of telling history and its various and sometimes contradictory truths, and whether it affords sufficient kinds of (sometimes interactive) experience for the visitor to become, as Ross Gibson has put it, "a provisional historian." (*Metro*, 100, Summer 1994/5)

Write sites

Kirsten Krauth looks at fiction on the net

<http://www.temporalimage.com/beehive.index.html>

Capital S style and capital C content, full of puns and buzzing with arches of fiction and critical theory, *beeHive* is a recent ezine aiming to "advance hypertext media". The 2nd issue features *Queen Bees and the Hum of the Hive*, an analysis of subversive feminist hypertext, and *The Red Spider and Razorburn*, two short stories lacking bite and edge, about the banality of everyday life with your lover. Fiction this short (under 1200 words) can't afford to be lifeless; every word has to count. Volume 1 includes Steven Shapiro's theoretical fiction *Doom Patrols*, an anticlockwise patience game of wounds, flesh and Kathy Acker. To play you need a java capable browser.

<http://www.gangan.com>

gangway online mag has poetry, short stories and "experimental prose" from Australia and Austria with a sprinkle of Germany and Scotland. Useful if you're multilingual, which I'm not, so I probably missed the best bits. I couldn't find anything that resembled experiment in the latest issue



www.temporalimage.com/beehive

but it may have been hiding in German. I was more attracted to the fiction that I couldn't read—*1 manuskript* and *Destruction* (followed by greek alpha thingamyjig which I can't find in my insert symbol menu) sound more gripping than *A Little Knowledge...* or *Requiem*. A Lucky Dip. There's duds—watch out for poems about waves in Bondi ALL IN CAPITAL LETTERS—but it only costs 25 cents and hopefully you'll draw out Andrew Aitken:

Venus the Harlem tennis-babe smiled at the interviewer on Sports Sunday. 'My biggest weapon's not my serve, but Dad's AK 47!'

<http://www.ryman-novel.com/>

253 or Tube Theatre. An internet novel set on the London underground. 7 carriages, 36 seats = 252 passengers plus one driver, hence the title. Number of words for each passenger = 253. The guy who created this site is either crazy or a



www.temporalimage.com/beehive

Virgo. Every character on the journey is described: outward appearance, inward appearance, what they are doing/thinking. A ptg myself—public transport grrrr—I do this every day in my own imagination anyway. Meet Mr Donald Varda who is re-imagining the ending to *An American Werewolf in London* or Ms Sabrina Foster who advertises in the personal column as a black woman (she soon regrets it...because she isn't one). Hypertext is used minimally but to good effect, co-workers linked, stories intertwined, the sense of order works well and sly humour, political barbs and intertextuality mean addiction for pop culture junkies. It's also an inclusive project, an intermingling of cultures (you wouldn't want a train carriage of Hansonites but then again...the train does crash in the end). Right behind, there's another train coming, stalled, full of passengers just waiting for a persona...

Have you seen any sites that feature hypertext, creative or experimental writing? Please email URL to Kirsten: opencity@rttimearts.com

Hypertexts

Dear Reader,

Please note: I have just re-read the finished letter and decided to use the convention of underlining words to suggest hypertextual links. Rather than reading the line beneath the word as an authoritarian marker of emphasis, as if words were bound to the page like black flies on white flypaper, the reader is encouraged to interact imaginatively with the potentialities of the text (do a little cerebral hypertextual flea-hopping (See "Notes on Mutopia"). This is just a suggestion.

It is deathly still in the room—the one sound is the pen scratching across the paper—for I love to think by writing, given that the machine that could imprint our thoughts into some material without their being spoken or written has yet to be invented. In front of me is an inkwell in which I can drown the sorrows of my black heart, a pair of scissors to accustom me to the idea of slitting my throat, manuscripts with which I can wipe myself, and a chamber pot.

Nietzsche, Fragment of 1862
(quoted from Kittler by Tabbi, in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol 43, number 3, Fall 1997)

On The Letters K and Q

Sometimes there is a queue in our house to use the computer. I like this image of a bold Q forming, like a shallow pool, outside the room with the computer, with me standing anxiously by. I am aware that two persons maketh not a queue. I am also aware that the use of the possessive 'our' is

misplaced, since we do not, at the time of writing, own our own home, although we would like to. At the time of writing we do not even own our own computers (plural). Please note that interest in and enthusiasm for the net are no guarantee of computer access and/or ownership (singular). The fact that we want to own our own computers—one each, mine and yours, or else it's over, and I'm taking the car—leads to my first conclusion: here, in what used to be called the Domestic Sphere but which now, surely, after it has had innumerable holes punched in it by penetrations of market, media, man, ought to be renamed the Domestic Sieve; here at least we are still in the Kingdom of the first person possessive pronoun, no matter what the PDH (Partie Democratique Hypertexte) tell us.

But I digress.

Re: The Uses of the Q. I'm sorry. I apologise. I have exaggerated both the intensity with which we want to use the computer, and the associated protocol. We do not queue, as such. I went a little overboard, because in order to parade the badge of (partial/situated) knowledge, to lay claim to some right to write, I felt I must cite extreme feelings for the computer, that I must gesture towards addiction (see Ann Weinstone, "Welcome to the Pharmacy: Addiction, Transcendence and Virtual Reality", *diacritics*, fall 1997). Of course, the Q also introduces a hint of domestic conflict

into the picture— even, dare I say it—romantic/situational comedy. One man, one woman, one computer, one mouse, one cat...another story. I confess to playing the junkie card, mobilising the (to some) all too familiar scenario of the transcendental rush, the nightly habit of queuing in a dark corner, waiting to make a connection, scratching, itching to log on and get out of it. Intensity sells stories.

Outside the study, gazing into the glassy pool of the letter Q, I catch a glimpse of myself. At least it looks like me, and in this day and age that is enough. I sink into the curly embrace of the Q, wrap myself around myself, and take up my pen—a thin, black, felt-tipped pen. Most people, as they move inexorably towards middle age, develop a preference for one writing implement over another. They exercise their choice. Optimum Scriptive Technologies. Sitting there, alone, I write—*Each adjective that qualifies this pen of mine—thin, black, etc—makes me think, My pen and me, we're special. We are singular types with something singular to say.* Just for fun I sign my name, over and over, reducing my irreducibility and singularity to pure iteration(!). And then I wake up and realise it is all nostalgia, that it is not me in the pool at all, and cross out what I have written. Unlike the screen and its blinking little cursor, the trace of what I have just un-wrote remains on the page. Interesting. Bored by waiting in the queue, I pick up an interview with Paul Auster. He has just sold some manuscripts to a Library. A man who specialises in mediating between Libraries seeking manuscripts and writers who might want to sell them, comes to visit Paul every day for several weeks, putting the drafts in order, checking that the words that have been crossed out can still be read, so that the future readers can see quite clearly where the writer has been even though he chose not to stay there. What a job, I think, not sure if I would want it or not. ("Excuse me Paul, is that a 't' or a 'b' I'm seeing here? Is that 'hat' or 'had'?")

What happens to the idea of the manuscript now? Should we be worried, I ask a representative of the PDH? Ought we all to be saving and printing our drafts as we go, just in case that little man from the Library should one day call? Is this a paradigm shift? Is this the future? Is there money to be made in places we nearly went?

My emails are re-routed. The server is down. Or something like that.

Some say it all started with the typewriter. I believe the Heideggerians began this fingerprinting, but I am not sure. It was the typewriter that directed written language away from the body, the hand, away from the ME! ME! to the reproducible discretion of the SHE/HE, left to tap away peripatetically under artificial light, like neurotic battery hens. Around this time, some say, writing became a terrifying prospect. Kafka felt it, (and hence the letter K). Nietzsche felt it before him. Eventually all the big guys got it bad.

(I realised the other day that I wanted to buy a typewriter. 'Why?' was the incredulous response. Who ever thought we'd get nostalgic about typewriters? Remember the old IBM Golfball? The speedy Kthunk. Sigh.)

At last it is my turn. I sit down and study the illuminated square in front of me, thinking about all those monks who worked on the first letters of manuscripts. I think about solitude. About writing. About reading. Turning back the pages, I think about the time that it used to be just me, my book and my (moving left to right from age 7 to the present) banana, cold milk, chocolate, coffee, cigarette, chocolate, tea, chocolate, and finally,

herbal tea. I have renounced the lot. But have I renounced the intimate relation of the body with reading, writing, and thinking? Am I finally, once and for all, a severed head? (Of course, all this giving up and renunciation are merely a rhetorical ploy, the flip side of my addiction-simulation above). My mother is worried. My eyes, RSI, radons, microns, veiled dangers emanating from behind the screen. Don't worry, I tell her, reaching for a raw carrot. It gives me something to do with my hands. I hold the little mouse tight. I click. It is a voyage of sorts.

Textual islands rise up here and there, archipelagos of quotations, aphorisms, fragments, and we sail from one to the other, trying to connect the dots, to get something sweet to eat, to make love in the shade. That is what I am doing here and now; hopping from island to island, lily-pad to lily-pad, oasis to oasis, enclave to enclave. I am anachronistic, but what counts is, I am quick.

Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, "Notes on Mutopia" (*Postmodern Culture* 8:1 <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/post...> but only if a university near you subscribes, I believe.)

I read on. "What matters now is not the straightness and purity of connection, but how many things something can be connected to." Questions linger. Is the ideal world one in which everything is connected? Is this choice? Or the definition of paranoia? Remember the military-industrial-psycho-medico-multinational-corporate-arts-complex? Is this what we want? Is this what we are getting? Why are all the articles I read online from East Coast American Universities?

I keep my mouth shut while the battles are replayed on the listserv. The Prophets of Doom vs the Angels of Rapture. Mea culpa, I say, one hand on the mouse, the other on the cat, I am just a beginner. I feel like a sneak, a voyeur. I recognise in my inordinate fear of exposure the working of power.

I worry that the PDH has weakened their case, fetishised the footstep in the sand, instead of worrying a little bit more about whose boot was on whose foot. And what about this Hypertext Aesthetic? How come hypertext seems to be the realisation of every theoretical dream of poststructuralism, postmodernism, deconstruction, and now even post-colonialism (see Jaishree K. Odin, "The Edge of Difference: Negotiations between the Hypertextual and the Postcolonial", *Modern Fiction Studies* Vol. 43, No. 3 Fall 98). How can it be democratic, reader-driven and avant-garde as well? Have I overlooked something?

Outside, the queue is getting longer. The crowd is getting restless. I look forward to your response and could you hurry, please. People are waiting.

Sincerely,

Josephine Wilson
josie@opera.iinet.net.au

Josephine Wilson and Linda Carroli were the recipients of the First Prize in the recent Salt Hill Journal Hypertext Contest (an international competition) for their project *water always writes in *plural. See RealTime 24 for Kirsten Krauth's review and visit it direct at <http://www.hypertext.com/sh/hyper98>.

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OnScreen

film, media and techno-arts

Feature: Sydney Film Festival

Alive and kicking

Kirsten Krauth at the Dendy Awards in the Sydney Film Festival

The State Theatre. A small screen dwarfed by opulence—plush red seats, the roof a kaleidoscopic riot of snowflaked colour, weird floating backlit busts—like the interior of a casino there is no sense of night and day and the luxury seems curiously appropriate for a short film festival, such events often relegated to the outdoors or cold cheap space. The Dendy Awards opened this year's Sydney Film Festival and I spoke to Kriv Stenders about his award winning film *Two/Out*...

Surviving Relationships

Two/Out is a powerful drama based on a play by Jim McNeil (a writer who spent most of his life in prison), about the negotiation of friendship in a gaol cell, a space where there is no physical or psychological room to manoeuvre. Jack and Tom are cellmates. Jack has fallen in love with a black plastic bag filled with warm water; he cuddles it, speaks to it, longs for its companionship; it becomes his modern day Matilda. Tom, his world threatened by this new object of desire, tries to cheer and bully Jack out of his new and bizarre infatuation with jokes about the nature of women, and in a fit of jealous rage picks up a knife. Faultless performances, chronic, constant dialogue, a simple camera set up, pared down script and brutal editing contribute to a claustrophobic, tender exploration of what it takes to continue a relationship that is threatened.

Kriv Stenders, director and co-writer, cast ex-prisoners in the two leads, intent on making a film not so much about the injustices of the prison system but about the "offkilterness" and "poignancy" of a man "recognising a need for love and for nurturing" in an isolating environment: "What I wanted to make the film about was essentially the idea of compassion...it's in the very nature of relationships to go through turmoil and certain crises and one partner always has to compromise or sacrifice in order for the relationship to continue."

Erica Glynn's *My Bed Your Bed* also focuses on two characters, Della and Trevor, negotiating a relationship within a confined space. As Della loads her bedding onto a ute, the older women laugh in the background. It's a playful but knowing laugh, mocking her

inexperience. As she continues to load the truck, the to-ing and fro-ing predicts a long journey in the dust, but the women laughing get the joke before the audience—perhaps they are laughing at us for making presumptions—as Della reverses her truck only 25 metres down the road and begins unpacking. It is a clever opening to an elegant film.

As Della puts her pink futon mattress down and tucks in the sheet, she claims her territory, her space. Della, like the audience, hears her "promised" husband before she sees him, sitting in the corner of the pink kitchen, crosslegged with a green guitar (again, the object of desire), framed smaller than the fridge. All POV scenes of Della's outside world are through wire screens, distorted, a reminder that she is a prisoner of tradition. Her increased sense of isolation is highlighted when the neighbours wave but retreat to their houses. When she is alone with Trevor's guitar, it offers her a way of connecting: she sizes it up, tempted, holds and sees its preciousness, touches the strings but is not ready to play. When outsiders arrive, Trevor at last becomes demonstrative, his position in the household threatened (her triumphant look reminds him) and he grabs his bed frantically, dragging the mattress next to hers. The room suddenly fills with family noise, a sharp reminder of the innovative sound design; Trevor and Della communicate without words for 17 minutes.

Gagging on obsession

Kriv Stenders' aim when making *Two/Out* was to not make a gag film: "I was a bit fed up with that whole [idea]...it just seemed there was a point where that's all that seemed to be being made and no-one was really taking it seriously as a format, as a medium. I wanted to do something very dramatic and I think all good drama has humour in it." Ironically, *Bum Magnet* and *I Want You*, the films in competition against *Two/Out* are gag films, obsessive love tales, Women-from-Venus-Men-From-Mars concepts. *Bum Magnet* is about a young hip grrrl waiting for the phone to ring. With a self mocking appeal and good design, the slippery surfaces of her bedroom contrast with the stupefied community of her stoned Romeo. *I Want You*, darker in tone, is about getting what you want at all costs and, like the recent *Junk Male*, has some delicious fantasies about taking over the domain of the desired and settling in, having a shower, playing on his bed, greeting his girlfriend at the door with bad news. Both are crowd pleasers with neat twists.

Shifting histories

The documentary section reflects the changing nature of Australia's cultural identity, with two films about China and one set partly in Ethiopia. *Little Brother, Little Sister*, about an Australian couple who adopt a brother and sister, Sisay and Eleni, from Ethiopia, has

• continued page 24



Richard Green and Tom Ryan in *Two/Out*

Feature: Sydney Film Festival

Alive and kicking

• from page 23

immense emotional impact (especially for me as I have a brother adopted from Bangladesh) and is an example of how families, built out of fragments and fragility, can work. Anne and Steve are good interview subjects, open to the camera, intelligent, funny, articulate and honest about their motives: "I'm wondering if they're going to think we're really weird looking" comments Anne dryly before they meet their new children.

The film's appeal is its wider interests and themes: the importance of maintaining a cultural connection with your place of birth; how Anne's motivation stems from her own childhood experience (insight from her brother Michael); the positive influence that technology (photos, videos) can have on bridging emotional distance; sibling rivalry and the importance of your 'place' in the family unit. A knack of anticipating the children's behaviour, and attention to the small and everyday bring some memorable moments, for example when Japhet (their other adopted child, 11) is standing outside the front door, passenger seat, of the Land Rover, knocking on the window. Sisay is already sitting in this seat but it's Japhet's spot now he's the eldest. Sisay finally relents and gets out to move into the back seat but can't resist a surreptitious punch on the way through; so perfectly orchestrated you can't help but wonder if it's been scripted.

A *Breath* and *Mao's New Suit* focus on very different Chinas. Split into sections—childhood, passion, fish and water, war, suffering—*A Breath* is contemporary, ambitious filmmaking attempting new territory in the genre. Using a combination of re-enactments, historical footage and voiceover, it brushes over the lives of Huang Miaozi and Yu Feng, Chinese-Australian artists who "fought with the pen." In rich sepia, blue and red tones the film blurs into fiction, its evocative imagery reminiscent of Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor*. Although exquisite, it attempts too much; we don't find out enough about either the artists or the history of China. With the proliferation of popular and detailed accounts of the Cultural Revolution like *Wild Swans*, the potted history of *A Breath* seems insubstantial, the voiceovers heavyhanded and the juxtaposition of stylised acting/staging with period footage clumsy. While recognising the film's aim to experiment with the documentary form, I wanted to get to know the artists better, become intimate with them. We meet but don't speak.

Getting intimate can be disadvantageous, however. After *Mao's New Suit* screened, a woman behind me commented, "They're the kind of women I hate in real life. I don't need to see them immortalised in film." An interesting comment considering Sun Jian and Guo Pei, Beijing fashion designers in their early 20s, are perfectly positioned to represent the "real life" face of modern China, attracted to all capitalism has to offer: money, independence and the chance to have a career (within a rigid structure). These women live on the edge of feminism. While they have control of their own financial position and, to an extent, their career choices, they are still bound by the conventions of an idealised (increasingly westernised) femininity. Well edited, the film moves outside the realm of the young women's dreams to interview older women, reflecting changes between generations, and occasionally jolts the audience into recognition of freedoms taken for granted. For example when one of the mothers is interviewed she talks about watching a movie where the couple kissed and she was mortified, "so embarrassed." It's easy to see the appeal of extravagance and colour after decades of the grey Mao suit.

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Moulding desire

The dirty mirror that Eugenia peers into when she arrives on Australia's shores reflects an unclear vision, as murky and smeared as her identity. Based on a true story, *I Eugenia* attempts a revision of Australian history. Arriving from Italy, Eugenia wants to be a man, seeing herself as a bushranger with an appendage made out of stick and rubber and cloth, an appendage which only comes out at night. Well acted but too long, the film screened in the strange General category, a hodge podge of films which didn't seem to fit anywhere else (including Paul Winkler's exquisite tintinnabulation of layers, *Capillary Action*, too much for the Sydney crowd who responded with jeers).

The subversive *Feline* also explores the shifting nature of gender, the dark recesses of desire and awakening. On the edge of the ocean, femaleness is spewed, ejected and a woman is free to experiment, to mould herself into how she would like to be seen. She plays, erotically shaping her breasts higher and larger and rounder, kneading her hips narrower then rounder; she even gives herself a large and erect penis—why not—before returning to her original state where she rests, making a bed in the sand, while the wolf approaches, licking gently...The audience was noticeably uncomfortable during this film—is female desire, explicit, still so dangerous? It made me hanker for plasticine.

The Dendy Awards attracted a large, young audience unlike the rest of the Sydney Film Festival. Lynden Barber's recent article "Festivals thrive when audiences survive" (*The Australian*, July 17 1998) highlights this issue: "the Sydney Film Festival is faced with a decline in interest from young audiences which, if allowed to continue, will spell the ultimate death of the festival." A decline in interest not surprising considering the antagonism shown towards young people at one of the festival's forums, "Art my Arse", where the final comment from the audience was that young viewers don't have an attention span beyond a video clip on *Rage*. To attract a young audience the new festival director needs to take a closer look at the Dendys which are alive and kicking, offering young filmmakers the chance to call an artform their own.

Documentary category: Little Brother, Little Sister, director/writer/cinematographer Belinda Mason; *A Breath* (winner), director/writer Christopher Tuckfield; *Mao's New Suit*, director/writer Sally Ingleton. **The Seventh EAC Award:** *A Breath* (winner); Little Brother, Little Sister, Revisionism, director/writer Rachel Landers; **Fiction over 15 mins:** Denial, director/writer Phillip Crawford; *Great Falls*, director Yves Stening, writer Fiona Seres; *My Bed Your Bed* (winner), director/writer Erica Glynn. **Fiction under 15 mins:** Bum Magnet, director/writer Michelle Warner; *I Want You*, director Gregory Quail, writer Lisbeth Kennelly; *Two/Out* (winner), director Kriv Stenders, writers Kriv Stenders & Troy Davies. **General category:** Don't Blink, director/writer/editor George Goularas; *Capillary Action* (winner), Paul Winkler; *I, Eugenia*, director Gabrielle Finnane, writers/editors Gabrielle Finnane & Robert Nery, based on Eugenia, *A Man by* Suzanne Falkiner. **The 12th Yoram Gross Animation Award:** *Feline* (winner), director/writer May Trubuhovich; *On a Full Moon*, director/writer Lee Whitmore; *Vengeance*, director/writer Wendy Chandler. **The 1998 Dendy Awards for Australian Short Films, State Theatre, June 5.**

Kriv Stenders is currently working on his first feature film, The Glass House, to star John Hurt in the role of Lord Alfred Tennyson. He hopes to begin filming in 1999.

My Bed, Your Bed and Two/Out were recently nominated for AFI awards and are screening nationally in the short films section.

Newsreel

Industry Fights for Australian Content
Project True Blue, the production industry coalition, representing Australian actors, directors, writers and producers has been organising a public campaign to gather and demonstrate support for the protection of local content quotas on television. Rallies have been held in Sydney and Melbourne and advertisements pledging support from across the industry have been placed in major metropolitan newspapers. The High Court recently ruled that the Closer Economic Relations trade agreement with New Zealand means that New Zealand programs must be treated the same as Australian programs, therefore allowing them to qualify as local content for the purposes of local content quotas for television. According to Project True Blue, the problem could easily be resolved by the Federal Government by deleting section 160 (d) of the Broadcasting Services Act. The Senate has voted however not to accept the Democrats amendment to restore the Australian Broadcasting Authority's power to alter the Australian Content points system. According to the Joint Federal Secretary of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, Anne Britton, the Industry is bitterly disappointed by the decision.

1998 AWGIE Awards

The winners of the 1998 Australian Writers' Guild Awards (the AWGIES) were announced on Friday July 17 in Melbourne. Winners included Andrew Bovell, Ana Kokkinos and Mira Robertson for *Head On* (feature adaptation), Deborah Cox for *Dead Letter Office* (feature original), John Dobson for *The Big Pelican* (Monte Miller Award for an unproduced screenplay) and John O'Brien for *Masseur* (short film).

Movie Network AFI Awards Nominees

Film Australia Award for Best Documentary: *Urban Clan*, Aanya Whitehead, Paul Humfress; *Playing the Piper*, Ed Punchard; *The Dragons of the Galapagos*, David Parer, Elizabeth Parer-Cook; *Mohamed Ali's Happy Day Feast*, Catherine Dyson.

Animal Logic Award for Best Short Fiction Film: *Two/Out*, Kriv Stenders; *Tears*,Ivan Sen; *Delia*,Priscilla Cameron; *My Bed Your Bed*,Erica Glynn.

Quantel Award for Best Short Animation Film: *Seabound*, Donna Kendrigan; *Harry the Human Fly*, Darryl Aylward; *Vengeance*, Wendy Chandler; *Has Beans*, Andrew Tamandi.

SBS TV Award for Best Achievement in Direction in a Documentary: *Big House*, David Goldie; *After Mabo*, John Hughes; *The Liner- Ep.3: The Great Duel*, Peter Butt; *A Breath*, Christopher Tuckfield.

Best Screenplay in a Short Film: *Mate*, Evan Clarry; *My Colour Your Kind*, Danielle MacLean; *Picture Woman*, Peter Rasmussen; *Denial*, Phillip Crawford.

Kodak Award for Best Cinematography: *The Rough Shed*, Phillip Bull; *The Dragons of the Galapagos*, David Parer; *The Bridge*, Ray Argall; *Great Falls*, Daniel Featherstone.

Best Sound in a Non-Feature Film: *Mama Tina*, Paul Finlay; *Urban Clan*, Michael Gissing; *Remote*, Sebastien Craig; *Three Chords and a Wardrobe*, David White, Liam Egan.

Frameworks Edit Award for Best Editing in a Non-Feature Film: *The Liner Ep 3: The Great Duel*, Peter Butt; *Playing for the Piper*, Lawrie Silvestrin; *Box*, Cath Chase; *Denial*, Philip Crawford.

Enter Artsmedia Open Craft Award: *After Mabo*, John Hughes, Uri Mizrahi for Visual Design; *Relative Strangers*, Erika Addis, Rosemary Hesp and Tim Richter for Visual Design; *The Bridge*, Maya Stange for Performance; *Two/Out*, Tony Ryan for Performance.

Adrian Martin in WA

The WA branch of the Australian Writers' Guild has invited Adrian Martin to Perth for a week-long visit in August. He will be introducing two screenings at the Luna Cinema on Monday the 10th and Thursday the 13th, conducting script consultations and presenting public lectures ("Precise Sequences of Emotion" and "How to Make a Bad Script Worse" respectively) on Tuesday the 11th and Wednesday the 12th, and conducting a seminar "Intriguing Stories" on Friday the 14th and Saturday the 15th. For further details contact the WA branch of the Guild: tel 08 9201 1172.

Richard Dyer

Richard Dyer, Professor of Film Studies at the University of Warwick and author of *Stars*, *Only Entertainment*, *Heavenly Bodies*, *Now You see It*, and *White* will be speaking at *The Age* Melbourne Writers Festival on Saturday August 29 at 8pm, on Sunday August 30 at 4pm at the Merlyn Theatre, and in Sydney on Monday August 31 at 6.30 pm at the MCA.

Hong Kong Cinema

A festival of Hong Kong Cinema will screen in Sydney at the Academy Twin from August 6 - 9 and in Melbourne on August 21 - 23. Leading Hong Kong filmmakers and industry representatives will be speaking at associated forums. Contact the AFI for details. tel 02 9330 8239

Shorts at the Globe

The Globe Group is searching for short films to screen theatrically at the Globe Cinema in Stanmore, Sydney. Filmmakers with films finished on 35mm, of less than 10 minutes duration, should contact the Globe Film Company: tel 02 9332 2722

New technology for choreographers

Metro Screen is offering an intensive 8 day workshop and seminar with well known Canadian Professor Iris Garland. Using life forms software, this choreography workshop has the potential to jumpstart the use of such technology in the Australian dance community. While this workshop has been offered exclusively to selected choreographers, the seminar will be open to all interested members of the arts community. It will be run by Metro in conjunction with Ausdance on Monday August 10 from 6.15 to 9.15 at Metro screen studio one. It will focus on Professor Garland's presentation of the lifeforms software and the development of the technology and its capacity to bring significant change to the dance arena. Tickets \$20/\$15 members. For bookings and further enquiries contact Metro Screen tel 02 9361 5318

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Movie(s) matter

Peter Galvin reviews feature films at the 45th Sydney Film Festival

It's a funny thing about Sydney's film festival—a lot of the real action, fun and excitement seems to occur off-screen in darkened corners of the overwhelmingly plush State Theatre foyer. There, old (and not so old) 'film people' talk in earnest tones and swap stories and try to answer the question: "Why are we here?"

Is it to debate the direction of cinema? Is it to say that film festivals ain't what they used to be and then complain bitterly that the festival should be doing more to push to further extremes the idea of what cinema *can* be? Is it to grab passing festival staffers and chew their ears about one's *bête noir* or to make outrageous suggestions for future directions—more talks/fewer movies/a more curatorial approach...

Some try to convince themselves that turning up day after day, night after night, risking illness and the possibility that they may encounter old enemies, has something to do with what used to be called 'cinophilia'. Others just come to binge on a bunch of movies. And, underneath it all is the assumption—never stated—but clearly understood, that cinema is no longer an urgent game, that films no longer *matter* as they once did.

But talk and rhetoric is cheap. Paul Byrnes, director of the Sydney Film Festival for ten years, has now resigned and it's been a tough ride. The audience has shifted, as the marketers like to say, and the ones that are buying tickets seem less preoccupied with cinema and where it's going than seeing 'good' pictures before anyone else gets to see them (so who cares if they matter?).

This isn't the place to review Byrnes' directorship. But if one is going to complain about the Sydney Film Festival's position on any one of a number of cinema/cultural issues, it does seem purposeful to at least admit that the festival reflects a negotiation of 'the problem of film culture'.

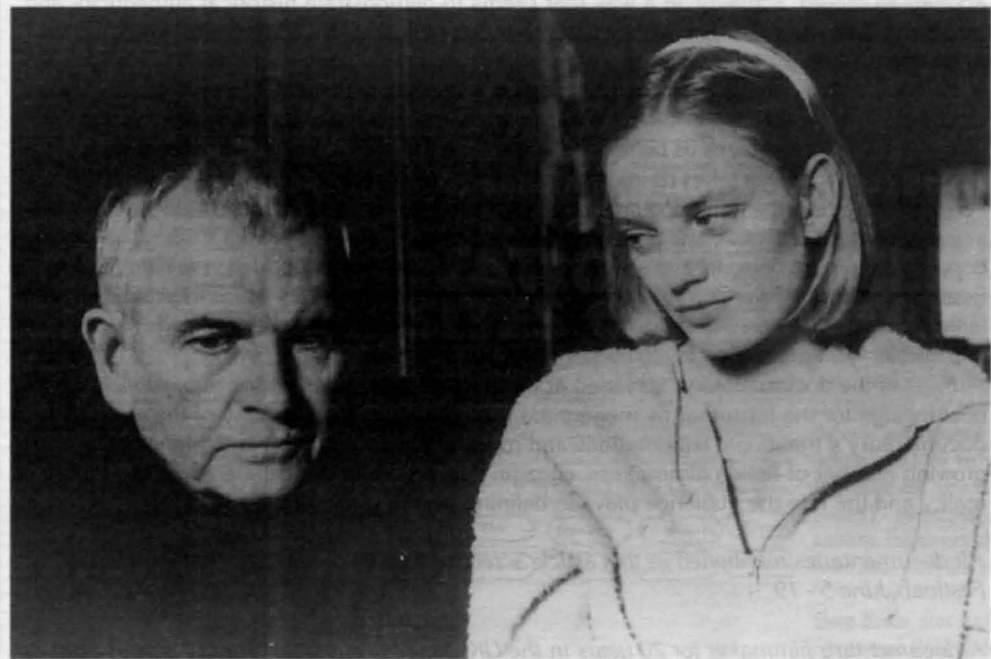
If movies don't seem to matter to 'young people' in the way they did to the older generation of cinephiles (and slightly younger ones like myself) then whose fault is that? Has it something to do with the fact that, beyond a few hardy and persistent individuals, the mainstream press seems downright embarrassed about writing on cinema in a serious, polemical way? If festivals like Sydney's (and Melbourne's and Brisbane's) are there to fill a gap, well, *which* gap—or gaping black hole—are they filling, exactly?

The Museum of Contemporary Art's Cinémathèque is a promise—but it's not there yet so, what's a cinephile to do? What was apparent after two weeks of talk stoked by nostalgia and coupled with bilious outrage at the state of play in film culture was this: When there's so much to be done, what the hell is a film festival supposed to look like?

All this aside, there were a few movies that seemed to matter a great deal—at least during the festival. Takeshi (Beat) Kitano's *Hana-Bi* (Fireworks) from Japan for one. This filmmaker's strange, beautiful, violent genre workouts haven't penetrated the arthouse psyche the way that say, the movies of Kieslowski have; perhaps because they are way beyond the comfort zone of valued subject matter and cuddly aesthetic tropes of the heroes of the 'scene'. Or maybe they do not have the enthusiasm of the buyers, exhibitors and programmers. When the end credits rolled at the screening of *Hana-Bi*, there were hisses, heard through cracks in the applause. *Hana-Bi* seems deliberate, antagonistic—by turns rapturous with a cheeky humour and horrifically bloody, absorbed in the Japanese traditions of the Yakuza/Gangster cycle of the 60s. The plot has Beat Takeshi in the lead as a cop losing his grip after a bad case, getting drawn into vengeance and retreating, at the same time, into a world of existential brooding. But, more importantly, Kitano's style far from determines the moral economy of this set up, turning the film into something more ambiguous than a 'redemption' story. *Hana-Bi* is playful, mournful, sad and gruesome and it's further proof that there are special ways to revise genre beyond the sharp, attractive, ironic distance of, say, a Tarantino (not that there's anything wrong with that).

Atom Egoyan's movies have been seen in Australia (and at the festivals), but he has had a tough time from critics and audiences. Demanding, deceptive, dense with ideas and labelled, too often and cruelly, as cold and cerebral, Egoyan is not an easy filmmaker. Perhaps, like Cronenberg, another Canadian, Egoyan must steel himself against the urge to merge with the force South of the Border; perhaps that's why isolation, family, community and the violations that can despoil the promise of those ideals seem to preoccupy him. His movie this year, *The Sweet Hereafter*, based on a fine novel by Russell Banks about the impact a bus crash has on a tiny mountain community, is not only great Egoyan, but great cinema. It doesn't have the mystery of *Exotica*, but it is a superbly controlled mood piece about incest and loyalty, yet it takes a great deal of time for the 'subject' to emerge. Egoyan, like Kitano in *Hana-Bi*, uses an intricate elliptical structure where flashbacks evolve ideas about the way memory seems an agony, where loss is performed forever in 'the now'.

The other truly great film of the festival was Robert Duvall's *The Apostle*. I say "great", but perhaps it is less great in its film style than in its imagination. It is a



Ian Holm and Sarah Polley in *The Sweet Hereafter*



Nishi (Takeshi Kitano) the formidable police detective in *Hana-bi* (Fireworks)

performance film. Like many an actor turned director, Duvall doesn't find much use for brevity or glibness. He wants (and gets) scenes that play out in real time. They are long and fierce and they risk restlessness and embarrassment at so much raw emotion. Once again, *The Apostle* takes an audience into uncomfortable, unpopular territory. It is a movie absorbed in the traditions of American Gothic literature (particularly Flannery O'Connor) about a preacher, Sonny (played by Duvall), who's trying to find grace. But as in the short stories of O'Connor, the frenzied religious fanatic is held up as neither villain nor tormentor but as an individual who's trying to transcend earthly bounds—he looks for God everywhere and in this story a commentary emerges on Faith. Duvall never laughs at this and the film is so alive with the fire of vigorous, naturalistic performances that it is impossible to ignore Sonny's fervour.

Perhaps it's seen as a flaw but those pictures are all getting a release. It's good for the rest of us—but, some might say it hardly pushes the boundaries of a festival.

Marius and Jeannette, on the other hand, is a 'typical' festival film: small, French, attractive and 'human'. This film does not seem destined for a theatre near you: it does not have sex and the wonderfully true, emotionally complex performances are the work of non-actors, discovered by director Robert Guediguian, all of whom seem to have faces that carry the weight of time rather than the look of desire. Its romantic plot is infused with politics (the movie is set amongst the working class of Marseilles) and the photography is grimy.

Thirteen is another typical festival film (which is to say that one couldn't ever imagine it finding a home anyway else). Small, even clumsy, made on a low budget also with non-actors, it looks like somebody grabbed a camera, threw up a few lights and started shooting. The story is coming-of-age-in-lower-middle-class black community. The point of view seems 'give the marginalised a voice'. Yet, this low wattage, rough-as-bags kind of approach draws a few laughs and conjures some ideas about family and friendship. The plot has the heroine do a runner—but there's no sexual horror as a result, no melodrama. It's a movie about how the world is full of nice people too. A snapshot of the USA without the tabloid glare.

Gone With The Train from Slovenia and directed by Igor Sterk is an exercise in style and good humour. Slight, charming and relentlessly oddball, it's about a train-board romance between a traveller who's going nowhere and a girl who is also going nowhere. If there's an allegory in there it eluded me. What it's really doing is working on memories of Buster Keaton, Chaplin and thousands of silent one-reelers. There's little dialogue, intertitles, great use of music (to cue the comic climaxes) and some fine jokes: during a delay in the journey the soccer-mad rail workers have their convention, divide their numbers and start up a game trackside.

Then there was *Cure* (dir Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Japan), a bleak thriller that creeps with such a sense of metaphysical dread that it makes *Seven* look happy-go-lucky by comparison; and *First Love, Last Rites*, a disappointingly flat, desultory adaptation of an Ian McEwan short story about sex.

There is no room to discuss *The Butcher Boy* or *Gadjo Dilo*. Suffice to say that there was enough diversity, interest and excitement in the features this year to convince me that movies still matter—even if most of the so-called players these days don't really want to admit it.

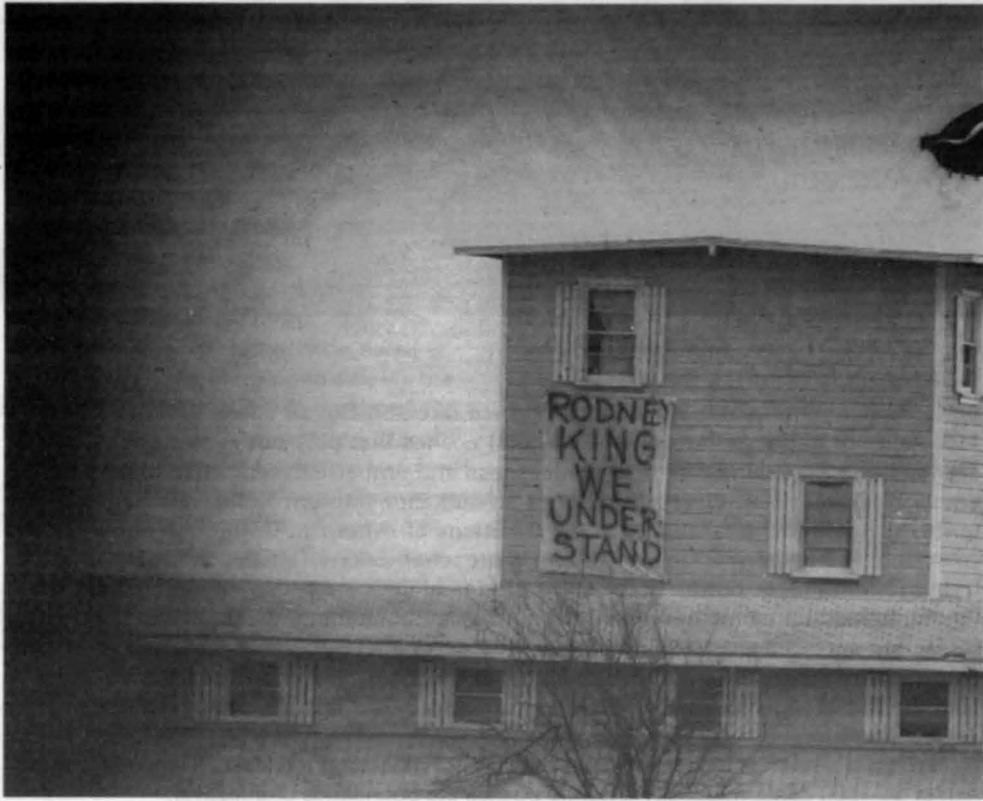
Hana-Bi, writer/director Takeshi Kitano, Japan, 1997, distributor, Dendy films; *The Sweet Hereafter*, writer/director Atom Egoyan, Canada, 1997, dist, Palace; *The Apostle*, writer/director Robert Duvall, USA, 1997, dist. UIP; *Marius and Jeannette*, writer/director Robert Guediguian, France, 1997; *Thirteen*, writer/director/editor/photography/producer David Williams, USA, 1997; *Gone with the Train*, director Igor Sterk, writer Matjaz Rogajc, Slovenia, 1996; *Cure*, writer/director Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Japan, 1997; *First Love, Last Rites*, director/writer Jesse Peretz, writer David Ryan, USA, 1997; *The 45th Sydney Film Festival*, June 5 - 19

Peter Galvin is a critic, and broadcaster on film whose work has been heard on Radio National. He teaches screen studies and script writing at University Broadcasting Service. At present he is developing a number of feature film projects.

Reeling in the real

Jane Mills questions the nature of documentary at the 45th Sydney Film Festival

The word 'documentary' entered screen language when John Grierson, the grandfather of the nonfiction film, reviewed *Moana* (UK, 1926), Robert Flaherty's poetic film about South Sea islanders. While conceding the documentary was a "creative treatment of actuality", Grierson bequeathed a moralistic idea of the form as necessarily objective with very different legitimations from the cheap thrills offered by the narrative fiction film. Along with a fixed view of reality, this is why the form has become widely perceived as a part of 'the discourse of sobriety.' Alberto Cavalcanti, a leading 1930s documentarist, said "I hate the word documentary. I think it smells of dust and boredom." Another celebrated contemporary documentary filmmaker, Pare Lorentz, claimed the word gave him a headache.



William Gazecki, *Waco: Rules of Engagement*

According to British cultural analyst Stuart Hood, the term conjured up dreary notions of public education, high-minded moral purpose and "a turgid style of rhetoric"—an opinion shared by the Australian television presenter who, announcing a program during the 1988 bicentennial shenanigans, reassured viewers: "Don't worry, it's not a documentary."

This year's Sydney Film Festival gave us ample opportunity to assess whether such views remain valid. Of around 200 films, 67 were documentaries—plus another half-dozen films which, although classified as dramas, made the terms 'documentary' and 'fiction' virtually meaningless in the way they blurred the boundaries. Most notable of these was Jang Sun Woo's astonishing *Timeless Bottomless Bad Movie* (Korea, 1997), a relentless tour of the lives and minds of young Korean rebels as they drink, dope, fuck, rape, steal, mug and fight their way round Seoul. The description 'fake documentary' seems appropriate, but this denies that somewhere in the mayhem there was some sort of reality being represented.

The documentaries presented a variety of styles, of views about purpose and legitimation, of notions of what constitutes actuality, and of attitudes towards the documentary camera's ability to document, reflect, capture, distort or deny reality, as well as entertain, amuse and provide thrills which would have given many an early documentarist a terminal brain tumour.

The films ranged in length from the 11-minute *Relative Strangers* (1997, Australia), an assured and visually artful exploration of memory and deception by Rosemary Hesp, to Frederick Wiseman's three-hour *Public Housing* (1997, US), about the outcome of racist town and social planning decisions on the African-American people of a Chicago estate—a peerless example of direct cinema which accepts filmic subjectivity, in a form usually associated with objectivity. Hesp's film suggests the short doco could become as popular as the fiction short currently is in Australia for filmmakers and audiences alike. In terms of

style, the audience favourite, William Gazecki's *Waco: The Rules of Engagement* (1997, US) about what 'really' happened at the 1993 siege in Texas which resulted in 87 deaths, could not have been more different from Friedrike Anders' experimental video, *Die Farbe Braun* (1994, Germany), about the 'truth' of Nazism. Both films explore official versions of historical facts. But while *Waco...* makes time-honoured use of archive footage and witnesses as 'evidence', Anders consciously questions notions of 'evidence', 'truth' and even 'sincerity' by an ironic manipulation of stylistic elements and narrative levels.

Many of the documentaries were unafraid to experiment with form and style in order to challenge previously hidden hegemonic structures—although it was noticeable that of the audiences' Top 10, only two challenged the codes and conventions of mainstream documentary filmmaking. In one of these, Anne Claire Poirier's poetic first-person *Tu as Crié Let Me Go* (Canada, 1997), the director/mother bares her soul mourning for her daughter, a heroin addict and prostitute found strangled in a Montreal back alley. Poirier gives us poetry; she gives us her truth. By insisting upon a personal involvement in the task of questioning what is 'real' and by refusing to privilege one particular truth or reality over another, the less conventional films provided audiences with the space to interrogate the practice of documentary filmmaking itself and reach their own conclusions about how the documentary form, in its many modes, contributes to an understanding of ourselves and of others.

Stanley Kwan's *Personal Memoir of Hong Kong: Still Love You After All These Years* (Taiwan, 1997) also incorporates personal history. Kwan's sexual orientation, his love of opera, and a fascination with the idea of denial show us a reality of the final months of British rule without a white person in sight.

Beverly Peterson's *The Andre Show* (US, 1997) documents her adoption of a 10-year old HIV+ boy who uses a video camera to become the star of his own—at times hilarious, at times heartbreakingly angry—movie show. There is no pretence that all the facts could show the whole truth of what it must have been like to be Andre or any of the amazing adults in his short-lived life.

In her self-revealing film, *Our Park* (Australia, 1998), Gillian Leahy explains how her original intention to make a "nice quiet film about my local park" and the relationship between the city and the bush, became subverted by an escalating row within her community, and between it and the local council in which she plays a major role: her



Jang Sun-Woo, *Timeless, Bottomless Bad Movie*

presence affects the film as it does the lives of her neighbours and the park itself.

David Perry's *Dr Jazz* (Australia, 1998), a personal favourite, allows us to share Perry's passion for jazz by drawing upon his experience as painter and experimental filmmaker: we hear, see and learn for ourselves how to connect the aural with the visual as a means of understanding the relationship between art and society.

The documentary is a constantly evolving form. It both reflects and contributes to the debates about representations of the 'real' and what constitute different modes of realism. There have been some key moments in its history when the documentary changed radically—in part, because old forms were no longer adequate to explain newly emerging ideas about the real. The observational-style films of DA Pennebaker and Chris Hegedus, the festival's guests, constitute one such important watershed.

From the groundbreaking *Primary* (US, 1962) which Pennebaker made with fellow luminaries Robert Drew, Richard Leacock, Albert Maysles et al for television, and *Town Bloody Hall* (US, 1979) when Hegedus first teamed up with Pennebaker, to their latest, *Moon Over Broadway* (US, 1997), seeing their eight films made it possible to explore how this particular approach to the representation of reality, with its intimacy and immediacy, appears to record 'actuality' in a way that seems to demonstrate historical authenticity and accuracy. Ultimately it fails. The documentary can only provide 'documents' which do no more than appear to offer veracity. Perhaps because reality itself is constantly changing.

Offering nothing new in terms of their mode of representing the real, two of their films, *Moon Over Broadway* and *The War Room* (1993) were, nevertheless, among the audience's Top 10 favourites. The former takes us behind the scenes into the production of a new farce starring Carol Burnett. The latter takes us into a President's campaign headquarters starring Bill Clinton. Pennebaker refuses the term 'documentary', restricting this to films which provide "exploration, investigation and analysis", and preferring the term "record" (quoted in Paul Wells: "The documentary form: personal and social realities", J Nemes (ed), *Introduction to Film Studies*, Routledge, 1996). While "record" suggests a notion of neutral actuality which the camera faithfully captures, Pennebaker doesn't believe in objectivity, telling the festival audience this was impossible, "you get sucked in, you become the fan of whoever you're filming."

Most of the documentaries screened at the festival share this view on subjectivity. It's a healthy sign for the form that its makers are increasingly rejecting many of the documentary's traditional legitimations and modes of representation and, alongside a growing number of fiction filmmakers, engaging on screen in the debate about the nature of reality and the role the audience plays in defining what a documentary is.

All documentaries mentioned in this article screened as part of the 45th Sydney Film Festival, June 5 - 19

A documentary filmmaker for 20 years in the UK, Jane Mills is now Head of Screen Studies at the Australian Film, Television & Radio School.

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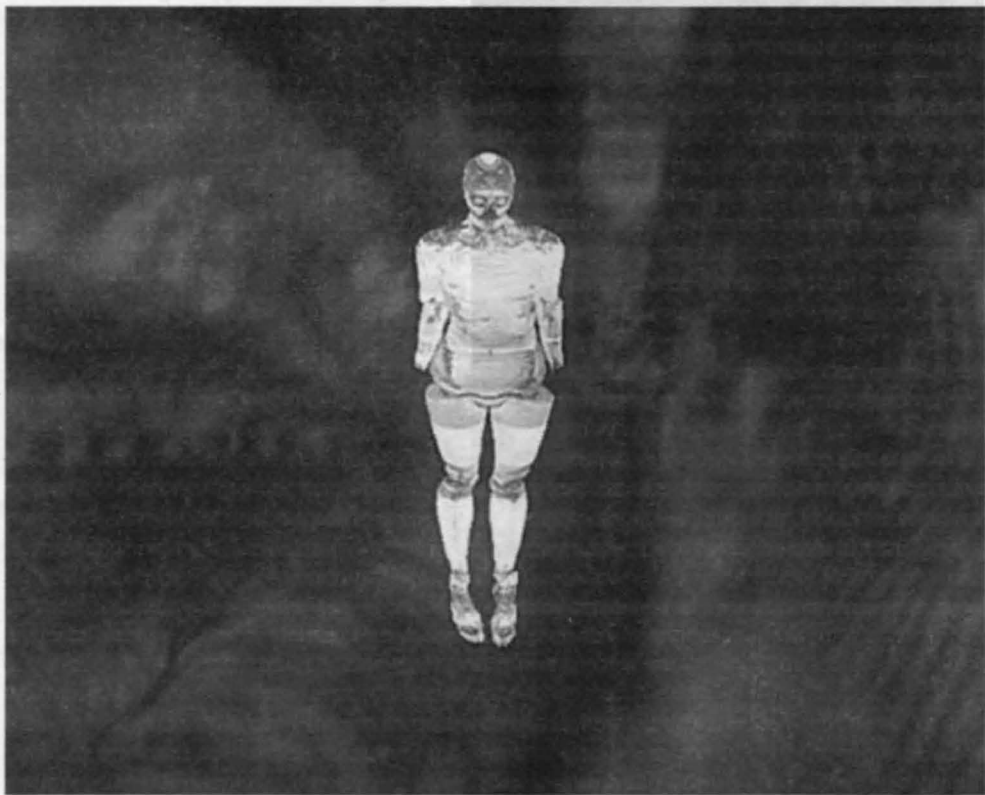


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Between professional diagnosis and dumb fascination

Colin Hood enters the spirit of Justine Cooper's *Rapt*



Justine Cooper, *Rapt*

What, however, I would ask, are the forces by which the hand or the body was fashioned into its shape? The woodcarver will perhaps say, by the axe or the auger; the physiologist, by air and by earth. Of these two answers the artificer's is better, but it is nevertheless insufficient.

Aristotle, *On the parts of animals*

"I wanted to take it somewhere else...create a wandering footnote to the Visible Human Project...and something else again." Justine Cooper took her own very live body through an MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scanner and came out with the makings for what I could only describe as an un-hinged, immortal body clock.

Turn on the animated section of *Rapt* and watch it tick over...build, unbuild...and build again. Each time it re-assembles through a different axis and with different body parts; a body bag of bits and bytes, programmed to construct, destruct and reconstruct in unnatural patterns of growth and decay.

Six hundred image files were generated through the scanning software. Cooper went to work on them, outputting living/dead body slices into two formats for presentation. The high-end process consists of a rendering of volume elements into a series of black and white 3D animations.

The second—low-tech—output form for this work consists of a curtain wall of individually sliced film images compiled into what seems at first a static installation. Readings of the work vary with the degrees of transparency and opacity offered by the film material, as well as the viewer's perspective—side on, front-on etc—on these quietly complex compilations of the total body.

On viewing the animated section, the spectator is ushered from masterful exterior views of this one squirming computer-made body to unanchored fly-throughs of tissue, bone, sinew and strange body cavities. For a moment an eye-ball rush through the white haze of solid bone structure triggers a brief and beautiful association with moisture-bearing storm clouds.

Cooper remarks, "The movement of the body would be impossible in 'natural space' but in this fractured space-time the body spontaneously produces itself—in faithful anatomy—and in

contortion. Time appears to dematerialise the body and then reconstitute it, hardly the normal cycle of decay. If entropy gives time a direction, time becomes circular in this case, not linear."

Some questions, however, remain unanswered: In what other ways could the raw body data be incorporated into objects/events that make art while acknowledging a debt to the technologies and output forms of 'unlovely', meaningful medicine? Cooper's choice of output and process solves much of the mystery.

The combination of projected 3D animation and vertebral curtain of inanimate photograms into a single bifurcated space, mixes pictorial models, reproductive technologies—disturbing the continuity of 'beautiful outlooks' upon a digital landscape. While the animation may be viewed with detached mastery, the ice-block of body slice-pics effects a psychological dislocation between whirling 'auratized' digital finish and cool, opaque originary data.

In *Rapt*, Cooper gives medical imaging back to the patient. The advanced science of healing (it gets smarter and smarter—we still die for pathetic reasons) is converted into a 'plain language' piece of art. It's a science show and a side show at the same time.

The work does not stand out in the field of progressive digital art. It draws back, bearing the scars, "the traces of the conceptual determination of the forms proposed by the new [medical] techne" (Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: reflections on time*, Stanford University Press, 1991). It also falls into some shadowy space between digital optimism and photographic nostalgia.

Shuffle a stack of X-rays and CAT scans from a personal medical misadventure. Fold them into the time-warp between future professional diagnosis and the lay person's dumb fascination with celluloid souvenirs of bodily catastrophe. You've just entered into the spirit of *Rapt*.

Justine Cooper, Rapt, installed at Sydney College of the Arts, March; video component screened in D.Art, dLux media arts' annual showcase of experimental digital film, digital video and computer animation art, 45th Sydney Film Festival, June 5 - 19 and touring nationally, including MAAP, Brisbane (see page 35).



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Curiously interactive, seductively simple, Janet Merewether's 5 minute video *Cheap Blonde* lures its audience into playing along with no hands-on and not a mouse in sight. We're offered an apparently limited set of images with instructions and a computer-generated voice which switches from male to female.

The film of a woman beside a waterfall, shot at one of the stalls at the SMPTE film and television equipment trade show, loops her into continuous motion. The lush opening image in cocktail colours shifts from colour bars to static as the fake backdrop vanishes and the camera moves to closeup. As framing dissolves, a feeling of texture emerges. The woman smiles, flicks her blonde hair over her shoulder, becomes familiar, though she never opens her eyes.

This is a work so constructed that we laugh as sentences implode and explode like a poetry machine, as an image of a "cheap blonde" who might have fallen out of some shampoo advertisement becomes a site of intimate reflection, and the twelve word sentence ("A famous film-maker said 'Cinema is the history of men filming women') permutates radically into meaningful nonsense. This is every abstract gaze theory you've ever heard made wittily and powerfully palpable. VB

Cheap Blonde, dLux media art's D.Art program, Sydney Film Festival; MAAP, Brisbane (see page 35)



A classic of masculine melancholia

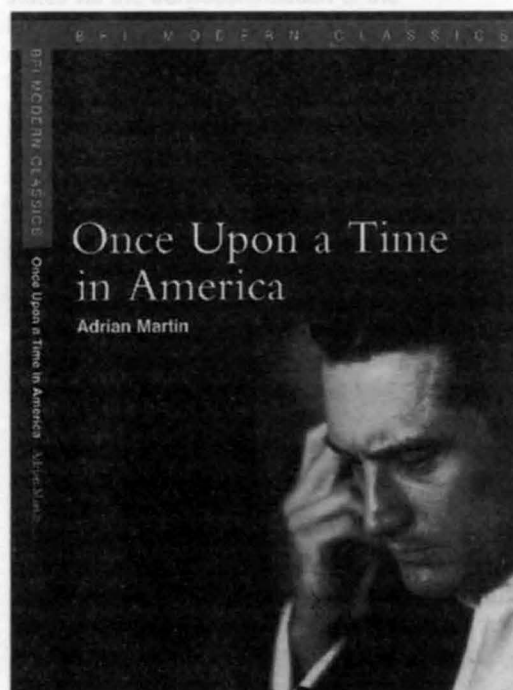
Noel King reviews Adrian Martin's account of Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in America* in the BFI Modern Classics series

In 1988, Adrian Martin contributed an essay, "No Flowers for the Cinephile: The Fates of Cultural Populism, 1960-1988", to the collection *Island in the Stream* edited by Paul Foss (*Island in the Stream: Myths of Place in Australian Culture*, Pluto, Sydney, 1998). The opening section of his piece was called "Once Upon a Time in America." Ten years later, Martin gets to write on Sergio Leone's great film of that name for the British Film Institute's 'Modern Classics' series.

To 'go public' on a 'Modern Classic' is to court two possible consequences. Will your act of passionate critical advocacy convey cinematic obsession in a way sufficiently alluring to persuade others to your view of the loved object? If the title of Roland Barthes' final essay—"One always fails in speaking of what one loves"—looms as one possible, gloomy outcome, the occasional columns in *Sight and Sound* ("Obsession") and *Film Comment* ("Guilty Secrets") show filmmakers and critics successfully discussing a film or films they love. Relax, Adrian Martin's stylish, highly readable book offers a distinctive take on a cinematic monument, elegantly informing his reader of the gestation, production and release of *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984), covering some of the main critical commentary and controversy which has attached to the film (while also adding to that debate), and outlining the film's influence on contemporary cinema.

The heart of Martin's argument is that Leone's film offers a profound cinematic exploration of melancholia and ways of representing male friendship. This concentration on the issue of "virile male friendship" is absolutely appropriate to a "dizzy and hallucinating" film which has at its centre a massive, and massively misunderstood, act of male-on-male betrayal. A man (Robert De Niro's Noodles) betrays his friend (James Woods' Max) and lives a long, guilt-ridden half-life ("go in' to bed early") only to discover, in his time of the sear and yellow leaf, that it was he who was consummately played and betrayed.

Early on, Martin says that Leone's film moves between "epic enchantment" and "massive disenchantment" as it plays its "key emotional note" of "melancholic disillusionment." He stresses, poetically and appropriately, the sadness and loss at the heart of *Once Upon a Time in America*: "This melancholy expresses itself not only through explicit narrative acts of betrayal and loss; it insinuates itself into every pore of the movie's texture, rhythm and mood." For Martin, this theme "is inextricably bound up with its presentation of masculinity." This strikes me as the one moment of critical risk for Martin's book, turning on the way he confronts and answers the potential charge of misogyny in *Once Upon a Time in America*. Leone, who died long before *Xena: Warrior Princess* became a prime-time TV hit, simply said he was making epic films and this necessitated a masculine universe. But much of what Martin says about Leone, De Niro and masculinity does double-service, critically speaking. It balances the formidable textual effectivities



contained in the genius of Leone's directing and the greatness of De Niro's acting, and it also "proves" the thesis that the film presents its viewer with a "desolate and anguished portrait of male sexuality", thereby redeeming the film via paradox from anticipated feminist criticisms: this insistently masculine world is not one in which a male view triumphs.

Nonetheless I suspect some readers will be troubled by the pages in which Martin discusses Noodles' rape of Deborah. He says up front that it "is not easy to watch, nor to discuss" this representation of "the most terrible, sexualised violence." After alluding to other film rapes (*Straw Dogs*, *I Spit on Your Grave*, *Kids*, *Fingers*), Martin argues that the scenes in *Once Upon a Time in America* show that masculinity "as learnt and lived, is presented as an impossible, self-cancelling condition. I do not believe that Leone deploys the

women as scapegoats for this desolation—even if Noodles, locked within the vicious circle of his own male complexes, does." In addition to saying that we should not confuse Noodles' attitudes towards women with the film's attitudes, Martin's defence calls on Elizabeth McGovern's "superb performance as Deborah" for having created a "vivid, full-blooded character" rather than a "two-dimensional stereotype in this depicted relationship." I'm puzzled by the fact that this rape is not placed in the "rhyming" context of Noodles' robbery-rape of Tuesday Weld's Carol, and I'm not sure how prepared feminist critics will be to accept a defence which seems to say that the technical actorial brilliance of a female lead ensures a redemptive dimension to this awkward filmic moment.

But Martin is unflinching in his discussion of this aspect of the film. He denies himself the "defence of genre" response that might allow one to say, 'It's a historical gangster flick, you've got to expect scenes like this.' Instead, he regards Leone's film as only weakly linked to the gangster genre ("a very curious and attenuated exercise"), and much of his book explores the question "what strange kind of gangster movie is this?" Certainly the film's conclusion, where Noodles is offered the opportunity both to recover the past (finally get the money) and revenge the past (kill Max), doesn't deliver the standard generic payoff to character or viewer. In genre terms the scene demands some explosive-cathartic display of hatred and recrimination. Instead, the scene plays with melodramatic possibilities of reconciliation and renunciation, and leaves us somewhere in between. Noodles honours his own remembered life, calls Max "Mr Bailey" and "Mr Secretary", hopes nothing comes of the investigation, and gives his wonderful farewell lines ("You see, Mr Secretary. I have a story also. It's a little simpler than yours. Many years ago I had a friend. I turned him in to save his life. But he was killed. But he wanted it that way. It was a great friendship. It went bad for him. It went bad for me too.") before quietly leaving.

Much of how this film is argued for and against involves one's perception of De Niro's performance, so it's not surprising to see Martin returning to it, hoping to grasp it once again, finally to pin it, with a word or a phrase. He calls Noodles "one of the great sleepwalkers of modern cinema", anticipating Willem Dafoe's role in *Light Sleeper* and Nicholson's in *The Crossing Guard*. But Martin's repeated probing of De Niro's performance is only one part of the many fine things on offer. Whether discussing music, acting, mise en scene or editing, explaining how some elements and actions in this "pulp poem" move from being functional-realist to poetic (doors become "poetic markers of passage" and toilets "sad places to be"), it is clear that Martin knows his film totally. Here is his wonderful description of the famous "long telephone ringing" that provided such a talking point for fans on the film's release: "It will ring, in all, 24 times, for over 3 and a half minutes. Just when you think this phone has stopped its hellish cry, you realise that Leone has only teased us by fractionally lengthening the pause between rings."

This play with screen duration and narrative source ("What was it? Where was it?") initiates a mystery of "agency" that will run throughout the film. Owing to the multiple, pyrotechnical visual-graphic transitions across the film's three historical time domains (1922, 1933, 1968) the viewer constantly wonders where these things, noises, effects, stories, are coming from. Do the flash-backs come straightforwardly from old Noodles' wanderings in 1968, or are they phantasmatic flash-forward imaginings from a younger, opiumed-out Noodles?

Martin sees *Once Upon a Time in America* as "a film of breakdown and crack-up, of loss and oblivion" and those words haunt his discussion as he guides his reader expertly through the 322-page screenplay and its textual variants: 165 minutes (the Ladd Company contracted-agreed length); 228 minutes (Leone's cut, shown at Cannes); and the infamous 147 minute "American cut" which reorganised narrative events into a linear chronology to avoid viewer "confusion". (Great idea! let's have a go at *Citizen Kane*, *Rashomon*, etc) Martin finds the American cut an "utterly abject viewing experience" and seems as saddened by the fact that it remains "a horrendous reality still circulating on American cable TV" as he is disappointed by the non-existence of a mythical further version, 263 minutes in length, alluded to by Leone in some interviews.

Part of the advertising pitch for the 'Modern Classics' series is that these books (14 so far) will "set the agenda for debates about what matters in modern cinema." Adrian Martin's contribution, the first by an Australian critic in this series, fulfils that brief with great intelligence and style, and some provocation.

Once Upon a Time in America, Adrian Martin, BFI, London, 1998, 96pp \$ 26.95 rrp, available in August.

QUARTET

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DIRECTOR JAMES KABLE
JULY29-AUGUST15
!Metro Theatre

BLACK SHORTS

KOOEMBA JDARRA
DIRECTORS LAFE CHARLTON
MARGARET HARVEY
AUGUST28-SEPTEMBER5
!Metro Theatre

BARKING DOGS

WRITER NORMAN PRICE
DIRECTOR MARCUS WESSENDORF
SEPTEMBER16-OCTOBER4
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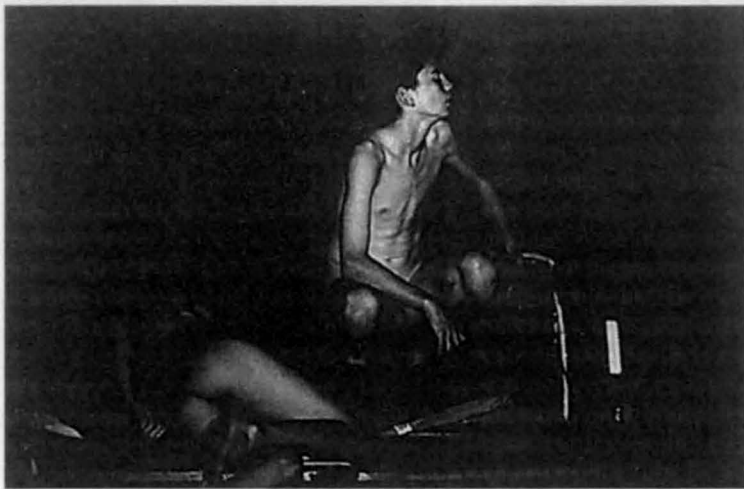
Deadly visions: at home in the abyss

Edward Scheer on representation of violence in Rowan Woods' *The Boys* and Bill Henson's latest photographic collection

Emile Cioran said that when he was an adolescent the "perspective of death" threw him into trances which he could only flee by visiting brothels or invoking angels. In two of the most unsettling works among recent examples of visual culture in Australia—Bill Henson's collection of untitled photographs at Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery in Sydney and the release of the Rowan Woods' film *The Boys*—these same elements combine: the adolescent, the trance, the violent breaking of the trance, and the uncanny (angels, as the living dead, are the ideal messengers of the uncanny). But what is also at stake in these works is a crisis within representation itself: how to represent violence and more broadly what should be the relations of representation to the world?

In *The Boys* the editing of Nick Meyers and the trancelike cinematography of Tristan Milani create a sustained impression of the banality of suburban violence in a way which the earlier and generically similar *Blackrock* never managed to do. Images of cluttered interiors, long still shots of wall surfaces, chandeliers hanging over everything like the last vain hope of material success, it's a vastly different scene to Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* but the analysis in these films of sexual violence as a means of reclaiming self from society rather than as a vaguely pathological formation, is identical. In Stephen Sewell's adaptation of the

1991 play by Gordon Graham, the character of Brett Sprague (played by the angelic David Wenham) just released from prison is the catalyst for an unseen crime against an unknown girl. This is the only event he can effectively orchestrate after a day of failures and diminutions in his personal power



Bill Henson, *Untitled*

base. The turning point occurs at the moment he realises he is impotent. His girlfriend Michelle (Toni Colette) mocks him but it makes no difference as he knows only too well that his role as the 'hard man' is now untenable. A crisis in his self representation and social/familial evaluation threatens, so his response is to seek out a target for violence to restore his sense of powerful masculinity, embodying Hannah Arendt's idea that "violence appears when power is in jeopardy." (*On Violence*, 1970)

But it is not an overtly violent film, there are no ghoulish images of a battered body, we do not even see the final act of violence, just the moments leading up to it and some of its more predictable and immediate effects: the brothers in custody, their anguished mother reduced to a phantom—just as all we saw of the earlier violence which led to Brett's imprisonment were the scars on his body. All we see of the crime is the point-of-view shot from the car where the boys are looking at their target and Brett is muttering "let's get her." For some time the camera follows the boys around in their car, watching while they progressively lose their subjective boundaries to the motion of the car and the effect of the drugs, becoming a weird collectivity of stray subjects. In Klaus Theweleit's study of military male violence against women he noted that "the predominance of hallucinatory perception" which "puts the man into a trancelike state, seems to be the ultimate aim of the attacks." (*Male Fantasies*, Vol.1, 1987) Brett's tender words to his brothers just before embarking on their collective act of violence recall this sentiment, that the reason for the violence is to narcotically restore each of them to themselves and to each other after the humiliations of the day.

The strength of this film is in its raising of these questions about the provenance of violent crime and the ethics of its representation. The producers John Maynard and Robert Connolly have been careful to distance their work from its association with the infamous Anita Cobby murder and this seems legitimate given the circumstances of its original production as a play (it is certainly less disingenuous than the denials of the *Blackrock* producers over its obvious connection to the Leigh Leigh sex murder at Stockton). But the important point to make here is surely that, as Barbara Ehrenreich says in her introduction to *Male Fantasies*, "we need to preserve the singularity of the horrors we seek to understand." Appropriately, the film is not rich in allusions, iconography or symbolism, it is openly unattractive. It does not seek to romanticise its subject, merely to dramatise it.

The Boys is not as direct in its interrogation of male violence as Jenny Holzer is in her recent work *Lustmord* (now at the Australian National Gallery in Canberra) though it operates with similar effects: the hallucinatory light cast by the electronic sign boards flashing texts about atrocities committed against women in war recalls the trancelike camera work in *The Boys*, but the uncanniness of the film's suburban setting and the strength and focus of its performances make it one of the most clawing and unsettling Australian films of recent years.

It is less clear why the images in Bill Henson's most recent collection of photographs are so disturbing, let's say it, so bloody creepy. Are they afterimages of an act of violation, of an unseen act...which must remain unseen in order to threaten the viewer's sense of the visual itself, its place in the sensorium? Almost like police photographs of a crime scene, there is a clinical/forensic quality to these images in which the crime itself is absent but its traces are everywhere in evidence in the randomness of the body sprawled on a surface, signs of a struggle—the litter of everyday objects which will no longer be used, fetishes now, suffused with an investment which is as fearful as it is libidinal. But here the bodies are looking blandly back at the viewer through dead eyes.

What age are the bodies in these photographs? We can only speculate but these gamin-like figures are not yet fully grown...they are bodies in transition, hard to definitively describe. This is what makes Henson such a brilliant photographer—if it could be said another way there would be less urgent need for these images, chilling and sublime. A continuation of the subject matter he explored in his previous series of untitled pieces but on a smaller scale and without the tears in the paper marking the force of the unrepresentable. No longer foregrounding the processes of the works, this time he lets the images alone speak their silent language, like a nameless voice breathing over the phone. He does not permit the

viewer the comfort of seeing the trajectory of the unrepresentable through the work, just this damaged youth held up for inspection...perhaps he knows like Cioran that "with age, we grow accustomed to our terrors, no longer willing to do anything to break away from them, we make ourselves at home in the abyss." ('on s'embourgeoise dans l'Abime', from *Syllogismes de l'amertume*, Paris: Gallimard, 1952)

As in *The Boys*, uncanny effects are produced through the accumulation of defamiliarisations: a banal suburban scene which in its obsessive focus suggests something which cannot be said, an unspeakable combination of the everyday humdrum and the violent rupture of the unique; adolescent bodies recline over car wrecks drinking beer from bottles, at once innocent and strangely corrupted, something in them is already rotting. Also like *The Boys*, violent death does not appear in these images but is nonetheless their ineluctable subject. Like the film, they offer a perspective on violent death as that which cannot be represented.



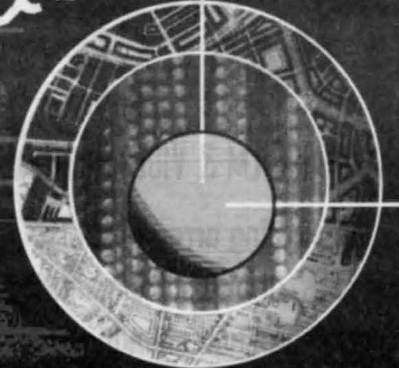
John Polson, Anthony Hayes and David Wenham in *The Boys*

Lisa Tomasetti

The Boys (MA), director Rowan Woods, cast: David Wenham, Toni Collette, Lynette Curran, John Polson, Jeanette Cronin, Anthony Hayes, Anna Lise, Pete Smith, writer Stephen Sewell (based on original play by Gordon Graham), Australian distributor Globe, screening nationally.

Bill Henson, exhibition of untitled photographs, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, May 14 - June 13

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Cinesonic

Philip Brophy: *Doctor Dolittle*-induced schizophrenia

To be surrounded by sound is one of the prime means by which we place ourselves in the world. Next to gravity and air pressure, the directional spread of contracting and expanding sound waves constitutes the core phenomenological state within which I acknowledge my presence, my essence, my existence. Quite simply, it is in sound that I find myself centred: not 'made centre' as in some archaic id/ego binary, but located within and between activity that forces me to accept that while I might be 'here', there's a whole lot of stuff happening over *here*. In this sense, the sonic is a liberating force. It takes the pressure off having to worry about the self because the sonic activity happening around you does not require you to be there for its existence.

But this calm, this pleasure is not for everyone. In fact, the breakdown between what could be termed the 'non-happening self'—the self that is not required for sonic activity—and the sonic activity around one—the city, the room next door, the truck in the street, the kid laughing as you walk by—can induce the most severe of traumas. Schizophrenia is currently advertised as something that can happen to anyone at anytime. The image is of a lightning bolt. A far more apt image would be a person trapped in a whirlpool of sound waves. The most apparent sign of a schizophrenic leaning is the inability to distinguish between the imaginary location of one's inner thoughts as voiced by your aural voice-box (a cast of thousands of voices from your vast history of personal experience) and the acoustic location of someone else's voice

external to you. I have never experienced this and can only imagine the destabilising effects. Maybe I am already enjoying it and don't realise it, considering how much I wish the sonic to engulf me, terrorise me, paralyse me. But ultimately, my pursuit is intellectual, and privileged by an ability to savour such occurrences.

For many, the state of 'hearing voices' is uncontrollable. It spreads from the self into an enlarged acoustic dome of the social self. That is, the person afflicted with this schizophrenic trait engages in an expanded sense of self within which a multiple of selves exist, and with whom dialogue ensues. To be precise, that person is not 'talking to him/herself', but rather talking to *his/herselves*. Singularity is vanquished in what essentially is a state wherein the self is surrounded by selves, all of whom appear to be located outside of the 'essential self'. As medical cut-backs send more of these people onto the street, our urban environment becomes louder, noisier. Additional to an increase in bodies on the street, their mass is multiplied and amplified. The noise of the city then becomes the heightened sonorum of this mode of sonic activity: the state within which the self is multiplied and amplified. No amount of fey flirtation with 'big concepts' like 'The City', no amount of collaboration with architects, urban planners and city designers, no detached fawning over the impressive/oppressive visual cock-throbbing of Big Buildings comes near to addressing this. Buy your inner city apartment; do your "The City" installation-cum-performance; work with town planners to beautify the streets with commissioned sculptures. Schizophrenia is building yearly and drowning out every pithy optical/conceptual moment and event you execute from your deluded CAD blueprints.

Viewed through the audio-visual slats of schizophrenia, the cinema is a squirming

melanoma: a mark which is surveyed to check on its symptomatic state. If the 1980s was a cinema of morphology, corporeality, pornographs and expansive/contracted bodily potentialities (and it was), the 90s has seen an alarming rise in the sublimation of schizophrenic states via the transubstantiation of the human voice into all manner and form of oral/aural bodies. In other words, films have become obsessed with giving vocal identity, performance and character to things which do not speak. In particular: robots, babies and animals. Frighteningly, they're all family movies. This brief article cannot address the insidiousness of encouraging children's imagination to hear/talk to the non-vocal only to damn that freedom in adult social spheres later in life. But a recent film is frightening enough to mark this trend as contemporary malaise.

The doctor is in. He's Eddie Murphy—he of the long tradition of loud-mouthed, rubber-lipped, tongue-smacking, in-your-face, motor-mouth comic viciousness. Now he is Doctor Dolittle—wrenching the role from Rex Harrison on a musical fantasy island, and slam-dunking it down in San Francisco. The doctor says a very telling line in the new *Doctor Dolittle*: "I'll end up like one of those people on the streets talking to themselves. It ain't a good look". How right he is. San Francisco has one of the most dense concentrations of street/homeless people in all of America. From burnt-out acid casualties in Berkeley to the disenfranchised of the Mission district, 'street crazies' hover slowly, surely, steadily. Ten years ago, south of Market Street was acknowledged by the tourist trade as being the no-go zone. North of Market and you start heading into the business district (where people wander around talking on mobile phones with lapel mics). Like a rising tide, street/homeless people populate at least five blocks north

of Market Street, their increase emulating a living multi-media demograph. In America and Australia, street/homeless people are psychologically rendered invisible through the less fortunate ignoring their voice. You don't make eye contact; you don't engage in dialogue; you learn to treat their voices as voices not directed to you, but encased within their own 'acoustic self domes'. Visually, they blend with the urban grime. But aurally, they can trap you into responding. This complex audio-visual distancing is both striking and unsettling in America's dying metropolis, in that the ability with which its citizens can filter out noise for the sake of their own sanity is amazing. For whenever one hears the floating voice of schizophrenia, one is hearing the potential reverse echo of one's own demise.

In *Doctor Dolittle*, the term 'schizophrenia' is never audibly mentioned, but it is screamed in every aural moment of the film's soundtrack. Like a mega mix of the soundtracks to *Milo & Otis*, *Look Who's Talking* and *Babe*, a thousand and one wannabe comedians desperately vie for your attention onscreen and offscreen with their smarmy wise-cracks. *Doctor Dolittle* is like being forced to sit through a condensed, accelerated marathon of that most desperate of all social discourses: topical comedy. Comedians read the newspapers (as if newspapers are meaningful and relevant) and then say something incredibly rude and dumb about easy targets like The Spice Girls. This form of comedy itself is a malaise—a neurotic reflex action with no other cause except to be topical. Listening to all those living and dead-stuffed animals with digitally composited lip movements is like wandering through downtown San Francisco. It is cacophonous, pathetic, scary. It is noise at its most fundamental: the collapse of communication through overload; the inverting of interiority; the ultimate surrounding of sound.

Doctor Dolittle goes as far as having Eddie Murphy interred in a psychiatric hospital because he claims he can talk to the animals. The film soon becomes hopelessly trapped by its own contradictory do-gooding, for at the end of the day, no-one is going to believe *anyone* can talk to the animals and hear exactly what they say. The film throws intensely absurd plot loops which try to mesh Cosbyesque altruisms with a critique of America's woeful medical system while making a cinematic fluffy white cloud. The more that urban vocal schizophrenia takes hold of the aural metropolis, the more we will try to deny it, and the louder its noise will get. One must not forget the role we as 'non-crazies' play in increasing this audible threshold. Every time we ignore that person talking to themselves, the more we socially enforce a cone of silence which actually allows the person with schizophrenia to expand their 'acoustic self dome'. They figure that our silence is an acceptance of their expanded aural territorialisation—which is exactly what it is.

There are people whose TV sets have additional dialogue tracks. There are people whose radios pick up broadcast frequencies unheard by the normal ear. There are people whose body parts have separate and vocal consciousness. They step onto the tram you catch and transform the aisles into a stage. They queue up at the bank and convert the booths into recording studios. They stand on a street corner and turn the whole city into their own personal Walkman. We are but vague shapes of silence in their surrounding noise. And all of them can talk to the animals.

Doctor Dolittle (PG), director Betty Thomas, cast: Eddie Murphy, Ossie Davis, Oliver Pratt, writers: Nat Mauldin, Larry Levin, Neal Jimenez, Lowell Ganz & Babaloo Manzel, music: Richard Gibbs, Australian distributor Fox.

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Further information, including position documentation, must be obtained from the Screen Studies Secretary, phone (618) 8201 2578, fax. (618) 8201 2556, or from the Head of Screen Studies, Dr. Richard Maltby, phone (618) 8201 2468, or email Richard.Maltby@Flinders.edu.au.

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Telediction

Mainlining: Jeff Gibson under the Spelling spell

A blatant come-on and a potent catchphrase, Channel Ten's *turn me on* promotion cuts straight to the Faustian heart of media hedonism. If you watch TV habitually you'll be singing it to yourself by now. Go on: *Turrrnn meee oonnnnn. Teennnnnnn*. Feels good doesn't it? And think of what's embedded in these words ... Marshall McLuhan, Hugh Hefner, Timothy Leary, and, just to ironize it all, Austin Powers, come to mind. In other words, sex, drugs, and global TV. Why wouldn't it feel good? Fast funky edits, scuzzy fonts and that infectious phrase, promise instant delivery through televisual transcendence. And they *do* deliver. Most of the shows that matter are there...*Seinfeld*, *The Simpsons*, *X-Files*, *NYPD Blue*, *Law & Order*, and of course *90210* and *Melrose*.

Ten rules, and even though some of these shows have had their day, there's no denying the enormous influence they've had on shaping the character and attitudes of this decade—which is not to say that TV fiends will greedily lap up whatever placebo's on offer. Supply meets a very sophisticated level of demand these days, and what seems to have hit the spot in the 90s is a blend of contradictory qualities—order amidst chaos, trust amidst cynicism, fact amidst fiction—indicating not only a referential depth and postmodern complexity, but a deep-seated desire for 'realness', manifest as a casual outing of psycho-sexual or ideological subtexts. Even if TV is just a palliative for social and economic impotence, as its detractors claim, it's a pretty damn good one.

As both window and mirror, TV provides a portal into the cultural unconscious, and a reflective surface upon which to model our selves. As window, take *Seinfeld*'s pop psychological mundanities. Putting a neurotic spin on just about everything, *Seinfeld* is constantly picking at, or satirising, the foibles of socialisation. Similarly, the mass avant-gardism of *The Simpsons* and the blanket paranoia of *The X-Files* both point to an inherent scepticism, or at the very least, a cynical acceptance that there is something *out there* that needs to be uncovered. As for mirrors, you can't go past Aaron Spelling's *Beverly Hills, 90210* and *Melrose Place*. There have been numerous other Spelling series cast from the same mould, but none so durable. Remember *Savannah*, *Pacific Palisades*, *Malibu Shores*, *Models Inc*, *The Heights*? Probably not. Indeed, between the two of them, *90210* and *Melrose* have got the whole normative youth catalogue sewn up.

Teen drama turned soapie, *90210* has now been running for an amazing eight years—three in high school, four in college and now the first year out—notching up around 240 episodes. In essence, a neo-Disney, anti-slacker morality tale, *90210* was hugely successful in the first three years, having tapered off steadily ever since. Though always impeccably produced, nothing could compare to those first vulnerable years. It was truly addictive TV—first loves, blind adventures, corruptible futures, and they looked so good in such a loathsome kind of way. The whole show reeked of innocence,

particularly with the casting of Spelling's daughter, Tori, as Donna, the eternal virgin, having only just this year given David the greatest gift of all after SEVEN LONG YEARS. What's even weirder though, is that David seems to be closely modelled on Spelling's other real-life offspring, rap-writing music-loving son, Randy, who, incidentally, starred briefly in *Malibu Shores*, as well as making the occasional appearance on *90210* as Steve's mischievous younger stepbrother. Talk about all in the family.

Melrose, on the other hand, although initially a spinoff from *90210*, worked a very different part of town. Starting out as a sexy but earnest ensemble youth drama, it quickly turned into a comical bitch-fest-cum-soap opera. While the Beverly High kids were working out their futures between swapping spit at the Peach Pit, over at *Melrose* it was only ever a question of who was screwing who, literally and figuratively. All they've done over the years is complicate and accelerate the process. At its peak, *Melrose* was also unmissable. However, eventually the plot lines exhausted the mathematical possibilities for mating and betrayal, and once they started coming back for seconds, the rot set in. As with *90210*, one suspects the only people watching *Melrose* now do so for sentimental reasons, just to see what the old gang are up to.

What's more interesting is the Manichaeon duality that's developed between the two shows. Good and evil go head to head, back to back from 8.30 to 10.30 every Tuesday night. It's like

disappearing down a manhole while strolling on the sunny side of the street. When viewed distractedly, and both shows are so tired now it's hard to view them any other way, conscious propriety and subterranean forces coalesce. As such, there is no better portrait of centrist subjectivity in the 90s—*90210* is the public face of PC liberalism while *Melrose* represents everything repressed in the name of moral rectitude. It's like those cartoon saints and devils tormenting Fred Flintstone in his hour of reckoning. Just picture the good one as Brandon Walsh, and the bad one as Michael Mancini.

With some 95 movies and TV series under his belt (eg *Dynasty*, *The Love Boat*, *Charlie's Angels*, *Starsky and Hutch*) Aaron Spelling is *Mr Television*. Predictably, the net is brimming with sites devoted to Spelling productions, and of course there are plenty of satirical digs. There is one dedicated solely to slagging off Tori, and another recording an entirely unremarkable pizza delivery to the Spelling residence. (The security dude took the pizza at the front gate. That's it. Go figga.) And if you want to know the synopses for the next 10 episodes or so, just check the official sites. (Psst. Brandon and Kelly head for the altar but bail at the last minute, Donna gets it on with Noah, David gets it on with Val, but Val also gets it on with Johnny, a drug fiend photographer who is HIV positive). As the mix of praise and parody on the web would seem to suggest, the good love these shows, and the bad love to hate them. Either way, we addicts are powerless to resist such delectable candy.

Jeff Gibson is an artist who lectures at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney.

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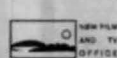
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dLux media arts is a member of the Australian Screen Cultural Industry Association (ASCA)

Disconnecting the larynx

Mike Leggett on *Being Connected* at the AFC's multimedia conference

The fourth of the Australian Film Commission's (almost) annual multimedia conferences, mounted in chilly Melbourne, was the cleverly phrased *Being Connected—the Studio in the Networked Age*, a label that managed to be interpreted through most of the 35 presentations in the assertive, hypothetical or simply descriptive senses.

The focus at the previous AFC conference, *Multimedia Languages of Interactivity*, had been on teamwork models from quite distinct production environments. The suggestion at *Being Connected - the Studio in the Networked Age*, that producers were hyperlinking the production process was less convincingly projected. With so many more completed products and projects than earlier events to use for show and tell (multifarious websites being invaluable for this purpose), the tendency was to survey outcomes with little opportunity for formal interaction with the presenters, a shortcoming noted at previous events (seeking to amplify the interactive element within multimedia).

The notion of the integrated interactive production team, whilst not so strange to commercial producers, was less evidenced by the practitioners who composed the majority of the audience for this year's event. Their informality was brought about, of course, by project-based budgets rather than the continuity experienced within the 'virtual' facility houses servicing Hollywood from London (such as www.cfc.co.uk). Able to access

extraordinary resources, it came as no surprise that whilst these companies were able to work in a wide-band virtual studio, the outcome seemed simply to improve their bottom line in relation to where they choose to live and work. Peter Webb's demo reel of visual effects for *Romeo+Juliet* hypnotised us with so much digital manipulation and mentioned, almost in passing, the innovative 'video fax' ISDN network set-up linking Melbourne and the studio execs in LA.

John and Mark Lycette ('The Lycette Bros') described how they had collaborated using the humble email attachment back and forth between Melbourne and Vienna over a matter of hours to devise a prize-winning T-shirt design. Providing JPEG image attachments to 'faceless' clients in distant cities is now well practised—whiteboard websites to enable the clients to monitor a project's progress via the web is standard.

"Technology changes at the speed of habits", Clement Mok reassured us, as internet telesales boom in the USA. The corporate design guru and information architect suggested that we don't need metaphors but relationships. "The net should improve the connections between families," he said via the teleconference link from his Studio Archetype in the USA. (www.clementmok.com)

For the 3% of world-wide families who are able to link there is also Victoria Vesna's recent investigations into how to build "a virtual community of people with no time". OPS:MEME (Online Public Spaces: Multidisciplinary Explorations In Multiuser Environments) follows the celebrated Bodies Inc project and likewise delves deeply into online space. "The primary mechanism for facilitating this goal will be the design and implementation of the Information Personae (IPersonae), a combination search engine, personally generated and maintained database of retrievable multimedia links, tool kit for collaboratively manipulating information, and pre-programmed intelligent agent ..." The project is in its initial stages anticipating forums such as *Being Connected*, but, given the kind of patents that may result, raises nonetheless the spectre of the virtual meritocracy. (www.arts.ucsb.edu/~vesna)

One Tree, expat Australian Natalie Jeremijenko's cloned trees for the San Francisco Bay Area, combines, in a meta-project metaphor, symbol and material

presence, using a website that will record the life of each real tree, and a CD-ROM that will algorithmically reproduce a tree within a host computer. Here the geographical community and the community of interest are brought together by being connected with nature and into the biological virtual organism. (www.tech90s.net/index2.html)

The AFC-funded <whoseland.com> "enables good voice", and will connect Indigenous people globally around land issues into a documentary form that, under the management of Jo Lane, will 'live' for the next two years. Writer and filmmaker Richard Frankland, a man from the Kilgarrick clan of the Gourditch-Mara nation in western Victoria, spoke eloquently about this opportunity for interaction to occur between all those who see the Land as the focus of our survival rather than our extinction, culturally "in many forms, not one generic form—generalisation is not an option." (www.whoseland.com)

Hypermedia futures were intriguingly projected by the mercurial Andrew Pam, Technology Vice-President of Xanadu (Australia), the research group assembled by Ted Nelson, one of the definers of online media. As the world wide web begins to stretch at the seams under the incursion of non-standard mark-up and bundled browsers, Project Xanadu—as the ideological conscience of the World Wide Web Consortium—works to encourage standards whilst developing further enhancements and extensions of the phenomena: OSMIC, a versioning tool that will identify original sources; scalability standards to prevent fragmentation across different browsers; replacement of the URL with the URI (Identifier) such that a page can be located regardless of which server it sits on; and transpublishing, transcopyright and micropayments as a means of making media more freely available for minimal cost to the end user. (www.xanadu.com.au)

Hypertext achievements featured strongly. Katherine Phelps gave us a thorough "History of Digitally Based Storytelling", 1960s to the present. Kathy Mueller, developing her work in interactive drama and game play ("the web will give us the opportunity of making better relationships.") outlined a theoretical basis for online serials with which she is currently working. (www.glasswings.com.au/)

The more recently completed "...waiting

for a stranger" is also the verbal metaphor for Perth writer Josephine Wilson's "stumble from printed page to screen", which in collaboration with Brisbane artist and writer Linda Carroli, was an online writing project hosted by ANAT, *water always writes in *plural.

(<http://va.com.au/ensemble>)

Flightpaths: Writing Journeys, a meta-project involving CD-ROM, installation and radio was directed and described by berni m. janssen. Utilising the talents of many other writers who contributed via email from across the country to the process, a CD-ROM anthologised the outcomes.

Flightpaths was one of an impressive group of 13 recently completed CD-ROM projects which were exhibited in the conference foyer. Artists who spoke about their work included Michael Buckley. His *The Good Cook* integrated words and images as a poetic whole (the production was completed in Dublin town after all), addressing the contemporary urban condition through the (hypermediated) loops and repetitions of the hopelessly insomniac cook. The city and its culture was explored by Sally Pryor in her multi-faceted CD-ROM *Postcard from Tunis*. Part travel diary and part language coach, *Postcard ...* won the prestigious Gold Medal at the 97 NewMedia InVision Awards, and secured a French distributor. (www.ozemail.com.au/~spryor)

Troy Innocent's continuing adventures with artificial life systems delivers *Iconica*, which combines the multimedia capacity of the CD-ROM with the dynamic interconnectivity of the web, whereby the capacity of the software to evolve its Icons, Forms, Entities, Spaces and Language is extended through interaction with other evolving copies of the system loaded onto other computers also connected to the internet. (www.peg.apc.org/~noodleboy)

Such a metaphor (for the conference as a whole perhaps) produced a rare moment of humour as it became more difficult for the demonstrator to locate one of the 'beings' resident within *Iconica*: "No it's not there...or there...ah there's one, no it's gone..." Observing artificial life, it seems, is to be as elusive and misleading as observing one's neighbours through the curtains. Quite distinct from the observations made by the keynote speaker Darren Tofts on the issue of memory, the further we immerse ourselves in the networked world, the more technology is able to "remember it for you wholesale", atrophying the oral tradition of knowing what you can recall. At this stage of the game, "are we ready for the evolutionary loss of the larynx?"



Multimedia Funding

The AFC supports the development of multimedia through a range of programs and activities including funding the development and production of multimedia works. The objective is to encourage Australian initiatives which explore the creative potential of multimedia, both on the Internet and in other digital media.

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For guidelines, application forms and further information contact Kate Hickey/Lisa Logan or visit the AFC website: <http://www.afc.gov.au>.

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Australian Film Commission Conference, *Being Connected: the Studio in the Networked Age*, RMIT, Melbourne, July 9-11. Conference papers and artists' and speakers' URLs will be available for a limited time at: <http://being.connected.afc.gov.au/>

Mike Leggett acknowledges financial assistance from the NSW Film and Television Office to attend the conference. legart@ozemail.com.au

A question of questions

Stephen Jones offers a biased account of the *Towards a Science of Consciousness III Conference*, University of Arizona

What is subjectivity? That's the issue. How does a physical, biological system like a human being come to have that personal, private but *conscious* experience of the world which is ultimately available only to oneself and expressible only through the most devious of means. Moreover, what is the self that is conscious of this experience?

These were the questions explored by the 800 or so people from many disciplines in philosophy, the social, biological and physical sciences, as well as computing applications and artificial intelligence, who came together for the *Towards a Science of Consciousness III Conference*. The range of contributions and possible answers run from complete denial of subjective experience through to the utterly mystical. Important new information about our neuro-biological processes and several new approaches to a quantum physical "mind field" explanation were presented but, ultimately, this edition of the biennial conference brought us no nearer to an explanation of conscious experience.

Great advances have been made in the biology of consciousness, or at least the biology of how we see and recognise objects, how we control our movements, how we interact with others and the emotional underlayer for everything we do. To mention just a few. A very good understanding of seeing, and how we interpret and recognise what we see, has been developed by Christof Koch (Germany/USA), built up from the work of many others. The neuronal processes employed for the detection of colour, edges and movement and the maintenance of object wholeness as we move (scan) our eyes across a scene are becoming well understood. The hierarchical relations of visual-feature-processing neural-assemblies in the cortex leads to concepts of how and where we recognise objects and people, how we separate out the information we need to physically grasp and manipulate an object, and most importantly, whence the visual information that we are conscious of derives.

Al Kazniak (USA) has elucidated much of the neural structures which mediate our emotional experience and the relations our desires and fears etc have to our behaviour. Our understanding of our social behaviour is also being shown to have neural basis. Vittorio Gallese (Italy) and colleagues have discovered in monkeys the visuo-motor "mirror" neurons by which they recognise and respond to the facial expressions of other monkeys. These neurons may serve as the basis for that recognition of the other, which forms the basis of communication and language.

Al Hobson (USA) has shown us a great deal about how dreaming enters our lives, what changes in the chemical modulation of our brains brings about sleep and dreaming and why dreams are so disjointed and bizarre. It's proposed that dreams are what happens when, with the usual waking sensory input turned off, low-level bodily events and the day's residuum within our emotional brain become input to the normal visual interpretation mechanisms without any of the regular awake control and discernment applied.

Bernard Baars and James Newman (USA) have mapped a highly suggestive description of the cognitive aspects of consciousness onto an architecture of control and processing assemblies operating between the cortical processing and lower brain attentional

mechanisms. The cognitive description has become known as the global workspace. Its anatomical basis is in the inter-relational architecture of the cortex and the sensory relay station called the thalamus.

But all this biological knowledge does not resolve the issue of how it is that we have subjectivity. What is that intimate personal experience of the information flow through one's brain that 'I', a 'self', experience? Is the biological process all that is going on, or is there some other thing occurring? This problem seems to arise from the fact that what I experience as first person process is so utterly different from the third person, physical description of the world. For example, what we report to each other about the ineffability of a glorious sunset simply hasn't got the depth and intensity of the direct experience of that sunset. The green of the leaves may well match a Pantone colour chart but how can I tell you of its intensity when walking through a forest? (The nearest we seem to get is in the transmission of ideas through the range of the arts.)

And this is what is known as the "explanatory gap." How can we explain the difference between my subjective experience of some phenomenon of the world and the physical explanation of that phenomenon, say in terms of wavelengths of light turning out to be some special colour. This was the major philosophical problem discussed at the conference. What is this explanatory gap? Is it real? And most importantly, if it is, how do we bridge it? This has become what David Chalmers (Australia/USA) describes as the "hard problem" for a science of consciousness. It is what produces some of the most outrageous proposals and makes the whole area so interesting. How do we get from one's first person *experience* of something to the third person *description* of the experience? What gives the experience of a colour or a smell its intrinsic feel, its depth and intensity, its "qualia"? Given the neurobiological explanation of what is happening in my experience of a colour, why do I experience it at all?

Evidently, quantum physicists are having the most fun with these questions. As somebody noted during the conference, for every quantum physicist there is a different interpretation of the quantum physical world. Stuart Hameroff (USA) still holds to the idea that quantum collapse (the manifestation of a consciousness of something) occurs in the skeletal structure of the neural cell, and is still challenged to explain how this could occur in a system operating at biological temperatures. Fred Wolf asserts that there is a field of "mind" throughout the universe, that everything actually occurs within that field and that we simply tap into it for our dose of consciousness. This is the most theologically inclined suggestion and is perhaps the best hope for the mystical and transpersonal psychology types who speak of the 'spirit' being primary. But it still remains to ask how it is that any biological 'I' might have access to my personal part of this field?

The new quantum physics of information throws a fundamental spanner into the works for all sides of this argument because it introduces the notion of information itself, the differential relations between things, being even more fundamental than the particles discerned through the agency of those relations. This issue, and the detectability of the

difference relations, is still being developed as a topic of consideration, though it has deep sources in the work of Kant and Bertrand Russell.

Transpersonal psychology and the mystical experience have the most to gain from the formulation of the explanatory gap and quantum physical explanation. Here the politics of the research start to become evident. Is the neurobiological work all that is necessary or is there something more that should be funded? For my part I think that the explanatory gap is actually a result of the struggle between theology and mechanistic explanation as clearly shown in the work of the 17th century philosopher Rene Descartes. If he hadn't needed to show himself to be a being possessed of a soul as well as a 'mechanical' body then this subsequent confusion need not have arisen. Experience could have been shown for what it surely is: being inside the body's processing of the informational product of the world, rather than the dualistic interpretation; namely, there is the physical and there is something else, which we find inexplicable.

Disappointingly, the possibilities inherent in the organised-systems nature of neurobiology and the possibilities of artificial intelligence as available through neural networks were left almost completely uncanvassed. As a result I think that the opportunities for a useful understanding of how a physical body produces consciousness were missed.

The problem boils down to this question: Does consciousness require a field of some sort to exist within? Or is the functioning of the biology enough to produce the qualia and subjective experience that defines consciousness? The quantum physicists and the mysticians all assure us that a "field" of some sort is necessary and those neurobiologists and cognitive psychologists who choose to deal with the notion of the qualia of experience suppose that the functioning of the brain is all that one needs. The purpose of most of the philosophers in the debate is to point up this issue: How do you explain the subjective feel/quality of our first person experience of the world. (Ignoring, for the present, the issue of what exactly the world is anyway?)

Towards a Science of Consciousness III Conference, University of Arizona, Tucson, April 27 - May 2

Stephen Jones is a recipient of an Australia Council Fellowship through the New Media Arts Fund. His website, titled The Brain Project, is at:

http://www.merlin.com.au/brain_proj/

The installation version of The Brain Project was exhibited at Artspace, Sydney, July 2 - 25. Stephen was recently commissioned by dLux media arts to curate Synthetics: video synthesis to computer graphics—a history of the electronically generated image in Australia, which was presented by dLux in conjunction with the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, July 19 and 26.



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A filmmaker's guide to the digital

Annmarie Chandler reviews a new book on film and postproduction

The film industry came into the arena of digitisation relatively late. For approximately 70 years, from the 1920s and up until the early 90s, filmmaking and its associated post-production processes provided its creative labour with the most secure and stable 'assembly line' in the media arts sector.

The computerisation of film editing and the digitisation of cinema imaging which started taking hold of the industry in the early 90s, however, destabilised this former linear production model and introduced a number of alternate pathways for filmmakers. For many people digitisation caused a major culture shock to traditional work practices leading to an environment of confusion and uncertainty. At last a comprehensive guide on the subject has arrived, published in the highly reputed

Focal collection on media techniques and authored by an Australian, Dominic Case, who is Technology and Services Manager for the Atlab Australia group.

Film Technology in Post Production describes the function of the film laboratory and film's interface with other postproduction technologies. The text is divided into nine themes covering the properties and gauges of various film and screen stocks, the alternatives in postproduction pathways and what happens in film processing, printing, editing and telecine operations. It also explains negative cutting and the management of EDLs (Electronic Decision Lists), laboratory and digital effects, soundtrack compilation and the quality stages leading to release prints including grading and answer prints. Each

chapter is illustrated with diagrams, flowcharts and budget spreadsheets.

There's been a lot of hype about new digital techniques and visual effects in filmmaking. This book is an essential reference for directors who want to understand the quality control they have over aesthetic decisions and visual styles involving the laboratory. For example, the concept of "contrast" (which remains the most distinguishing visual feature of the film medium) is explained clearly, with details on how various stocks and camera exposures can be manipulated in the photochemical realm by being "pushed", "flashed" or "bleached" to manipulate image resolution.

The composite coverage of both digital and photochemical processes will provide filmmakers and others needing to update

their knowledge of the craft with a solid understanding of all the new postproduction pathways, and therefore assist the quality of creative decisions in planning and negotiating projects. The book provides significant information to practitioners in a film industry which is undergoing rapid technological change.

Dominic Case, *Media Manual—Film Technology in Post Production*, Focal Press, Oxford, 1997, 192pp. Distributor: Butterworth-Heinemann, \$39.95 rrp

Annmarie Chandler is a senior lecturer at UTS in Media Arts and Production. She is also researching new work practices emerging within the film industry through digitisation.

Waiting for the fourth dimension

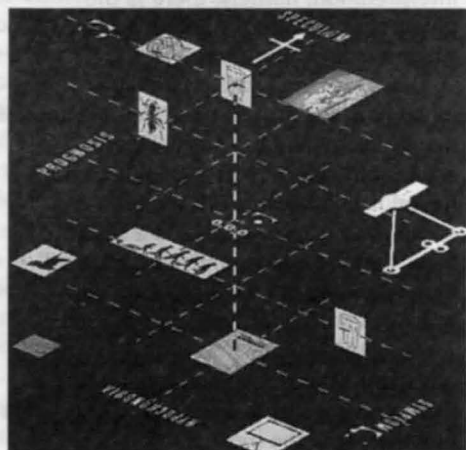
Dean Kiley queries *A CONCEIT* at the RMIT Project Space

It was the kid who showed us how it works.

The project—'exhibition' is too inertly flat—is launched by Kevin Murray. He gives a long, slow and apposite speech, Murrayisms marching neatly out in squadrons of analytical metaphors that line up and do smart manoeuvres on the conceptual, discursive and cultural fields territorialised by *A CONCEIT*. He talks (off, through and around the exhibition program) about mapping, about ideas of, and, as space. Inevitably he retells that old Borges story of the one-to-one map, the positivist fantasy of the model meeting its referent in an exact fit.

Meanwhile there's this kid (oh I don't know...about nine, Enid Blyton-blond, blue sly-eyed, jerky and restless) standing at the kiosk computer in the centre of the (attentive) audience. Unlike the previous well-behaved gallery-goers who'd clicked halfheartedly (next page please) or left the mouse primly alone, the kid discovers a geometric game hidden in the overlapping spinning spheres onscreen, drag'n'dropping this on that and that on them till an exact fit begins another scenario.

Murray continues to summarise what we've already worked out: that the invocation of the literary version of 'conceit' as per the Metaphysical Poets (Donne et al)—as a deceptive, ingenious and elaborate fusion of disparate and surprising elements—itsself models the way the project moves from map to model to choreography to synaesthesia. And back



Model map from www.diagram.com.au/conceit

again, providing either a send-up or escape-clause for the empty sloganeering and abstract-art-y pronouncements.

Meanwhile the kid examines the documents, captions and other orientation figures taped to the gallery floor. He does a bad-busker mime of arm-pumping Ready? Set? Go! and skitters from one floor-marking to the next, inscribing as Timezone vectors the designs Murray is describing as Arthur Murray dance-steps.

Murray gestures at some of the stockpile of mapping devices we've already collected on our way through the exhibits: keys, symbols, lists, dot-points, typologies, numberings, pointers, drawings, equations, stylised representations, icons, ant tracks, axes, directional arrows, blueprints, movement vectors, flowchart lines, procedural manuals, tables, calibration

marks, schematic charts, constructible (think Chemistry-class to-scale model) movable assemblages, captions, titles, instrument arrays, bricolage whiteboards. This is one project where the thematic metaphor providing a coherent model and cohesive microcosm is, precisely, that of models and microcosms, so the collaboration is more than five artists working with roughly commensurate rubrics. In a nice extrapolation of the working principle, it's difficult to know who—from John Lycette, Greg O'Connor, Darren Tofts, Christopher Waller and Peter Webb—had done what or worked with which bits...until or unless you sifted through the website afterwards. The launch resonates with an anxiety of provenance and of navigation: should one watch multimedia as slide-show; does that do anything; ought we be touching that; am I stepping on an exhibit?

Meanwhile the kid fiddles with anything that moves and immerses himself in whatever doesn't, bouncing from one item to another in a Chinese-checkers or string-art geometry until he's seen the sites, covered the territory and can safely be bored.

A CONCEIT worked on mapping the exhibition time-space in three dimensions. There's the planar (print program), with its ironising of the comprehensive modular diagram as coded index or algebraic commentary or interpretive key. There's the sited (gallery installation), with its playful proliferation of topographic ideas, objects, stories, readings, sonics, nodes, connections and breakdowns using computer screen,

video, slides, models, mounted displays, documentation and all available surfaces. And then there's the virtual (onscreen), framed by kiosk or pulled-out down the modern line, with its (false) promise of precisely-articulated 3D working model and its sleights-of-interactivity offering uncontextualised tourist circumnavigations of static excerpts. It was effective work, despite some inflatable baroque vaguenesses ('songlines'? lite-Todorov 'morphology of a grammar'? 'This is a place for the intellectually amplified?') that may also be called hyperbolic conceits, and a frustrating hesitancy (refusal?) to use the usual convergent places (program, website) to disarticulate diverse modelling practices that are not reducible to each other except via the abstraction, simplification and regularisation of Doing-A-Diagram (TM). Which may be the archetypal gallery experience.

The launch simulated all three dimensions at once. Given this, I'd have thought further reflexivity was a natural extension: a working back to gallery praxis (eg what's a curator, and do they decide on the map's borders?) and to exhibition constituencies (how are we the users/readers/audience placed and routed and corralled?) via the project.

The 4th dimension, that of interactive working through, was generously modelled by the blond mischievous boy: less official map than quick sketch, less hermeneutic than heuristic. Better, he demonstrated how to play with the work(s).

A CONCEIT, a collaborative mapping in 3 spaces, curator Christopher Waller, artists and authors: John Lycette, Greg O'Connor, Darren Tofts, Christopher Waller, Peter Webb, RMIT Project Space, Melbourne, June 2 - 9 www.diagram.com.au/conceit

Report

The WIFT report

Charlotte Faunce reports on recent developments at WIFT

In a coup for WIFT (Women in Film & Television), Erika Addis, one of Australia's most highly regarded documentary cinematographers is its new president. Two of her recent projects received acclaim at the 1998 Sydney Film Festival—*Relative Strangers* directed by Rosemary Hesp and *Our Park*, directed by Gillian Leahy. Other credits include the *Rite of Passage* (directed by Richard Keddle and distributed by Film Australia) and *Mao's New Suit* (a finalist in this year's Dendy Awards, director Sally Ingleton).

Following the second National WIFT

Conference entitled *Tools of the Trade—Skill Up for the Future*, held in Sydney last October, WIFT continues its skilling initiatives. Its NSW Mentor Scheme Editing Initiative was launched on July 2 at Island Films in Glebe. Working in consultation with the Australian Screen Editors Guild and with the support of the NSW Film and Television Office, this scheme offers professional mentorship to women editors and assistant editors. Mentoring has proven to be one of the most effective and rewarding ways for less experienced practitioners to benefit from the guidance and support of accomplished

professionals in their particular field. While the scheme is currently focusing on editing, it's not exclusive to this area with previous mentors extending across all areas of filmmaking and including industry luminaries Rosemary Blight, Jan Chapman, Pat Fiske, John Hughes, Cherie Nowlan, Graham Thorburn and Tom Zubrycki. There are other kinds of training which are just as vital in their own way, as featured in the forthcoming Sydney Spring Feature Film Pitching Event.

Recurrent events like the Women on Women (WOW) Film Festival (September 25 - 27, followed by a national tour) enrich Australian screen culture with works on 16mm or 35mm film or video tape under 40 minutes in a non-competitive atmosphere. For the competitive there is the short film section offering a Best Film prize of over \$15,000 in-kind support from industry sponsors and there's an audience

prize for Most Popular Film. Previous winners have included Penny Fowler-Smith's *At Sea* and Sandy Lepore's *Acquiring a Taste For Rafaella*.

WIFT continues to provide an invaluable way for women to create and maintain contacts at every level across the film and television industry. President Erika Addis looks forward to keeping WIFT on the map in discussions on screen industry culture, pushing for more involvement in WIFT by women in the television sector and maintaining the organisation's already strong local and national industry profiles.

For further information about WIFT's mentor scheme, the Sydney Spring Feature Film Pitching Event and WOW, contact WIFT NSW, Sydney Film Centre, PO BOX 522 Paddington 2021 tel 02 9332 2408, fax 02 9380 4311

Bent virtual

Shane Rowlands sees *Ultraviolet* at Griffith Artworks

Existing beyond the visible spectrum, ultraviolet light is a useful analogy for the positioning of experimental short video and electronic media works in relation to mainstream film cultures—particularly work with a queer bent. The marginal existence of much of this work means that it is dependent for exhibition on the somewhat restricted screening possibilities of specialist film and queer festivals and this, in turn, highlights the importance of cultural institution collection and acquisition policies for long-term survival. Hot on the heels of Brisbane's month-long Pride Festival, *Ultraviolet*, a selection of 11 short video works and a CD-ROM from the Griffith University Art Collection, screened to a full-house at the State Library of Queensland. Curated by Edwina Bartleme, the program explored intersections between formal innovation and alternative representations of gendered sexualities.

Engaged (1994), by Paul Andrew, explores the world of cottaging, beats and anonymous sex. Counterpointing tightly framed colour mid-shots of numerous men

(refreshingly diverse in class, age, beauty, ethnicity and masculinity) with fast-motion, grainy black and white footage of graffiti in public conveniences, the film foregrounds the dichotomy of public/private and the way it manifests differently for men and women. *White* (1996), by Francesca da Rimini and Josephine Starrs, maps connections between madness, lesbianism and the dominant culture through women's experiences of psychiatric wards. The use of predominantly white stills (of clinical interiors and bandaged body parts in close-up) constructs a sense of deep-seated alienation and institutional rigidity. No longer connoting purity and goodness, white becomes the colour of disease and oppression, challenged slyly by the soundtrack of detached observations in Italian, Spanish and English (the only suggestion of difference in the work).

The camp underbelly of classic film noir is exposed in *Back to the Happy Ever After* (1993) by Philip Hopkins, Michael Carne and Shane Carne, in which the 'male lead' is played by a ventriloquist's dummy. In some ways analogous to the regimes of compulsory heterosexuality, institutionalised and internalised homophobia, ventriloquism raises questions about who is speaking and who is being spoken for. The short-circuited, anxious editing in Barry McKay's *Faggots*



White (1996), directed by Francesca da Rimini and Josephine Starrs, the Griffith University Art Collection

are for Burning (1996) mimics the dilemma of the necessarily closeted gay man positioned as a secret outsider inside the closed(-minded) community of Christian fundamentalists.

A diaphanous and seductive palimpsestic assemblage, Robyn Webster's

video *Korper* (1995) traces the surfaces of that most unstable border, skin, and other intimate textures relating to the body, blurring the boundaries between inside and outside to create fleshscapes. Featuring a teasing soundscape of soft static, barely audible whispering punctuated with the arhythmic scrape of metal, *Korper* is beautifully shot in the duo-tone blues of X-rays and fleshy rose pinks. In *Cyberflesh Girlmonster* (1996), the interactive CD-ROM by Linda Dement, the scanned body parts of various women are re-membered and re-articulated as monsters (a notion also explored in a disorienting close-up of an armpit in Julie Rrap's *Sniff Movie*). One way to read the navigation of the girlmonsters and the various texts activated by them is as a virtual beat offering anonymous (lesbian, trans-sexual, cyborgian) sexual encounters. Given that the (often violent) sexualised experiences may be the 'real' bodily memories of the flesh donated by others, it's significant that opportunities for safe, anonymous public sex for women are usually virtual.

Ultraviolet, State Library of Queensland, curated by Edwina Bartlene, Griffith University Art Collection, administered by Griffith Artworks, Queensland College of Art, July 5 1998.

Preview

Digital acronym riot

A new New Media festival in Brisbane

A spectacular collaboration of acronyms—QAG, QUT, QANTM, QPIX, dLux and IMA—with assistance from Brisbane Festival, Griffith University, Metro Arts, Arts Queensland, Brisbane City Council and Macromedia, has given birth to MAAP 98, a brand new festival focussing on Art and Technology in the Asia Pacific region to be held in Brisbane in September.

Incorporating public events, forums and exhibitions using online technology, digital animation, video and national television and involving a range of innovative artists working with new technologies and screen-based media, MAAP's regional emphasis will align it with the Queensland Art Gallery's Asia Pacific Triennial in 1999. It also offers an opportunity to see and compare some of the best recent work in the one location.

The screening program (SEE) includes: *Technophilia* curated by Beth Jackson for Griffith Artworks and Queensland State Library including work by Linda Dement, Ian Haig, Ross Harley, Peter Callas, Patricia Piccinini, Stelarc, Csaba Szamosy, John Tonkin, Robyn Webster; a selection of works created by artists from the co-operative artists group *Video Tage* in Hong Kong; *Digital Fresh Out*, graduating show reels from multimedia and design students; *D.Art* the 90-minute showcase of experimental digital film, video and computer animation from dLux media/arts; and SIGGRAPH 98's international compilation of computer animation art and digital effects. Those who failed to surface for *Recovery* on ABC TV can catch *Art Rage* the recently screened collection of video artworks for television.

In the exhibition program (SEEK) search out *SMOG*, a digital performance event and environmental extravaganza at QPAC, Southbank presented by Griffith Artworks. Featuring work generated on IBM SP2 supercomputer by Jeremy Hynes and Georgina Pinn and researcher Andrew Lewis, the subject is...um... smog. Also included in the program:

another piece in the puzzle that is Sea Change—*Shoreline: Particles and Waves* curated by Beth Jackson and showcasing 12 artists from Asia and Australia online and at the Queensland Art Gallery; *Game Play*, an exhibition from Melbourne's Experimenta Media Arts; and *Virgin on Hard Drive* an interactive multimedia installation by Brisbane artist Lucy Francis and others at Metro Arts.

The *Techné* exhibition from Imago Arts WA will be showing at Sunshine Coast University College and also at the interactive party at The Hub Internet Cafe that winds up the festival. *Arts Edge* also from WA features over 30 artists presented in large screen projections and 12 computers. In *Alien Spaces* Paul Brown web hosts an exhibition of his recent work from The Substation in Singapore. The National Digital Art Awards will be presented at the IMA and works shown until October 3 and there'll be a special MAAP98 edition of *Fine Art Forum* online zine at <http://www.cdes.qut.edu.au/FineartOnline/>

The SPEAK program includes *Australia and Asia Pacific Think Tank*—a forum to discuss current issues and develop future strategies for digital art networks in the region; and *New Technologies and Indigenous Culture*, a one-day seminar on intellectual property with regard to Indigenous cultural material featuring live links to Darwin and a multimedia-based infotainment session. *QANTM Youthworks* is a week of courses in Macromedia web programs such as Director, Flash, Dreamweaver and Fireworks. RT

MAAP98 launches its website at <http://www.maap.org.au> on August 15

MAAP 98: September 18-26. Information: Kim Machan, Festival Director tel 07 3348 4109 fax 07 3348 4109 kima@b130.aone.net.au

Review

A kind of innocence

Ana Kokkinos' *Head On* reviewed

Head On
director Ana Kokkinos
adapted from the Christos Tsiolkas novel
Loaded
screenplay by Andrew Bovell, Ana Kokkinos, Mira Robertson
distributor Palace Films
release date TBA



Alex Dimitriadis and Paul Capsis in *Head On*

John Tsiavias

An Anglo-Greek friend says to me after the preview screening of *Head On*, I know what that's like, to be stuck in the middle. Yes, but what is this 'middle', I ask. Ari (Alex Dimitriadis), the film's 19-year old, alienated, drugged-out, unemployed protagonist, at odds with his father, with politics, with community, knows no middle, because there is no certain other against which to locate a middle. This is where the film's power lies, in the subjective uneasiness of Ari's position in the world, in the camera's framing (our sight blurs and glares with his), in the soundtrack shifts (always the world Ari hears, in the street, at home, at the club, on his Walkman).

The otherness of his life is the homosexuality Ari pretty much denies, and refuses when it comes to a potential relationship with an anglo, the mention of the word love precipitating violence. A cross-dressing friend (Paul Capsis as Johnny) is other, but he's also part of the same Greek community whom he

provokes at a dance and for whom the band refuses to play, Ari can't publicly support Johnny's transgression. The middle, the between of oppression and liberation is simply not there for Ari. This is amplified by the careful shaping of the film and its sustained scenes. It's a movement from a closed, delirious, narcissistic

interior world out into his community (a momentary sense of listening to others, of family when he dances with his father, of shared despondency with female friends, of obligation and responsibility—of a traditional and confusing kind, for his sister's sexual safety) and then back into a word of disavowal and self.

You don't want it, but you expect suicide, or a genre shootout, but it's not that kind of film, this is not hack tragedy, but a

dark, unknowing pathos which we experience with Ari. Although essentially a private drama, Kokkinos frames it with black and white footage of Ari's parents' arrival in Australia, as part of continuing cultural circumstance in which he finds himself (not that it interests him), and she details his milieu with an easy and convincing naturalism, and works in nice large scenic units which give the narrative and Ari's world an almost Cassavetes sense of an unfolding of its own accord (except that the film editing is much busier).

Head On is sometimes a head butt of a film, but its sense of an interior life yielding and resisting, finding no place nor able to really search for one, is deeply disturbing and curiously embracing because it offers complexity and a kind of innocence. Dimitriadis is excellent as Ari and the other roles are played with a verité plainness and tension that matches the material. KG

How many performance artists does it take to change a light bulb?

Dunno, I only stayed for four hours

Virginia Baxter does the rounds of her MCA exhibition with Marina Abramovic

Marina Abramovic is collecting jokes but I can't think of one. She whisks a small group of arts writers through her exhibition *Objects, Performance, Video, Sound* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney. It will have to be a quick preview, she says, because she needs time to get nervous before her performance at 6.30 and after it she'll be useless. In the flesh, she appears somehow lighter than I imagined, easier. Can this be the woman who sat for 16 hours tied by the hair to her partner and collaborator, Ulay before letting the audience in? She's dressed in black but I spy under the flats, she's wearing fishnets.

artists in which Abramovic and Ulay sat at a table for days without moving. "I had to leave", she whispers, "I was bored." So much for departure.

We catch up with the artist who is already in the next room where the retrospective material, she says, presented her with some problems. How do you document performance art? Did you really have to be there? Which reminds me of the joke I should have told Marina Abramovic.

A woman is walking past a shop window when her eye is caught by the display—a lush velvet curtain frames a plinth holding an alabaster hand displaying

Rhythm O. As well as replacing her own body with transitory objects for the audience's performance, she has created a number of quite personal video installations. In *An Image of Happiness* she appears upside down on a monitor atop a 1960s refrigerator. As the blood runs to her head, she repeats with increasing difficulty a monologue of imagined bliss. In *The Onion* the monitor sits on top of an old wooden wardrobe with a mirror for the viewer. On the screen the artist, eyes open, crunches into a huge onion and complains about her life. Watching herself on the video, she is clearly taken with the idea of fiction and

audience of cheering, whistling adolescents, waits for them to settle. After a long time in which he simply smiles, he says "Woo-woo" and waits. And again, "Woo!" he says, "Woo! Woo!" Abramovic draws our attention to the moment when he announces languidly, "Charismatic moment" and smiles beatifically out at them. Eventually, he is brought to his senses by one of the cardinals nearby. John Paul confides to the audience, "We're ruining the broadcast" before proceeding with his prepared speech.

Again, true to the form, many of Marina Abramovic's performances over the years have involved pain (she etches a cross into her belly with a razor blade), endurance (over days, she and Ulay share a room with a cobra) and intense concentration (she places one hand on a table and dances a dagger around her fingers). Though her reputation for such acts may account for some of the turnout there's audible shock from the uninitiated. Though she urges me to look, I prefer to eavesdrop on the idea that while she is performing Abramovic feels no pain. This has interested me ever since in some forgotten performance, and with no preparation for transcendence, I stepped into a pair of shoes a size too small and didn't realise till I left the stage that my feet were on fire. Marina Abramovic sees as one of the functions of performance to remind us of the capacity of the body to exceed its imagined limits, and to withstand fear. For her, art should be nothing less than a matter of life and death. Critic John McDonald is unconvinced. A few seats away, he's jotting "...art is a matter of judgement and taste." ("She's suffered for her art, now it's your turn", *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 25 1998).

Death may hold no fears for Marina but the end of her relationship with Ulay after 12 years together was clearly traumatic as you'd expect from a couple who created performances with instructions like: "We kneel face to face. Our faces are lit by two strong lamps. Alternately, we slap each other's face until one of us stops." In a romantic gesture befitting such an enduring relationship, their final performance involved a trek along the Great Wall of China from opposite directions. They met in the middle, only to part.

One of the last sequences she shows is of a performance (*Biography*, 1993) which she conceived after the split. Here her performance borders on the theatrical though, as usual, she plays herself. Adopting a series of gestures including Ingrid Bergman's wave in the final scene of *Casablanca*, she announces dramatically, "Goodbye pain. Goodbye extremes. Goodbye self-denial", and finally "Goodbye Ulay." Lately, says Marina, she has had to own up to a sense of humour and a taste for glamour. She finishes with the final frames of the scene from *Sunset Boulevard* where Gloria Swanson descends the staircase on her way to the asylum, a scene in which Billy Wilder manages to contain Swanson, Norma Desmond, himself and his fictional film crew all in the same mirror.

Marina Abramovic: *Objects Performance, Video Sound* was organised by the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford and has travelled to Edinburgh, Dublin, Munich, Ghent and Lyon. It showed at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney April 8 - July 5



l to r, Virginia Baxter, Jill Sykes, Nell Schofield, Marina Abramovic consider *Wounded Geode*, MCA

Cameron Bloom

We enter the rooms of what she calls her transitory objects—sets of smooth stones lining the walls, inviting the audience to place parts of themselves (head, heart, sex) against them, eyes to the wall. Others require them to lie with eyes closed or sit looking at walls. This is the way her art is heading, she says, the gap between audience and artist shrinking—what they make of the work becomes part of it. She is a bridge for opposites. *Inner Sky*, 1990 requires the participant to stand under a hollow rock and look up. In *Wounded Geode*, a high metal chair leaves feet dangling child-like as you look along a monumental "wounded" amethyst geode in the centre of the table.

The essential visceral element of performance art makes its appearance on the wall of the central exhibition space where in *Spirit Cooking* Abramovic has spent the afternoon scrawling in pig's blood instructions for the performance of some ritual acts for intrepid lovers—"Spin around until you lose consciousness. Try to eat all the questions of the day." In *God Punishing*, 1993 on the opposite wall a line of whips made from the hair of Korean virgins suggests more tantalising possibilities till you read the sign, "Due to constant use, these whips have become too fragile for public use." Elsewhere, we enter a smaller room in which two quartz clogs await the feet of another collaborator. Again, the invitation to stand in the shoes and "make a departure" is temporarily withdrawn due to possible damage. On the way out, someone recalls the 1981 Australian performance *Gold found by*

a diamond ring. She enters the shop. How much for the ring? she asks. The ring is not for sale, says the salesman. How much for the hand? No. The curtain then? Sorry, he says. If you don't mind me asking, says the woman, what do you sell here? We de-sex tomcats, says the salesman. Tomcats! What's with the curtain, the hand and the ring, she asks. Well, he says, what would you put in the window?

Abramovic's solution is to look at work from the past in the spirit of the present. So, with the photographs, a split second stands for hours. One is taken prior to a performance, one during, another after. There are 12 photographs of 11 performances including one from her famous *Rhythm O* performance in 1976 in which she lay naked in a Naples gallery surrounded by a set of 72 objects—among them, a sheet of paper, a pocket knife, a Polaroid camera, an axe, a lipstick and a loaded gun—and invited the audience to use her as desired. "I am the object. During this time I take full responsibility." She was rescued after 6 hours after being cut and when someone held the gun to her temple. The photograph makes me shiver.

This exhibition suggests that Marina Abramovic may be embracing a new age. Not I think, as has been suggested, *the New Age* (though I noticed an advertisement for the exhibition found its way into the catalogue of the *Mind Body Spirit Festival*). At 52 she appears to be moving away from works of such frightening endurance as

real-fake tears. In the next room, on a vertical bank of video monitors the artist rolls up her sleeves and vigorously scours a skeleton.

Abramovic's lecture-performance, *Performing Body* (MCA, April 8), is packed which is encouraging given that the MCA has not up to now shown much interest in performance. A new audience of the fashionably curious mix it with the performance artierati. Mike Parr blows a kiss to Marina while someone in earshot whispers "Who is this woman? I've been carrying around this article from *RealTime* [Edward Scheer, "Shock after aftershock", RT#24] all day but haven't had time to read it."

Mirroring a section of her new audience, onstage in white light Marina Abramovic is transformed in crimson Miyaki shirt, stretch pants and high heels. "She looks like a rock star", says a young woman near me. Marina announces that she will be driving the show like a video jockey and that for tonight's performance she will be dissecting the body into head, torso, arms and legs. She carries a scribbled map of instructions—to fix the format, she says, would be deadly.

Her nicely loose talk is illustrated with an exhilaratingly inclusive array of work—alongside Burden are Buñuel and Bausch. As well as her own work, there are young artists, famous artists, non-artists. A fascinating inclusion is a taped section (since edited out of the official version) from a televised broadcast of Pope John Paul II made on his visit to America in the early 80s. In it, the Pope faced with an

Pitch black performance

Aleks Sierz talks to Tom Morris, artistic director of London's Battersea Arts Theatre about a season of works performed in the dark

One of the classic distinctions between British and European theatre has always been that while Europeans have 'spectators' (those who watch), the Brits have 'audiences' (those who listen). To explore the theatre of the word in the flexible auditoriums of our heads, London's BAC (Battersea Arts Theatre in the Battersea Arts Centre) put on an innovative season of plays in total darkness. Called *Playing in the Dark*, the 9-week season featured a wonderful variety of experiences, all played in complete pitch blackness. Tom Morris, BAC's artistic director since May 1995, got the idea while directing Beckett's radio play, *All But Fall*, with its detailed sound cues. This led him to try an experimental season which would explore the "question of why we go to the theatre—and the kinds of imaginative involvement you discover there."

"Although this season seemed like a weird idea at first," Morris says, "it's fired a lot of imaginations." What surprised him was the range of artists who wanted to be part of the experiment—from the blind violinist Takayoshi Wanami to Britain's foremost visual theatre company Complicité; from veteran actors Suzannah York and Timothy West doing Shakespeare to the BBC's radio program *Blue Jam*.

"I've been astonished by the diversity of the season," Morris says. "And by the extraordinary openness with which all the artists have responded. Many people have come to see more than one show" and have said how different each one was."

For Morris, violinist Wanami was "the exquisite caviar in the dark experience." Without lights, "all the voices of Bach's violin sonatas—which we normally unify because we can see them being played by one musician—drift apart like defraction images and you can hear the different melodies alongside each other." The classics also became extraordinary. "It was a real thrill to have grand old British actors like York and West—not people you'd usually associate with experiment—fully engaged with the sense of adventure the project generated." With Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos*, Morris found that "the text is not very visual, except for the end when a messenger comes on and describes Oedipus blinding himself and Jocasta hanging herself. In the dark, this was electrifying. The audience were hungry to know—they'd been in the dark for one hour 10 minutes and had become word junkies."

When Theatre Complicité did a workshop, they "reversed the darkness by blindfolding the audience. They gave you a moist bag of soil that was the weight of a human heart. Then they did a slide show in which they described the pictures, so each member of the audience went away with a different image. It was all about memory, touch and smell—Complicité wanted to find out more about how the memory muscle works." Then, says Morris, "We had a week of recorded radio plays—in relation to radio, having a live audience made the event more like cinema than television. With undistracted listening, people became totally focused on the work." Plays included Lee Hall's *Spoonface Steinberg*, Michael Boyd's *The Trick Is To*



Tom Morris, artistic director of BAC

Keep Breathing and Piers Plowright's *The Shadow Knows* sound collage.

"The idea of playing recorded work in the dark is one of the things that are likely to take off as a result of this season—it's cheap and easy to control and produces a very unusual experience." And Morris sees one of the lessons of his innovative approach as confirming "people's imaginative involvement in theatre. When you're in the dark, it's completely unlike film or television—it's more intense, more like reading a book." Everyone will have their own favourite memory of *Playing in the Dark*. I enjoyed the camaraderie of Primitive Science's *Theatre Dreams*, in which a moving figure told us a ghost story (set in a theatre) and a female guardian angel led us to an envelope secluded under each seat. After opening it, we had to drink the contents of a sachet, hold a card, and scribble a wish on the envelope.

To make the wish, we held hands with our neighbours. Winds blew our faces, hairy spiders fell on us, and strong perfumes wafted across the theatre. After the show, we stumbled into the light, and found that our wishes had been written in black pencil on a black envelope. A king of clubs and the few drops of water left in a sachet were all the evidence that remained of 40 minutes which mixed giggles with childhood dread. It's amazing how much we trusted each other. As the sign said: "It's all in the mind." What does Morris think of Primitive Science? "Well, normally this highly visual group creates a slightly sacred atmosphere in its shows. It's a bit of a cult. Audiences sit in complete hushed silence—almost intimidated. By contrast, *Theatre Dreams* had an incredibly rowdy audience—because they were asked to interact with the performers there was constant bickering and laughing. It's the first time Primitive Science got such a vocal response."

Did anyone have a bad trip? "Yes," Morris says. "In one show, a pair of tourists whose English wasn't good didn't realise that the show was in the dark—and they had to leave soon after it started. Also, some people discovered that they were frightened of the pitch black. If a show is one hour 40 minutes without a break, you lose all sense of time. Many people said that they'd never been in the dark for so long—it does funny things to the imagination."

Playing in the Dark, BAC, London, May 12 - July 12

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Highlights of the program in August/September include:

love child

three nights of new short performance works, curated by Victoria Spence and Groovii Biscuit, followed by DJ's 'til late

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Clawing it's way out of the primordial ooze dripping from CLUB bENT, Sydney's infamous queer and alternative performance forum, comes love child - three nights of curated performance and music presented by The Performance Space and the Stephen Cummins Bequest. Come to a performance gig with a difference, a club with a twist, see work as you have never before...

▲ Performing Lines presents

William Yang Friends of Dorothy

a boy's own adventure live on stage with music & sound by Simon Hunt

Preview: Tuesday 11 August
Wednesday 12 to Sunday 23 August
Tuesday to Saturday at 8pm, Sunday 5pm

Friends of Dorothy is the third of Yang's full length monologues with slides. This time Yang takes us on another extraordinary journey, weaving his personal story as a gay man together with some of the most significant issues and events of the last twenty years, and along the way chronicles the gay & lesbian subculture of Sydney - Mardi Gras, drag divas, socialites, saunas, the parties, the literati, the glitterati, international celebrities and many friends in a warm, humorous and uplifting evening.

INJECTION

an art project in four parts

Forum - Saturday 22 August, 1998
from 10am to 5.30pm
Forum bookings and enquiries 02 9698 7235
Exhibition dates: August 26 to Sep 5, 1998
(opening Saturday 22 August from 6pm - 8pm)

Art project co-ordinator Penny Thwaite and The Performance Space have devised Injection in response to the Australia Council's Emerging Artists' Initiative: Contemporary Artspace Projects.

Injection/Forum is a free public forum funded by The Performance Space, on the issues of funding for artists and the exhibition spaces which support their practice, based on the premise that: The best way for the Government to support artists, is for it to financially support Artist Organisations*.

*Artist Organisations were previously known as Artist Run Initiatives.

AUTOPSY

A performance and conference event which examines the current state of Australian contemporary art and performance practice.

Monday August 31 to Friday September 4
Processions, performances and pickets
Saturday September 5

The Autopsy - a day of debates, discussions and conversations

Autopsy commences with a funeral procession which mourns the death of nostalgia for performance art... from there begins a process of oration, criminal activity, investigation, autopsy and finally the wake. Entry is mostly free and audience members will be paid to attend various events.

▲ Performing Lines presents

an official event in A SEA CHANGE,
the 1998 Olympic Arts Festival
Nadaya Music and Dance Company's
KAGOME

6 performances only
Preview: 25 August at 8pm
Wednesday 26 to Saturday 29 August at 8pm,
Sunday 30 August at 5pm

Kagome is an extraordinary theatre experience created by Nadaya Music and Dance Company that magically interweaves butoh movement and contemporary dance with eastern and western music.

Kagome was performed to great critical acclaim in Melbourne in 1996 and Nadaya was hailed by The Age as one of the best new companies of the year. Now Sydney audiences will have the chance to experience this exquisite melding of dance and music. Nadaya is an ensemble that combines butoh and contemporary dance forms with a blend of live music styles in a collaborative and improvisatory fashion that is lyrical, compelling and profoundly moving.

Dance Works presents in absentia

choreographed by Sandra Parker
Lighting/projection design by Margie Medlin
Music by Amelia Barden

Thursday 17 - Saturday 19 and
Tuesday 22 - Saturday 26 September at 8pm
and Saturday 26 September at 4pm

Dance Works, Melbourne's highly respected contemporary dance company, will present in absentia, a full length dance work by artistic director Sandra Parker. Established by Nanette Hassell in 1983, Dance Works is renowned for its development of Australian contemporary choreography and choreographers. in absentia is an exciting collaboration between Parker, lighting and film designer Margie Medlin and composer Amelia Barden, and reflects the interaction of three art forms - dance, music and film.

the performance space

The Performance Space is a non profit organisation assisted by The Australia Council, the federal government's arts funding and advisory body and the New South Wales Government - Ministry for the Arts.

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Jan Lauwers speaking

Keith Gallasch encountered *Snakesong/Le Pouvoir* at the 1998 Adelaide Festival and talked to its Belgian creator

If the audience experience of *Le Pouvoir*, the second part of Needcompany's *Snakesong Trilogy*, is profoundly (and beautifully) unsettling, writer-director-designer Jan Lauwers and his ensemble are also feeling delirium—of severe jetlag, of reviving a show not performed for some eighteen months and coming just when they are reassembling the trilogy as a single performance with a group of eleven musicians, not to mention continuing development of another work premiered at the major visual arts exhibition documentaX in Kassel, Germany in September 1997. "But it's okay", says Lauwers, whose intense gaze and spare delivery can be interrupted by bright-eyed laughter and brief floods of enthusiasm. The man is like his work. The ground constantly shifts in *Le Pouvoir*. An opening blackout is epic. The first complete image is a lie, of a kind. The next is sculptural rather than simply theatrical. The next has the audience more brightly illuminated than the performers. What commenced as an elliptical performance work, intensely visual and aural, a nightmare—a primal peering into the dark at half shapes, a dim purgatory—the senses both denied and overfed, is now a play.

But what a play. Language is filtered through successive translations (as part of the drama) as the Queen and her adviser, the Professor, interrogate Leda and Zeus. There is no set to earth us—design is generated by the actors' mapping out of space, by the sparest of lighting, by the stark differentiation in costume. Language is as

uncertain as the Queen's diminishing authority. The words 'dead', 'death', 'die' fly about as we grasp at them—how is it that Leda and Zeus are dead if they are before us, their deaths described so vividly... and sexually? It's not surprising then that Lauwers has directed Needcompany in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, where dying is orgasm, that little death, and very real death; nor that Lauwers draws on George Bataille; that he is intrigued by voyeurism—the position he implicates us in so deeply in the performance's blacked-out opening and faint emerging images. A man and a woman appear to be engaging in a gross sexual act—but what exactly are they doing? Then there's enough light to see that she's vigorously miming sex with what looks like a ventriloquist's dummy which she tosses away as she exits. This sex is illusion. But then we are faced with a very real Zeus. But then again, he's a god, a myth...he and Leda ruthlessly interrogated by mortals greedy for the gross facts—was the coupling rape, mutual pleasure, was there death, what kind, what size is his organ, who came and when?

The second act of the play leaves mythic time and enters the domestic present, the Queen now a mother with an addiction, suicidal, denied emotion, like the Queen, by the Professor-husband. However, the banality of this present is increasingly saturated with words and images bleeding in from the first act—blood appearing literally as characters dip their fingers into a bowl of stage blood and express alarm at the sight of it, cuts,

vaginal bleeding...In the second act stylish plinths are dressed with toaster, coffee-maker, flowers, objets d'art and a dead white swan. Everyone is standing, but they speak as if they are sitting down. The mother dies still standing, but still speaks. No one refers to the on-stage swan. But one of the women tells of running over a swan in her van and then backing over it. The tale is told through wild almost hysterical laughter with the audience drawn in, giggly and then raucous, implicated—on the night I saw *La Pouvoir*. Lauwers is pleased with the response and, at the forum on design (March 6, recorded by SUV), thanked Adelaide Festival audiences for their good-humoured response for what he admits is one of his darkest works. He explains to a worried young audience member at the forum that *La Pouvoir* was written at the time of the Bosnian war ("only ten hours away by road"), of political corruption and appalling crimes against children in Belgium. The Belgians didn't like the work. In Munich it was met with silence, until he added at the end a knowing smile offered the audience by the Queen/mother. *Snakesong* has been a success, its capacity to unsettle relished by its international audience.

Lauwers says to me later that his new two-play work (premiered in part at Documenta) is a touch more positive, more hopeful, treasuring what we lose when someone is no longer with us. Based on Camus' *Caligula*, it has been created for part one to be performed in an art gallery, part two in a theatre. He smiles: "We need cities that have both a very good gallery and a very good theatre." A key moment in Camus' play is Caligula's dance for which he demands the judgement of others. In the Lauwers version a dancer is added to perform for Caligula, judgement still being the issue, the dancing unfolding for 7 minutes in a very small space. This challenge is set for a leading dancer and composer in

each city that Needcompany visits. "There will be no set, no lighting, no costumes, just a table and chairs and a square metre space for the dancer." "Do you select the gallery room?" "Yes." "Do you mind what paintings or other works are in it?" "No." "Just a bit?" He laughs. "A bit." Like Alain Platel from Les Ballets C. de la B., Lauwers has the facility to disappear himself from apparent acts of choice and power while otherwise displaying enormous authority and vision.

Working the *Snakesong Trilogy* into a single performance has proved no easy task. "I don't want it to be a 6 hour play. No play should be 6 hours." So he must edit and he must reframe the whole. "*Snakesong* is about the Professor, played by Mil Seghers, even though I wrote *Le Pouvoir* about the Queen for the actor Viviane De Muynck. He will sit in a wheelchair throughout the performance—" "Even in the interrogation scene?" "Yes—with one hand shaking uncontrollably, all the time". He says this with relish. Because the music in this complete version of the trilogy will be live and onstage, the opening blackout of *Le Pouvoir* is out: "There is the music", he declares, as if to say that Rombout Willems powerful score is more than enough for Lauwers' dark purpose.

"Why the Professor?" (A *Snakesong* program essay by Jurgen Pieters "suspect[s] that the professor has more than a few traits in common with the artist Lauwers.") Lauwers replies, "Mil Seghers, who plays the Professor, is a great actor. Though he is not an actor. He came to work with me at 46 years of age after his business failed. He looks like a professor. I think that's where it starts."

Snakesong/Le Pouvoir at the 1998 Adelaide Festival, Needcompany, Playhouse, March 5.

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Reconciliation and transcendence

Julie Goodall on a *A Life of Grace and Piety* in Cairns



Lesley Marker and Roxanne McDonald in *A Life of Grace and Piety*

Michael Marzik

Cairns. Cane trains. Fruit bats. Mangroves. Tractors. Reef trips. Meal deals. Swimming pools. Movie stars. It's a bizarre yet intriguing combination of innocence and decadence, of down-home rural and international jetset. Perhaps less glaringly obvious is the local theatre scene, whose talents, as *A Life of Grace and Piety* shows, would sit well in any city.

The play developed out of a project called *Black and White and Shades of Grey*, in which local community theatre company JUTE (Just Us Theatre Ensemble) sought to create a piece of work which would further the reconciliation process, both in the way it was devised and in the final product. This well-nurtured consultative and creative process has borne splendid fruit. The JUTE-Kooemba Jdarra co-production, *A Life of*

Grace and Piety—the play, the performances, the imagery, the music, the lighting—was, in a word, transcendental.

Writer Wesley Enoch has woven a powerful and poignant story about family and the lack of it, opportunity and the lack of it, love and the lack of it. Two sisters, Grace and Piety, separated from their home and family in childhood, were separated again when Grace chose to pursue an artistic career overseas. Now Grace is back in north Queensland, accompanying a show of her design work, and she revisits Piety, who has lived quietly all these years. Grace also meets Ros, her teenage niece, who is just starting out on an artistic life herself, as a filmmaker.

It's a simple yet elegant scenario and Enoch touches on issues surrounding the Stolen

Generations without attempting to play on our guilt or pity. It is as if life is too important for such negativity. The characters with their dreams and heartaches, their sheer vitality attest to this.

The play gives us an intricate exploration of a 3-way relationship, unusual because the threesome is composed of 2 sisters and a niece. Yet the rivalry is just as fierce, the rejection just as painful, and the love just as tender. The play has a lightness of touch and ends with an inspirational speech by the young Ros who is innocent and therefore safe. Her future is bright and, by implication, so is that of her peers.

The different kinds of writing in the play provoked strong opinions among the theatre-goers on opening night at the Cairns Civic Theatre: its wordless scenes, its sparkling naturalism, its poetic monologues gave it a rich texture and for me it was a thrilling use of the theatrical medium, of space and movement and image. I particularly enjoyed John Kelly's sound design, which gave the production great subtlety and richness.

It was also moving. The ambitious Grace, a world traveller and successful designer, when speaking of home, says simply, "That place in me is dead." Piety, for all her simplicity, has great wisdom when she explains to Ros that Grace "...forgot who she was."

Fine writing, fine crafting, fine performances. Wesley Enoch's collaboration with Deborah Mailman, *The Seven Stages of Grieving*, toured Zurich in June. May *Grace and Piety* also touch the lives of those beyond our shores.

A Life of Grace and Piety, JUTE/Kooemba Jdarra, writer Wesley Enoch, Cairns Civic Theatre, May 21 - 23; Cremorne Theatre at QPAC, Brisbane, June 3 - 20

Julie Goodall is a writer living in north Queensland.

The getting of an audience

Roland Manderson interviews CIA's David Branson

David Branson is an extraordinarily prolific theatre maker: performer, director, producer, creating work in bars, cafes, theatres, in collaboration with Stopera, Canberra Youth Theatre, Tuggeranong Community Arts and many others. For 12 years a central figure in Splinters Theatre of Spectacle, David is joint Artistic Director of CIA (Culturally Innovative Art) who have just completed a bouffon based *Bum Sonata* and are embarking on Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* before a Festival of Pinter. I dragged Branson out of a rehearsal of Canberra Youth Theatre's *Wild Things* to ask about the theatre he is driven to make.

DB While we have a rich theatrical history, a lot of it isn't done. So rather than 'world theatre' here in Canberra we get *World's Best Theatre Season*—proscenium arch naturalism from the major state companies. Which is

work in with other producers; not overtaxing our artistic pool. Canberra people remember the first Neil Cameron (*Carmina Burana*), and *Arabian Nights*, and the Splinters opening of the National Theatre Festival—we don't have to be mainstream. Something to crow about now is that our work in small spaces, intellectually challenging and fairly experimental, is getting full houses. Something is going on. And we are not alone because Elbow, and Odd and Stopera are doing similarly well.

One of the things we do have is an opportunity as peers to talk about our work in critical ways, through *Muse* [a Canberra arts street paper] to a degree...and interestingly it is under attack. Which makes me wonder who is threatened by it.

RM And which raises the point about developing work.

training—with Kellaway, Heazledene. We use training as the base for ensemble. We get a director or have a special workshop on the weekend and then apply it immediately in our work. So I have these skills and really strong aesthetics, and what you say emerges out of the process. And there's gut feelings. I'm angry about Pauline Hanson being on the front page day after day. Angry because what is rewarding for me is difference. We've got a Prime Minister who believes a child will do better if they are spanked when they are wrong!

Perhaps that's why *Bum Sonata*, with a two week process is still a bit confused. I need the opportunity to sit back and see what I have got, not what I wanted or I thought I had, and to see where that goes. There would have to be another process of working with the material and going back to the floor to create a piece which speaks

about where we are specifically...but which could also tour.

The Australia Council in the past has been vigilant about that, but because of the diminishing pie, and the lack of exciting work, they've turned around and thrown money at the audience and marketing instead. Marketing is important, but it starts with the work.

RM Where is your work going?

DB To the world! I didn't go travelling at 19 or 20 or 22. I was so single-minded in my devotion to work that I thought I'd go travelling with my work. My frustration leads me to think that I need to do professional development outside of Australia or move out of Canberra and start again, because I'm hitting the same roof.

RM Theatre in Canberra: is it viable, is it worth it?

DB I think there's enough of us who believe it's important that we'll find a way. I keep being surprised at the competition for the small amount of resources at the top end and conversely delighted at the sharing and thieving at the bottom end.

RM What about the recent ACT Professional Theatre Forum? I wasn't invited but I hear it was stimulating.

DB I think I'm a bit paranoid, I go there and get obsessed with how much everyone hates me. But there's a real desire to maximise what we've got. Everyone thinks we can do better than we are doing both audience-wise and artistically. I'm worried that I'm seen to water everything down.

RM Because you do so much?

DB The work I'm doing I give my full energy to, and I think the quality is often very high. Where I shoot myself in the foot is not being paid to do it very often, except by magnificent institutions like Canberra Youth Theatre.

RM Are you getting paid for *Threepenny Opera*?

DB ...

DB I am totally miserable if I'm not creating something new and original and relevant to our culture, whatever that is. But you have to be very canny and find ways of slipping it into your next festival or mainstage event.

RM Don't you ever get to develop one piece of work over time?

DB Working with Splinters we did it successfully. *Fuck Jesus Coke* in Adelaide became *Theatrical Fiasco* in Melbourne became *Howling in the Halls of Night*. Also *Village of Captive Souls*, when we worked with rural communities in NSW developing the show with workshops in each place. Actually I must like to be busy because I was coming back to Canberra each weekend to do *Piper at the Gates of Hell* with Youth Theatre. I like working on something experimental and a larger framed work at the same time.

But if your head is just buried down in theatre you...you've got to see the rest of the world reflected in the art. It's not just performative but the real life that is around us that people aren't necessarily exposed to. I have to challenge myself and my audience to be outward looking and inward working. I believe it is important to use your work, in this case it is art, to change the world. It sounds incredibly daggy but it's true.

RM And how do you turn that into theatre?

DB I have gone for a lot of intense

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The *Threepenny Opera*, CIA and *Stopera*,
written by Bertolt Brecht, *The Street Theatre*,
Canberra, August 6 - 15



Vivienne Rogis, Liliame Bogatko, Jennifer Dansby, Jo Windred, Louise Morris and Victoria Young
in *The Threepenny Opera*

photo: 'pling

not to attack the quality or the content, but we need greater diversity. People aren't as interested in seeing experimental live performance. The art-going population has diminished, as has general support for local performance. It's about priorities for people: value for money, exciting things to do, knowing what they'll get.

So we've been strategic in the getting of audience. Festivals are important, for example The Canberra Festival, which wasn't an arts festival but we've been pushing, and the Festival of the Contemporary Arts. And it's about trying to play the game, building on things you know, such as modern classics, but working in an exciting way theatrically. We did a Dario Fo Festival last year using an ensemble, in the rough style; a sort of 'world theatre' approach to known texts. It's also about partnerships, like with Tuggeranong Community Arts, building audiences and promoting work together. Also playing the game of labelling. Using *The Street Studio* as a place for new work, and encouraging other companies to develop the venue in that way.

RM Live music is very much a part of CIA. But it costs money.

DB Music is a pure form of art, it talks beyond words. For the same reason that you go to rock concerts, you are reacting to other bodies. If I want to do a show whose concerns are epic, if there are artists who want to be involved, and we can do it, we will go for the big thing. But then if the opportunity comes we see how we can fit into other programs,

The pleasures of another's nightmare

Keith Gallasch on recent Sydney theatre and performance

Eugene O'Neill,
Mourning Becomes Elektra

It was going to be one of those once in a lifetime experiences. How many times was I ever likely to see Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning*

traditions of preaching and politicking and poetry from Whitman to Ginsberg? What's the likelihood of encountering a production that embraces O'Neill's melodramatic impulse as legitimate rather than attempting to bury it beneath a strained naturalism? Not

with over-determined American accents, certainly not with the aforesaid intoning—this is not the Steppenwolf Company (who frightened Sydney Festival-goers sometime in the 80s with their peculiar poeticising). The approach is expressionist, Kosky's idiosyncratic take on the European tradition: the set is both sculpture and dream (a monstrous furry evil-eyed dog head suspended above the action snorting steam; a giant wall-cum-bird seen from different angles, it too with its potent eye), a house sloped and rivetted like a shipdeck. The voices dwell, hold notes, intone, wear their hearts on their tongues (Anthony Phelan, General Ezra Mannon, and Melita Jurisic, Lavinia Manon, voice their roles sublimely as if they've always done it that way) and all but sing—O'Neill, rightly, as opera. The sound design (composer Paul Healy) murmurs and dreams uninterrupted through whole scenes and recurrently and alarmingly erupts into a dark, seat-shaking chord as if triggered by the monstrous, melodramatic utterances of the characters. We quake, like Pavlov's dogs, but do we ever learn? The actors embody a tense, sculpted stillness out of which movement and emotion burst. The pared-back text opens out time and space for this four hour nightmare to cast its spell. Some don't leave the theatre for the two 20 minute intervals, staying to witness the quiet ceremony of the redeployment and turning inside out of the set. It is one of those once in a lifetime experiences: O'Neill works. As alien as that American vision is with its secrets, guilts and murderous loathings, the horrible and mythic inevitability of the story hits home for a moment, the result of directorial vision and committed and skilled ensemble playing. From the opening moment when two pairs of hands tear apart the black plastic that covers the set to reveal the overwrought Lavinia (as if born bereft), *Mourning Becomes Elektra* becomes your dream.

Eugene O'Neill, *Mourning Becomes Elektra*, director Barrie Kosky, Sydney Theatre Company, *The Wharf*, opened May 9

Deborah Leiser, Regina Heilmann,
A Room With No Air

Again, the realm of dream: a red wall tilts towards you, a red floor rushes to join it, the rest is black. A long up-ended table. A woman, short hair, trousers, leans into it, asleep, murmuring, singing in the dark. She dreams. A woman in a white dress, hair pulled back, enters. Has she been conjured by the dreamer? She knocks gently on the table. Has she chosen to wake the dreamer? Who is dreaming who? A German is dreaming a Jew and vice versa, or more accurately, Australian descendants of German and Jew. In a brisk transformation the lowered table becomes house, barrier, refuge as Leiser begs, "Let me in", pursued by a racist mob in suburban Australia. We are suddenly in the world of What if...? A suddenly possible one nation. Without venturing into literal narrative, Heilmann and Leiser evoke a world of tentative refuge, a set

of scenes and images in which the two women exchange anxieties, guilts, cultural clichés and a recipes, in which they establish the possibility of communication and contact in verbal and physical tussles, and a demolishing and unifying dance. But not



Regina Heilmann, Deborah Leiser in *A Room with No Air*

Becomes Elektra? Once if ever? And a production that wouldn't try to 'naturalise' that "most non-naturalistic of American playwrights", as someone once said, whose dialogue lends itself to the sing-song ever-ascending tilt of the American voice out of

much. But wonder of wonders, the Sydney Theatre Company engages Barrie Kosky to direct it, to rehearse it at length and to work with his long-time designer-collaborator, the architect Peter Corrigan. The result is not pseudo-American, the theatre air is not thick



Melita Jurisic and Mitchell Butel in *Mourning Becomes Elektra*

Tracey Schramm

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before things go wrong, into reverse. Heilmann dons a boot that locks itself onto Leiser's neck in one of the work's most frightening passages. In another dance, of power and manipulation, the boot has an apparent life of its own—was it only following orders? The stark, expressionist set that houses this exchange also has a kind of life, hiding places and trap doors, and a tiny window that opens out onto an aural world of old German radio broadcasts. With director Nikki Heywood's guidance, Leiser and Heilmann perform *A Room With No Air* with a psychological intensity I've not seen before in either, and with a physical incisiveness that charges the scenario with tension and symbolic power. I entered this disturbing world twice, once early in the season, once late, witnessing the marked perfecting and transforming of an emerging work, and the white heat intensification of the performances. Curiously, for a performance work, the limits of the work are in its too tentative engagement with narrative: having set up a relatively literal scenario of the problems of offering refuge and establishing a new political context, it moves inward and stays there. There's also a problem in the framing, the initial conjuring is left as a given and not explored. It's not surprising then, on two counts, that for all its power the work left some unsatisfied, experienced as fragments of something more complex. Whatever, the basic propositions, images and performance strengths of *A Room with No Air* mean that it is work ready for deepening and opening out.

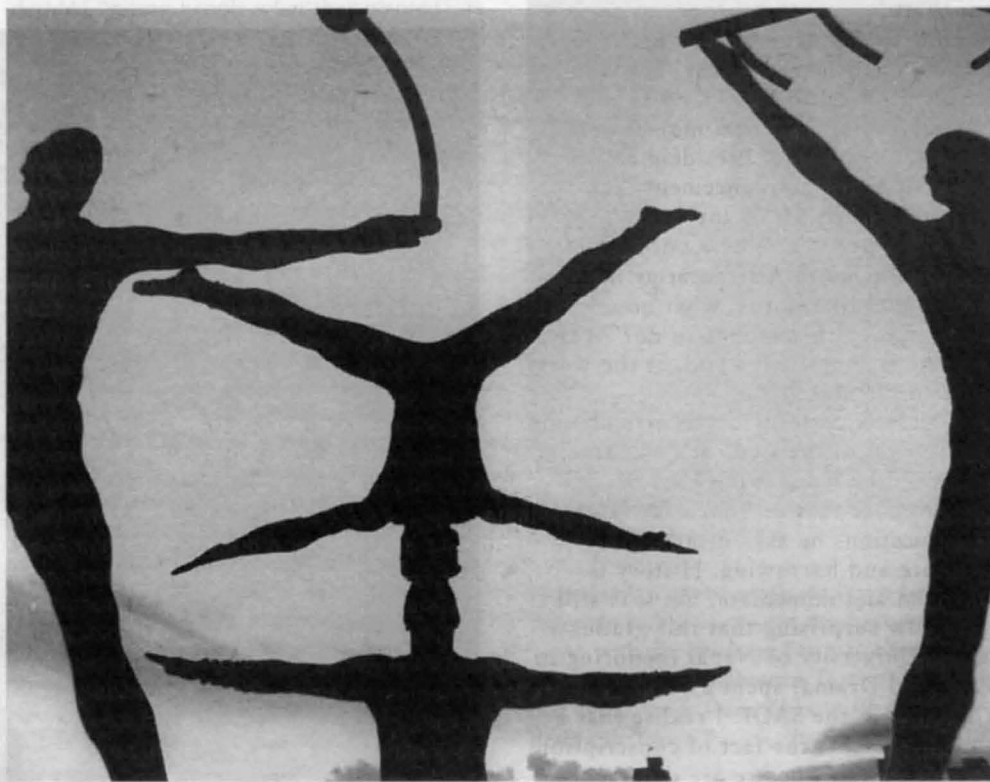
A Room With No Air, performer-producers, Deborah Leiser, Regina Heilmann, director Nikki Heywood, designers Leonie Evans and Clarissa Arndt, Belvoir St Theatre
Downstairs, July 1 - 19

Tongue power and head butts

Physical Theatre goes communal, industrial and head to head at the Sydney Opera House

In *RealTime* 24 ("Various gravities", page 33), Thor Blomfield of Legs on the Wall put the case for a national physical theatre conference in the productive wake of last year's Rock'n'Roll Circus-hosted *Body Contact*, a kick start for companies and artists to think and function collectively on issues of training, funding and marketing. Where there's a physical theatre will—and where there's Australia Council and Opera House support—there's a way. The conference is on.

Intriguingly it's titled *Head to Head* suggesting an exercise of tongue power, brain muscle and maybe the odd head butt. Participants should also bring their budgets, calculators and prospectuses if the lingo of the press release, quoting Blomfield, is anything to go by. The conference will "debate future directions in the Circus and Physical Theatre industry." "As Physical Theatre is now one of Australia's leading cultural exports it is important that the key players have the opportunity to discuss the direction of the industry and how the business can be enhanced both in Australia and overseas." Blomfield cites "20 new [physical] theatre companies forming in the last five years." Well, it sounds like an industry, so head first it is into the future in the language of the moment. However, issues of artistic import will rank high on the agenda. Still at the planning stage when I spoke to him, Blomfield hoped that



Steve Broun and Rudy Mineur from Rock 'n' Roll Circus

"conference sessions would especially address the hybridity of Physical Theatre's crossovers with dance, new media and contemporary theatre." He also forecast the key participation of overseas artists as speakers. Performer Sue Broadway, one of *Head to*

Head's organising committee, says the breadth of current work is enormous, from traditional circus to experimental work. "One of the goals of the conference is to find the common ground shared by companies." Training is certainly one of these areas, and

one of the forum sessions will be devoted to NICA (the proposed National Institute of Circus Arts): "I'm hoping that all participants will be in favour of getting behind the proposal." She also thinks that the conference will help improve the image of Physical Theatre: "It's improved a lot in recent years, but we're still not taken that seriously compared with theatre, dance and music." I wonder if this is not a little paranoid given the praise lavished on the likes of Legs on the Wall, Desoxy and others (not to mention the attention given to Physical Theatre at the Performing Arts Markets). Not at all, Sue declares: "This will be a conference of celebration about how far we've come, of the energy that Physical Theatre is."

The conference will screen videos of significant Physical Theatre works, present some small scale performances, and collaborate with the Opera House on a day of performances for the public immediately prior to the conference, featuring some of Australia's leading Physical Theatre groups and performers. Both the Opera House and Australian Contemporary Circus (aka Physical Theatre) are celebrating their 25th year, an interesting juncture of high and not so low culture, and bound to be heady.

Head to Head, National Physical Theatre Conference, Sydney Opera House, October 5 - 7. Enquiries: 02 9550 9887

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Humanising the enemy

Sarah Miller sees *White Men with Weapons* at Black Swan

I was really scared in this show. At times I found it terrifying. At times I found the audience terrifying—although I wouldn't want to hang an opinion on that. Not understanding the jokes in Afrikaans told by one of a series of mostly horrendous characters played by Greig Coetzee, I couldn't tell if they laughed because they found it funny,



Greig Coetzee in *White Men with Weapons*

because it made them nervous, or simply out of a kind of horrified recognition. Not, I hasten to add, that such recognition should in any sense be limited to white South Africans. Not at the best of times and certainly not now, as we re-enact white Australia at its worst.

White Men with Weapons is set in the barracks of the South African Defence Force (SADF) in 1990. It takes the form of a journey through the SADF via narration and a series of 14 characters. From the conscript (Coetzee himself) to the foul mouthed Korporaal (Corporal), to a Chaplain with Tutu-phobia, a drug addicted medic and, not to be forgotten, the utterly harrowing story by the rifleman responsible with his mates for the rape and murder of a black woman, this production is even more

confronting for its moments of great humour and poignancy. It's much easier to de-humanise 'the enemy' and don't we all want to do it.

Coetzee explores that moment of change: the night of President De Clerk's famous announcement that rocketed South Africa into post-apartheid politics. Where once a white man in the South African army had almost god-like status, what now is a white man with weapons to do? At the least he is superfluous and, at the worst, he is to blame.

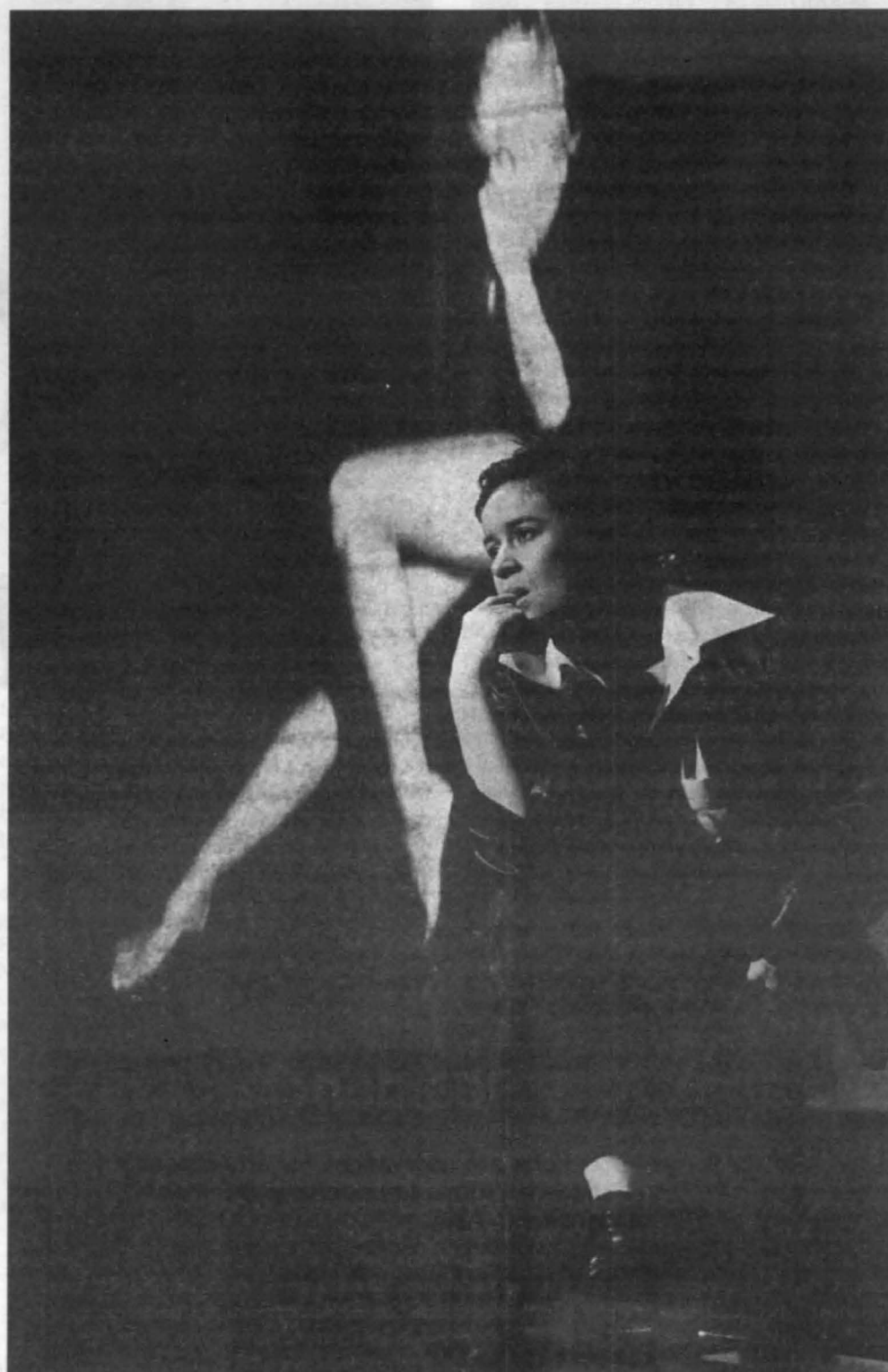
Coetzee's performance is articulate in every sense of the term. It's a character piece and he lends it the kind of performance that on film wins Oscars. The questions he asks us are both intimate and harrowing. History is personal and immediate. Yet it is still somehow surprising that this graduate of the University of Napal (majoring in Zulu and Drama) spent a year as a conscript in the SADF. I realise that I cannot imagine the fact of conscription.

Black Swan Theatre are deservedly well known for their work with Aboriginal theatre artists and writers such as Jimmy Chi's *Bran Nu Dae* and *Corrugation Road*. They have been equally successful with their adaptations of West Australian literary classics including Randolph Stowe's *The Merry Go Round in the Sea* and Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet*. A more recent development has been their growing relationship with South African Theatre as evidenced in an earlier presentation from the legendary Athol Fugard in *Valley Song* and most recently with The Actors' Co-operative Production of *White Men with Weapons*. I hope they continue to produce this kind of essential and relevant work.

White Men with Weapons, written and performed by Greig Coetzee, directed by Garth Payne, Black Swan Theatre Company, Subiaco Theatre Centre, June 2 - 14

On the tip of its tongue

Kirsten Krauth at the stage adaptation of Dorothy Porter's verse-novel *The Monkey's Mask*



Marianne Bryant in *The Monkey's Mask*

Peter Fitzpatrick

She's a brick and I'm drowning slowly. Tied to the one you love. Addiction. It's in her eyes. Private detective, butch dyke Jill Fitzpatrick, "pint sized Cliff Hardy", investigating the murder of Mickey, victim poet, gets distracted, taken off the scent by femme fatale Diana and too much Patsy Cline.

Marianne Bryant gets the balance right on Jill, a physical, fleshy, at times fragile performance. As she disrobes for the audience and Diana, consumed by the red-light-heat of lust and the possible taste of betrayal, the audience too wants to touch her soft/hard leather, brown corduroy, booted body. She has all the modern girl attachments too—mobile, answering machine, slide projector and screen—handy articles to navigate a murky undercover world, signposting her life remote control, a jerky stream of images, clear and obscure, to complement her moods.

As the solo performer (and audience) struggles to overcome gregarious crowd sounds outside the theatre, pace and humour skid in the middle, the momentum lost as subtleties from Dorothy Porter's original text are transformed into visual clues (rein)forced around our throats like Nick's large hands. Other characters—

Diana, damp pseudo-Christian Bill, new age scene-queen Lou—lose focus and become soggy, Bryant's sometimes one dimensional performance obscuring the potency of Porter's words on the tips of their tongues.

Minimalist set design, photography, digital imagery, voiceover and solo performance give *The Monkey's Mask* potential to be gritty and nifty in-your-face theatre. In such an intimate space, I wanted Bryant to grip the audience around their elegant necks and haul them out of their safe seats, swinging them into the tribal beat, daring them to get wet in the jungle rhythms of inner city Sydney where "Mickey's ghost walks in the tropical rain."

The Monkey's Mask, a stage adaptation of the book by Dorothy Porter, performer & producer Marianne Bryant, director Pete Nettel, composer Sarah de Jong, digital imager Greg Ferris, photographer Peter Fitzpatrick, Belvoir Street Downstairs Theatre, June 11 - 28; Seymour Theatre Downstairs, July 1 - 11

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Maturing blends

Stacey Callaghan samples the vintage at Brisbane's *Cab/Sav*



Lisa O'Neill and Christine Johnston in *All Tomorrow's Parties 1 and 2*

Jodie Ranger

With very little financial support, each year Lesbian and Gay Pride presents a festival that speaks to the diverse queer communities of Brisbane. With this in mind, *Cab/Sav*, a season of short works, followed a cabaret format with performances ranging from the highly physical to the intensely vocal. What to some punters seemed surprisingly lacking in "queer content" was a reflection, I suggest, of the evolution and maturation of queer performance in Brisbane resulting from the combined performance histories of such collectives as Pride, Cherry Herring and the now defunct Crab Room.

The latter two collectives have fostered the continued development of many of the movement-based performers in *Cab/Sav*. The evening opened with Caroline Dunphy's flippant flight attendant, complete with flashing semaphore wrist bands. The frivolity of her piece *Transonic—a monologue in few words* was the exception in an evening of somewhat sombre pieces.

Christina Koch's *Giant's Hopscotch Party*, was an innocently executed dance of death which showed the macabre joy of a giant crushing 'the little people' with various Suzuki influenced walks and stomps. Although the piece lost focus towards the end as the movement became smaller and more intimate, it was one of the few performances I have

seen where heightened Suzuki movements actually drove the narrative.

A strong physical presence continued with Brian Lucas' take on war, religion, politics and Patsy Cline in *psychothelrapist #3—joan of arc*. In his simple adjustment of a skirt, Lucas transformed from a hooded, softly spoken, petite Joan of Arc into a towering queen dancing to Patsy Cline. His repetitive use of movement, recorded and spoken text and music created several personae though the connections between them were not always clear. Several images from John Utans and Jason Wollington's performance remained long after their piece ended, particularly the chalk outline of one of their bodies traced after an intense contact improvisation. Unfortunately, the physical subtleties were often combined with slides of heavy-handed text.

A complete departure from the physical was *Shugafix*, a selection of songs sung and melodramatically gestured by Lucinda Shaw accompanied beautifully on cello by David Sells. Technical difficulties made the lyrics almost impossible to understand and as the audience were quite adept at reading bodies by this stage of the evening, this still and self-absorbed performance seemed rather incongruous. Mark McInnes, however, managed to

successfully traverse my physical expectations of the night in his understated *Four Songs*. McInnes' exquisite command of both French (*La Vie en Rose*) and German (*Falling in Love Again*), his soft camp introductory patter and his confidence in his own stillness created the intimate cabaret atmosphere promised in the production's title.

By far the highlight of the evening and the crucial performances that both linked and questioned the separation of the voice from the body was the combination of one of Brisbane's most talented experimental vocalists (Christine Johnston) with one of our most inspiring physical performers (Lisa O'Neill). In *All Tomorrow's Parties 1 and 2*, Johnston used such diverse musical influences as the humble Hammond organ, Velvet Underground, Bach and the theme from the film *Orlando* to contrast with O'Neill's tap-dancing, Suzuki-stomping and sassy dancing. The dead-pan expressions, dry humour and occasional stealing of looks from one another created a sense of two aesthetically similar performers desiring each other's inherently different forms of expression. Throughout both pieces, we gradually saw each performer attempt the other's skill, from O'Neill hesitantly joining Johnston on the organ to Johnston's slow walking exit from the

space. The final image of the night gave the impression that the physical and the musical can successfully embrace each other with O'Neill's sudden possession of the Flying V guitar.

Overall, *Cab/Sav* may have benefited from a curator or an outside eye. It seemed that the event was drawing on a cabaret format, however, the relatively serious 'theatre' atmosphere and absence of alcohol at Metro Arts created an environment where the audience were less able to relax. As a season of short works, *Cab/Sav* continued local queer performers' exploration of conceptually mature vocal and physical vignettes which would give its Sydney counterpart, *cLUB bENT*, a run for its money.

Cab/Sav, Lesbian and Gay Pride Festival, Metro Arts Theatre, June 17 - 20

Stacey Callaghan is a physical theatre performer, writer and director. She is currently devising when i was a boy, a solo circus theatre performance which explores the concepts of trust, risk, pain and safety inherent in both physical performance and intimate relationships.

THE SECOND NATIONAL CIRCUS AND PHYSICAL THEATRE CONFERENCE

HEAD to HEAD

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The conference acknowledges the Australia Council and the Sydney Opera House for their recognition and support of this important conference.



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Practice as difference

Eleanor Brickhill examines the studio space in dance practice

In dance, some people are beginning to talk about studio practice as if it might be different from other kinds of dance practice. And yet it's self-evident that any dance artist would have a studio practice: that is, something that they do in a studio, some repeated, habitual exercise, or action as opposed to theory, that is part of their performance-making. But there are several ideas about studio practice which need stressing, if only to assist in separating out some kinds of work from others, and to emphasise their differences rather than similarities, if dance practice is not to be imagined as an homogenous enterprise with a uniform, singular focus or ideal.

Picture two idealised scenarios: a studio, permanently occupied by several dance practitioners who are there for several hours a day, most days, often by themselves, or playing and talking with each other, pulling old ideas apart, finding out what still interests them, rejecting some material, expanding other movement ideas, finding new ones, showing them to each other and guests, feeling out each other's ideas.

Another scenario: an hour long, highly organised practice session following immediately after a specifically designed technique class, fitted tightly into a schedule of other back-to-back rehearsals; dancers move quickly from one choreographer to another, one dance to another. Each work might be allocated 4 or so hours a week

rehearsal time, during preparation for public performance. Choreographers in this case need to know almost exactly what they want to happen in that hour; each move is described by referring to the dancers more or less common vocabularies, with small changes, different inflections here and there, a rearrangement of what is already known. Working at this speed could not be managed if each move had to be investigated first.

The first scenario adumbrates a particular notion of research, something physically-based, on-going, and different from academic or theoretical research. Here it refers to careful inquiry and critical investigation of the body, looks into meanings of action and senses of aesthetics alive and developing in a person's body. The notion of research in the area of company-based or even independent dance, is often applied to those more or less imaginative rearrangements of off-the-shelf steps. While this might extend known theatrical tradition, it may not necessarily challenge the wider body of dance as an artform distinct from that theatrical tradition.

Dancers in the first scenario seem to be concerned more with developing ways of working, a body of work which is fundamentally related to the actual bodies of those artists who create it, so that its performance can be engaged with on many levels; it is not a finished product, something fixed and closed, which can stand by itself apart from the artists who create it.

The idea here is one about difference: about a person dancing, whose dance is about his or her own body, whether in performance or rehearsal; or a person who is trying to be something or someone different from their ordinary selves in performance, even if they're simply trying to be a dancer. There seem to be two quite different performers here, and an almost unbridgeable gap between them.

It takes time for students and other dancers to become aware that what they assume to be their own practice is really based on their relationship to someone else's class technique. For pioneers like Martha Graham, the purpose of technique class was simply to help her dancers better perform her choreography, so it was firstly a choreographic tool, rather than the pseudo-religious dogma it later became. Similarly, with ballet techniques, the kind of presentation of the body and the steps by which this is accomplished form the basis of the 19th and 20th century classics. For dancers to begin to develop their practice past that kind of externally imposed discipline requires effort, insight and a will to investigate the nature of practice itself, something not as easily accomplished within the second scenario.

How might these differences manifest themselves in performance? Decades ago in Australia, theatre and dance practitioners were seeking to expand audience awareness of what theatre practice might encompass. For many years, audiences have been invited to participate in informal studio showings; we have also had performances in the round, and in site-specific, non-theatrical venues, open rehearsals, works in progress, and the like.

But it seems to me that in dance—maybe not so much in theatre—these events often have been thought of, perhaps unconsciously, as mere practice for some other more important main event—the proscenium arch performance, or something that approaches this. And so, without acknowledgment or even realisation, the work performed in these venues has been made with these grand public front-on venues in mind.

Proscenium stages are perforce also about concealment: blocking views of the performers that distract the audience from a required focus, from much of what goes on, or might go on, both on and off stage. What is shown at these events is an entirely public version of social life, a view of cultural mores and myths to which we might safely claim allegiance and derive identity.

On the other hand, in a studio space, performances occur in what can be thought of as a much more private space, inhabited as if by guests rather than an unknown public. Performances here have the aura of intimacy and invitation. This kind of space seeks to remove the one pointed, single focused, frontal view that proscenium arch stages create. By removing the formality of wings, frame and curtain, we are less subject to its frontal perspective, and have the possibility of analysing what was previously hidden. The relationship between what is hidden and what is visible becomes fluid and subject to the audiences' discrimination. Preparation, awareness, hesitation, concentration, focus, small shifts of weight and intent all become part of the work performed.

This intimate view needn't be relegated to the less important view. Dancers can be seen as people, peculiarly physical animals—albeit of a highly attuned and not so ordinary variety—but less other-worldly and fantasy-laden than the ones we have been asked to see previously on stage. It allows for a much more interesting view, more personal, complex, immediate, and multi-layered,

which is often more accessible just because we are invited to see real human action, and to make sense of what is before us in the same way as we might regard any person's behaviour, without needing to resort to a limited and therefore largely imaginary experience of what dancing means. The material can be open-ended, and there is room for an audience to engage with different aspects of what is happening rather than be presented a *fait accompli*, some singular vision, some crystallised image to swallow. In studio performance, the dancer becomes the main event.

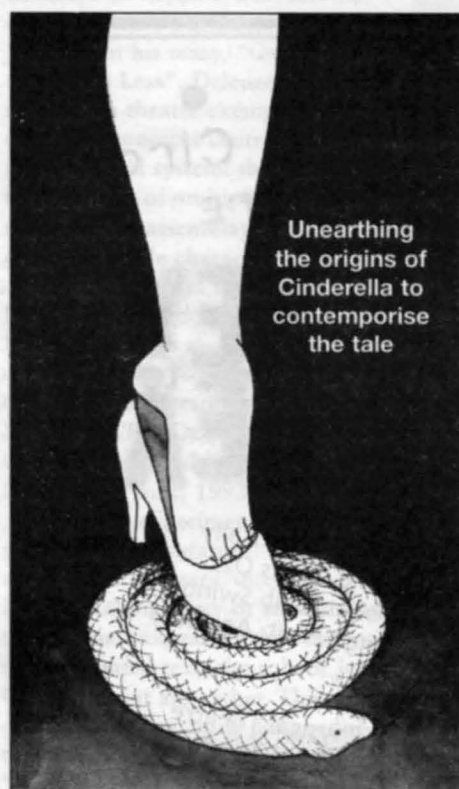
Not only are these different kinds of perspectives possible with proscenium and studio performances, but they are also unavoidable. And I am reminded of many events where problematic spaces caused the fluidity between hidden and revealed action to be misplaced and worked against the better intentions of the creator.

For example, Angels Margarit choreographed *Hilton 1109*, performing it at the 1996 Adelaide Festival, for a tiny audience of 10 whom she invited into her hotel room. We saw what I interpreted as the confined ennui of a dancer on tour. But I wondered how she could have overlooked the subtext in such a loaded and codified vocabulary. Even in such an intimate setting she became a character, other than herself, as if she was using the stylised dance to protect herself from the intimate scrutiny she had actually invited. Her character appeared bland and stereotyped, without the subtle revelation of real personality.

Many of the dance performers at Sydney's Newtown Theatre (such as those in annual *Bodies* seasons) have been required to ignore the potential open space available—and doubtless almost anyone would find that particular grand and cavernous auditorium challenging, and the ensuing vulnerability disconcerting—and to confine their work behind what seems like an absurdly small but purpose-built proscenium stage. But when many of the works are in progress, or of an informal nature, or the ideas are in an embryonic form and need a wider, more fluid focus, the tiny but distant vista one is finally allowed shows something which can appear brittle, or incomplete, even careless, rather than something full of possibility and in the process of evolution.

There will continue to be performances which mistakenly underestimate an audience's capacity to appreciate and engage with dances of immediacy, layered detail and open-ended ideas. And if those people are not to be continually disappointed with what they see, then more artists need to recognise where their own agendas lie, whether their focus is secretly fixed on the Opera House or the Seymour Centre, or really does require less formal venues, so that the studio space is not used merely as a practice venue for them, but can function autonomously alongside them.

Parts of this article were delivered in the MAP Symposium on dance, The Malthouse, Melbourne, July 25 - 26. Articles in response to the dance program and panel sessions will appear on the RealTime website (mid-August) and in RealTime 27 (October-November).



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Pay attention to the moves

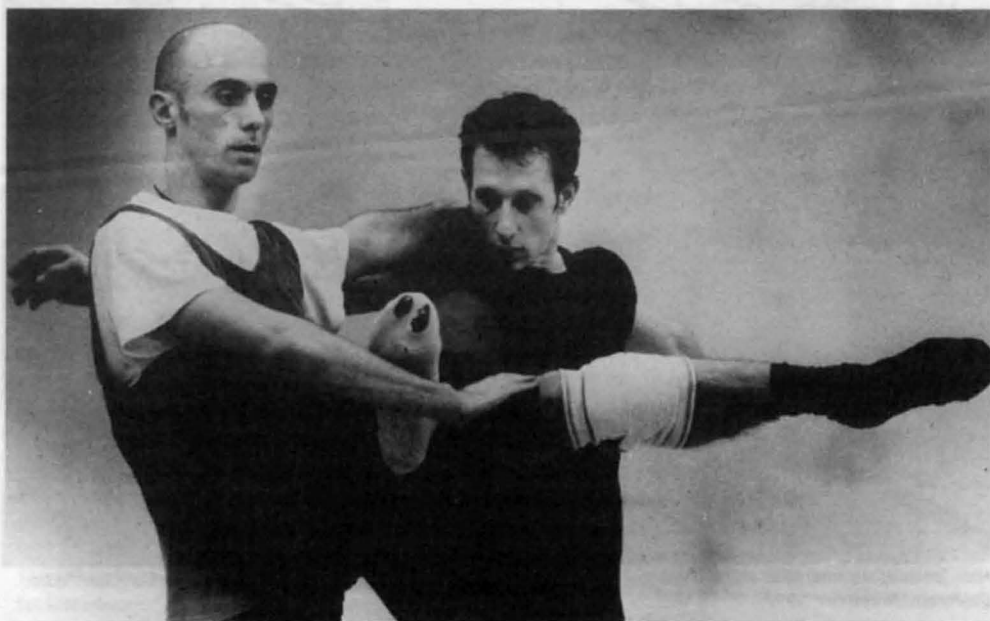
Sophie Hansen sees contemporary world dance in London—Stuart, Forsythe, Clark, Miller, Selwyn Norton

To launch his 12 month residency at The Royal Festival Hall with a bang, British choreographer Jonathon Burrows curated an evening of international contemporary dance extravagance. The foyer of the Queen Elizabeth Hall was all a-buzz as what seemed to be London's entire dance-world twittered and tingled in anticipation of the rare delights of this one-off event. Screens showing videos by Peter Newman hung over the packed auditorium, creating a backdrop of party-night animation and punctuating the pauses with inspiring sky-diving, flame-throwing visuals.

Burrows had worked his connections with the Ballett Frankfurt to bring together choreographers sharing his preoccupations with time, structure and physical detail. A booklet of conversations held with each of his guests illustrated the braininess behind this dance. Best read after the performances, it foregrounded many of the thematic similarities of approach made so richly manifest on stage.

Americans Meg Stuart and Amanda Miller performed their own work, William Forsythe showed a duet made in collaboration with Dana Caspersen of his Ballett Frankfurt, and prodigal son Michael Clark was back with a sneak preview of his new work. Paul Selwyn Norton, going soon to Melbourne to choreograph for Chunky Move, opened the event with a duet for two extraordinary dancers from the Ballett, the expert improviser Michael Schumacher and Vitor Garcia.

Selwyn Norton's *Proxy* was the longest work of the night at 20 minutes and as such ignored the less is more dictum. While Selwyn Norton delights in the incredible range of expression of his virtuoso dancers, allowing them quirky and elaborate articulations, he distractingly overwhelms these revelations with an unnecessarily generous embrace of theatricality. Strange props, such as the enigmatic rubber mats which littered the stage, and tomfoolery with a mike-stand cluttered the fascinating exchanges between Garcia and Schumacher. The recorded sound-track (Gavin Bryars' *A Man in a Room Gambling*), a fictional radio crash-course for card-sharps, said it all; "Pay attention to the moves", lilted the seductive Latino announcer, "because they are so simple that they need some audacity in order to be performed." Shame then that Selwyn Norton didn't give them more space.



Michael Schumacher and Vitor Garcia in *Proxy*

Meg Stuart's solo, *XXX for Arlene Croce and Colleagues*, was the palate cleanser required after *Proxy*. On a bare stage she danced her ironic response to the *New Yorker* critic's now famous description of Bill T Jones' AIDS related work *Still Here* as "victim art." Infused with human strength and frailty her contortions were both beautiful and abased. To Gainsbourg's *Je t'aime moi non plus*, her scrunched up face, jutting hips and stiff sides were bountifully defiant. Ten minutes and she had said it all. The pause hummed with approval.

And catty expectation, because bad-boy Clark was next on, with a glimpse of his first full stage work for 4 years. Dancing with Kate Coyne to a breathtakingly anarchic score by Mark E Smith of The Fall, Clark was in characteristically provocative form. Blinding his straining audience with 6 full spotlights at 12 o'clock the duet was barely visible. While the bitches later sniped that he was hiding, it was fair to say that Clark certainly wasn't making his new work easy to see. "Welcome to the home of the vain" intoned Smith in his laconically spiteful drawl, and Clark collapsed again from point to splay in a decadent and downright ugly drop. You've got to love him...or loathe him.

Amanda Miller's *Paralimpomena* translates literally as "leftovers" and her solo comprised "fragments from earlier group works that I felt didn't get

communicated." Miller flowed around a dark stage like a spirit, ghostily unmuscular amidst the exertions of the evening. Perhaps that was why her whimsical work seemed so brutally dismissed by Forsythe and Caspersen's show-stealing duet, *The The for Jone San Martin* and Christine Burkle.

Expert interpreters of Forsythe's angry physical intensity, these peculiar twins knotted themselves together across the

floor, in a seated version of a tantrum which surged through their bodies producing the most extraordinarily exciting shapes. A recorded voice read out time to remind us that there were intellectual battles raging too. As an extract from the full-length 6 *Counterpoints*, this duet is a thrilling introduction to a world of intellectual and physical rigour. As the end to an evening of vivid provocations it was a perfectly abrupt and unsatisfactory end.

Kick-starting a year of commissions and collaborations with an adrenalin shot of creativity, this event left the audience even more full of questions and opinions than when they arrived.

As it is—Choreographer's Choice, curated by Jonathon Burrows at The Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, Paul Selwyn Norton making *Proxy* for Michael Schumacher and Vitor Garcia, Meg Stuart making a solo, xxx for Arlene Croce and Colleagues, on herself; untitled work by Michael Clark for himself and Kate Coyne; *Paralimpomena* by Amanda Miller for herself and Seth Tillet; *The The* by William Forsythe and Dana Caspersen for Jone San Martin and Christine Burkle; video installation by Peter Newman, July 9

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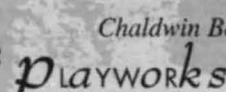
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Shadow pictures, words of light

Cassi Plate experiences the words and works of Allan Sekula

In late May—the last days of waterside-workers-as-front-page-news (but not the last days of the never-ending dispute)—American photographer and critic Allan Sekula presented his *Fish Story*. To the audience at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the timing was uncanny—*Fish Story* narrates the contemporary maritime world and the history of representation of the sea. The deadpan brevity of the title belies the depth of the story told in a verbal/visual ensemble reaching back to illuminated manuscripts and forwards into our era of visual overload, requiring a whole system of captions to intricately trace “the network of hidden relationships occluded from view by the total contiguity of ‘visual information’.” (Benjamin Buchloh, “Allan Sekula: Photography between Discourse and Document”, *Fish Story*, Richter Verlag, Dusseldorf, 1996)

Allan Sekula was delivering the Ian Burn Memorial Lecture 1998 and speaking as part of a symposium considering issues in the history of photography. In her closing remarks, one of the organisers, Helen Grace, pointed out that at the last event of this kind in the 80s, photography was discussed strictly within art discourse and that now it clearly exceeded this “connoisseurship of art history”, drawing instead on a richer mix of anthropology, media and cultural studies. Photos can speak across and from all these discourses.

The myth that photos tell the truth has been supplanted by the myth that they don't.
Allan Sekula

Speakers at the symposium discussed the origins of photography (Catherine Rogers) as ‘Pencil of Nature’ (1839) even then problematised by an early awareness of the contradiction between nature—what the eye could see—and technology—what the camera could see; photography as a way of reading American material culture (Sally Stein); and the idea put forward by Robyn Stacey that acknowledging all photography as a



Allan Sekula, *Hammerhead crane unloading forty-foot containers from Asian ports. Los Angeles harbor. San Pedro, California. November 1992*

technology deletes the argument of the computer (or digital photography such as Photoshop) as a manipulative tool.

Most writing on photography stresses the veracity of the photo in relation to the real.

Robyn Stacey

Christopher Pinney's concluding slide show was a fascinating comparison between the strongly indexical photography of the English colonial regime in India (those endless photos of ‘types’) in contrast with contemporary portraiture which is infinitely mobile and contingent—in no way tying the image to fixed (essentially Western) ideas of character or temporality. “What matters in India is culture, not technology.” (Pinney)

In India the term for photography (and painting) is “shadow picture.”

Photography—the medium's paramount attraction was, for me, its unavoidable social referentiality, its way of describing—albeit in

enigmatic, misleading, reductive and often superficial terms—a world of social institutions, gestures, manners, relationships...At that time (1971) photography seemed to me to afford an alternative to the overly specialised, esoteric, and self-referential discourse of late modernism, which had, to offer only one crude example, nothing much to say about the Vietnam War.” (Allan Sekula, *Fish Story*)

Which returns us to the uncanny unfolding of a history of maritime disputes and the reversal of 19th century ideas about the relationship between land and sea. Stretching from Hermann Melville (not just *Moby Dick*) and Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and into 20th century images of mutineering dock workers and sailors (*Battleship Potemkin*), and embedded in ideas of montage and realism, we arrive at this floating coffin, the giant (virtually) crewless container ship (called *Sea-Land Quality!*) which has assumed the shape and dimensions

of land at sea—a sea-borne factory in the long line from convict hulks on the River Thames to slave ships and immigrant ships. We are shown the idea of ships functioning as both prisons and as engines of flight and escape, as the watercolours of Winslow Homer and the Dutch maritime painters of the 1600s are drawn into the story. Allan Sekula's weaving of word and image revealed the questions at the heart of his photographic project, reflecting the labour of representation and the representation of labour.

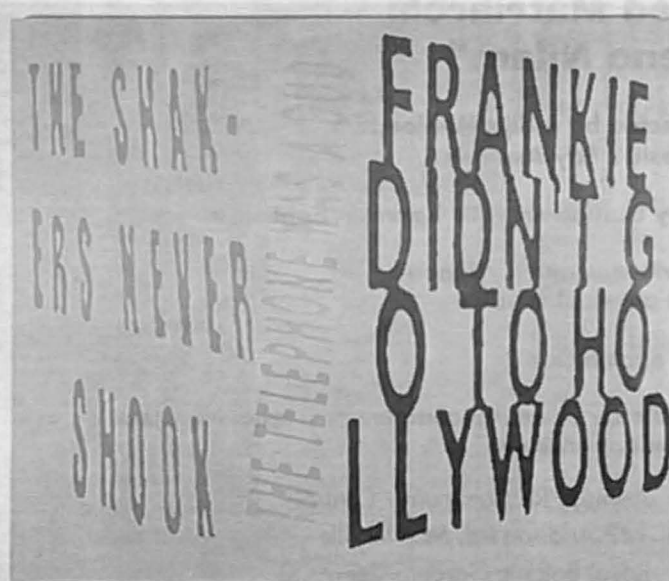
“His accounts of the instability of photographic meaning continuously oscillate between a conception of photography as conceptual (ie as a discursively and institutionally determined fiction) and as referential (ie as an actual record of complex material conditions).” (Buchloh, *Fish Story*) The record of *Fish Story* is the complex story of work and unemployment on the restructuring waterfront and water, in ports now removed from sight, container terminals in Korea, abandoned wharves in Los Angeles. Unlike Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado's famous images of work, Sekula's story neither romanticises nor pronounces this toil dead.

Maholy-Nagy called this “the century of light”, so ‘Words of Light’ as a description of photography probably also belongs to him.

For Walter Benjamin the truth of history does not involve the representation of an “eternal past” but rather “the production...of an image. This truth of history is performed when we take the risk of making history rather than assuming it to belong only to the past. It happens...when we understand historicity as a kind of performance rather than as a story or a form of knowledge.” (Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light*, Princeton University Press, 1997). Benjamin placed photography at the centre of his analysis.

The Pencil of Culture: Photography, the Indexical & the Digital, Allan Sekula (Ian Burn Memorial Lecture & Seminar), Art Gallery of NSW, May 21-22, 1998.

Cassi Plate is researching the languages of images as a way of reading history, and teaches in Cultural Studies at the University of Technology, Sydney.



Richard Grayson, *AHP - Frankie*

M. Bradley

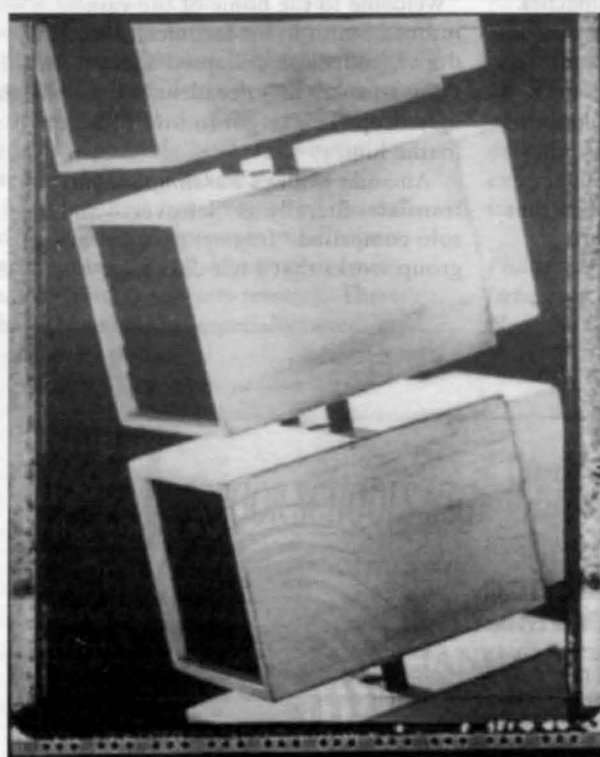
Richard Grayson's work evidences his long-standing interest in written language as representing a conjunction between the private and public. Past paintings have employed handwritten fragments of letters (sent and received by the artist) as the equivalent of found objects, the resulting images forming a kind of history of abandoned and anonymous personal inscriptions. Grayson's new paintings at the Greenaway Gallery in Adelaide extend this interest in both history and the personal through the form of a kind of schoolboy ‘conceit’—posing the question “what if?” If mother and father had never met each other I wouldn't exist—a troubling thought for any small, sensitive child.

Grayson's paintings attempt the daunting (and doomed) task of rewriting history—beginning with the reversal of every known or assumed historical fact. Appropriately enough, the paintings are baldly titled *Alternative History Painting*, and with the emphasis in the texts being equally and decidedly rhetorical. Phrases such as “The Illuminati Run My Bank”, “Harold Holt Returned”, “Joan of Arc Was Deaf”, “Alison Didn't Want to Know Me” suggesting the splashy stridency of newspaper headlines, billboards, political posters, concert fliers. The texts looked slapped down, the colours cursory, the typographic tricks pro forma—skewing, slewing, condensing, expanding. The effect is alarming. Everything about these works seems so visible and immediate one has to suspect Grayson of having squirreled away a second order of meaning. And there it is, suddenly thrown into (comic) relief, the binary two-step of ‘painterly problematics’—field versus incident, form versus content, flatness versus depth.

John Barbour

Alternative History Painting, Richard Grayson, Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide, May 20 - June 14.

John Barbour is an artist and writer. His work is represented by Yuill/Crowley gallery, Sydney, and he has contributed critical writings to many publications on contemporary Australian Art. He teaches at the South Australian School of Art.



Andrew Osborne, *Fragile*

match where the choreography orchestrates a muscular dance. Outside, on what was a warm autumn night, one retained the memory of light in darkness, of lightness, and the fact that art, craft, and the experience of the world are always interconnected.

Christopher Chapman

Vacant Spaces, Andrew Osborne, Gerard & Goodman Building, Synagogue Place, Adelaide, May 27 - 31

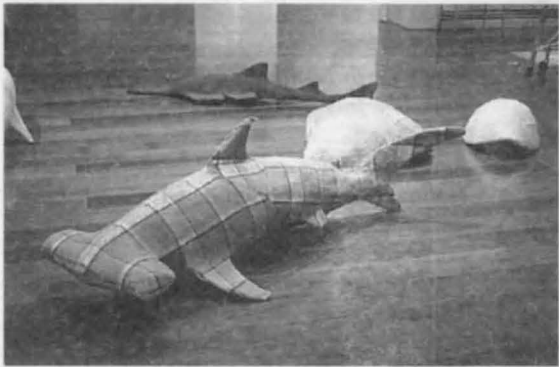
Christopher Chapman is a curator and writer on contemporary art and culture. He has worked at the National Gallery of Australia and the Art Gallery of South Australia. In August he will take on the Directorship of the Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide.

Cues, metaphors and dialogues

David Sequeira responds to selected works at the 1998 Adelaide Biennial

Despite widespread criticism that the 1998 Adelaide Biennial, All this and Heaven too, lacked cohesion and the works were poorly exhibited, individually and collectively many works were judged rewarding. Eds

In their catalogue essays for *All this and Heaven too*, Juliana Engberg and Ewan McDonald discuss everyday experiences from the past and their potential to signify meaning in contemporary life. This encompasses ideas beyond the confines of the institutional archive and acknowledges the role of memory, personal symbols, dreams and wishes in the development of history. At first glance, *All this and Heaven too* may



Ricky Swallow, *Blanket Shark and Turtle Shell (Blanket)*

have been a trip down memory lane. For me, it was a sequence of cues which prompted the consideration of personal histories which have meaning beyond individual experience.

I have selected four works with which I felt a strong resonance. This is not to dismiss other works in the exhibition, but rather to demonstrate how a particular grouping of artworks began to form a dialogue.

Each of these works draws attention to the ways in which objects, materials and experiences of the past have become powerful metaphors for current ideology and values. Change and transition are important sub-themes here: Colin Duncan reminds us of a time when we leave this consciousness in favour of dreams; Greg Creek shows us the moment at which the note or sketch becomes the final product; David Watt addresses the grey area between childhood and adulthood; Ricky Swallow illustrates the point in reality at which the imagination can go no further.

Colin Duncan's installation *Sleeplessness* features a series of beds in a darkened room. Dressed in crisp white paper sheets and pillows, these beds highlight the rituals of sleep and dreams. The clean, blank bedclothes are empty pages upon which we make notes. The bed is the place where we picture dreams. Duncan's beds become a symbolic point of departure from one reality to the next. Considering the bed as a point of interchange, I recalled an activity a teacher gave me when I was at school: "Imagine that what we do in our dreams is real and that what we do in real life is just a dream." Would our lives be any different? Dreams represent a liberation. They allow you to be something different.

The small group of single beds suggests the individuality of dream experience. We enter the subconscious alone. The title *Sleeplessness*, though, suggests an inability to shift into dream mode; but undisturbed bedding implies a wish to remain firmly in this world. Duncan's work signals an incapacity to go beyond the limitations of ordinary experience. Dreaming is a common enough practice but is often perceived as extraordinary.

The fragmented scribbles and notes in Greg Creek's *Desktop drawings* encourage the eye to scan the surface of his desks, dipping now and then into his pool of sketches and writings. This installation of drawings, presented as a series of desks, suggests at first a classroom or an art school. Further investigation reveals that Creek is the

only student here and that he has been sitting at the front, centre and back of the room. The learning and teaching that he has experienced at each point and from each perspective has taken place solely for him. The classroom is his studio. Creek's process has become his product.

The doodles, details, blots and jottings on each desktop form graffiti which invite us to examine the artist's private domain. The desktops act as evidence of thinking; a testing ground for new ideas. Above all, these markings show Creek's attempt to identify and assert himself. He tells us clearly that he is an artist and explains a trail of experiences that illuminate his particular studio practice. His studies of faces reveal an ongoing interest in the relevance of formalist painting to his practice. Written references to movers and shakers in contemporary art can be understood as part of Creek's identity. He shows us his environment, or the art climate in which he practices. His drawings are his way of exploring where he fits amongst it all.

In *Plan of the month*, David Watt presents a toy train which travels continuously through his constructed world. The train must journey through a landscape hand-crafted in plywood and rich in symbols. Certainly Watt's process deals with the "quiet, reclusive masculinity of the shed and the garage" that Gordon Bull describes in his catalogue essay, but there is also much to be gained from the imagery itself. The train follows Watt's concocted path. It repeats its journey over and over. Watt has set the scale, rhythm and obstacles for this passage. Is this a toy? Is this art? It is at once an instrument of childhood and of grown-up hobbies which makes the distinction between boyhood and manhood blur. Using trains and carpentry as the language of both big and little blokes, the artist acknowledges this rite of passage with warmth and humour. His tableau represents a particular kind of order, an idyllic miniature world which he has created and which runs like clockwork.

The warm plaid patterns of Ricky Swallow's *Blanket sharks* and *Blanket turtles* recall a time before the doona, when blankets and bedspreads were common bedroom accessories. When woollen dressing gowns with satin tassels were worn with flannelette pyjamas and Grosby slippers. For me, this was a time when my single bed with its bookshelf bed-head could become anything—a pirate ship, a submarine or an aeroplane. Familiar, yet strange, Swallow's creatures are earthbound. Trapped in a gallery, they signify the fruits of the mind and yet illustrate the point at which imagination is incapable of becoming reality. Grounded in the domesticity of winter bed clothes, the creatures of Swallow's fantasy do not come to life. They remain stagnant on the gallery floor. They are in a sense a fantasy half-baked. These soft looking sculptures are a sharp reminder of the role of art and art institutions. The ferocity of the hammerhead shark is belittled by its domestic textile form. This echoes the sometimes alienating nature of contemporary art, undermined by its display in a public institution.

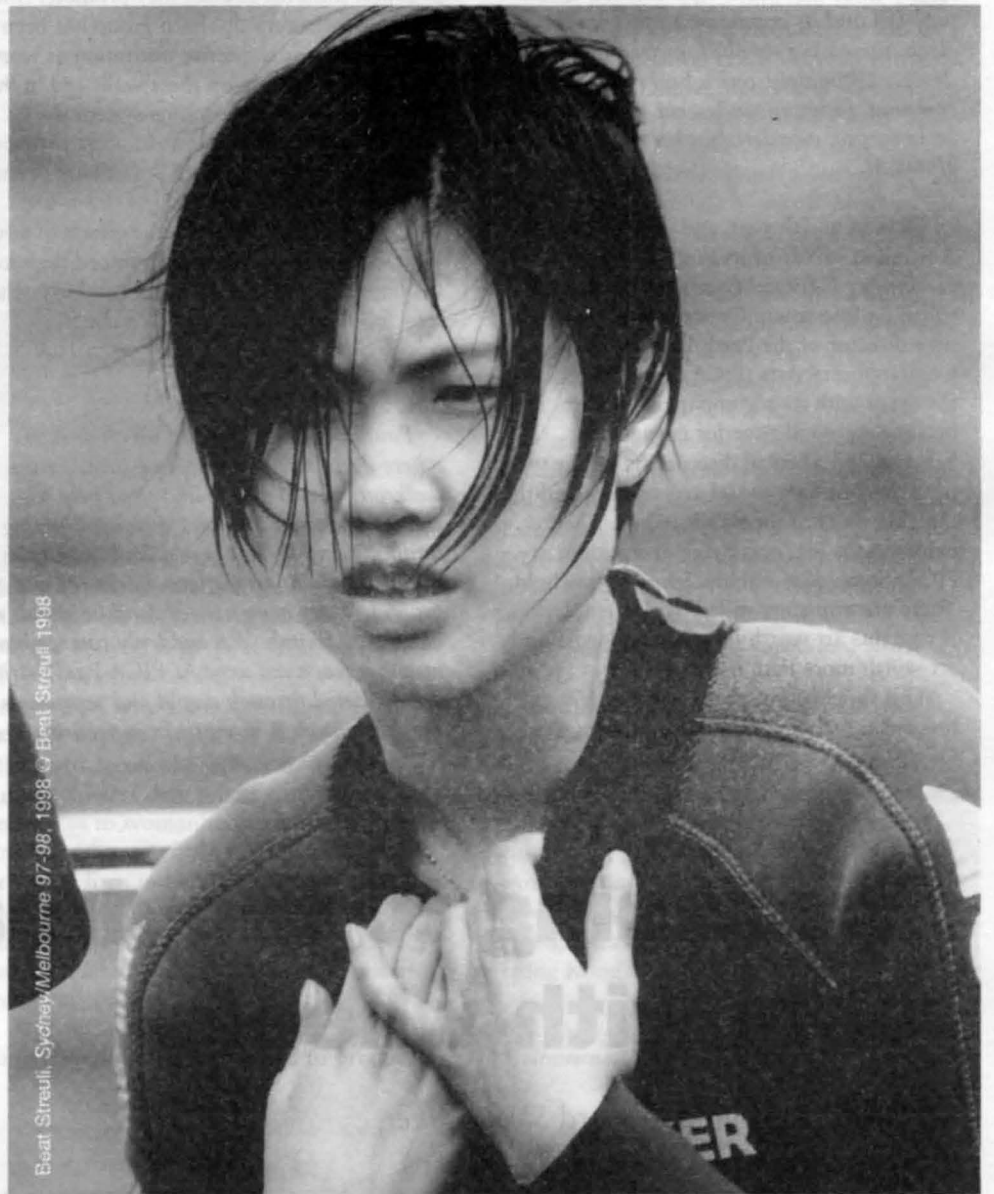
Duncan, Creek, Watt and Swallow explore the premise of *All this and Heaven too* with considerable success, asserting their individuality and providing a meaningful context for each other.

All this and Heaven too, Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, Art Gallery of South Australia, 1998 Adelaide Festival.

David Sequeira is a Canberra-based artist and the Co-ordinator of Public Programs at the National Gallery of Australia.

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Beat Streuli, *Sydney/Melbourne 97-98, 1998* © Beat Streuli 1998

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Squeezing the goods

Andrew Gaynor sees national arts graduates *Hatched*

In Jonathon Wilson's *Bedroom the mouse wheels keep on spinning: spinning, spinning, spinning. Sometimes the power in a wheel may fail and its companion takes up the slack, increasing revolutions by the nth of a degree. Ultimately, one wheel remains still spinning, faster, incandescent, as the others lie in torpor, wondering what the hell it was all about.*

Now in its 7th year, and still the only Australian survey of its kind, *Hatched: Healthway National Graduate Show* has rolled on into town. Conceived in 1992 by the then director of the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), Noel Sheridan, the event with its accompanying forums has become a pivotal zone for engagement between hypothetical discussions on the worth of various tertiary visual arts courses and the tangible fruits of their endeavours. The exhibition is big, occupying every room at PICA. Some of it is shiny. Some of it is bold. There are moments stilled by contemplation. It contains art worth less than its media and art worth more than it all.

This should come as no surprise. *Hatched* presents a real opportunity for graduates as

artists to jostle with their peers, but, given the exhibition's brief, it is difficult to separate the products from the courses they promote. And promote them they do. Each group has been selected by their respective institution as worthy of representing them on these walls and in the catalogue where the grouping system is formalised. Here the clusters of artist entries are preceded by the soft sell on the validity of each course now on offer. The feel of this is car yards and hypermarkets, with the efforts of young desirables paraded like goosebumped flesh in the hope that some may squeeze and like what they feel then sign to join the course.

Mouse wheels.

Paul Hunt has stumbled on an answer where illusion is just that. In *Construct we walk on painted stripes and need help to change our view. It comes through blinding intuit. "There he is. There's Wally" and the tumbled crowd just flattens, backs off into ground. Wally is no mystery and he stands out like a sore thumb. You suddenly can see him no other fractured way. At PICA Paul's stripes are mediated through a cold and scrutinous eye. Televisual. A monitor from security. You*

realise that you're climbing stairs. Startled, you trip and fall flat on your face.

Artworks must be cogent to survive the competition screaming from adjacent walls. It is one of the major difficulties for audience perception that group shows are often governed by simplistic practical aspects such as scale, similar hanging requirements or a need for small darkened spaces. This is hardly a revelation or an isolated problem but it makes for some interesting jumps. For example, the main space downstairs at PICA is visually dominated by billboard gimmickry and candy floss colour, moments of self aggrandisement that are effortlessly deflated by the consummate skill evident in an adjacent kiln glass platter or a wired industrial chair. A pink floral mattress, with gently stencilled images of hard porn boys, tells more about awakening desire, identity and attempts to conform that the piles of body-politic clothing demanding attention elsewhere. Mysterious videos in degraded black and white give glimpses into memories of Victorian psychic experiments. Or would do, if the recorded voice from the adjoining installation didn't keep intruding with its grating prattle. Miniature stadiums of

infinite joy, comic books and bottled fruit do winning battle against examples of aesthetic agendas whose textual banalities blare a lack of context and get hoist on their own petard.

This horizon line is infinite though etched by Jessica Loughlin's hand. It draws the gaze and squints on to the periphery. But the way there is blocked with words. Unread and regarded simply, they operate as threads, tantalising like chalk marks on a path, a softly textured hieroglyph. Deciphered, the mystery vanishes revealing a ramble with no meaning. The focus must return now to the craft, to avoid the proclamation and prevent this set position.

With all the questions, possibilities, positions, splendour and despair that such a show inspires, it is utterly remarkable that after 7 years the National Graduate Show appears once a year on the edge of the continent and never does the rounds. If *Hatched* continues to be denied mobility to catalyse some wider debate, it runs a real risk of becoming a purely didactic expo of tertiary art courses to tempt an isolated community.

Hatched: Healthway National Graduate Show, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, June 19 - July 26

Andrew Gaynor exhibited in the Original National Graduate Show of 1992. He has just graduated again.

Awakening to the dream in a room with wheels

Mark Jackson climbs aboard *Sleepwalker*

Caravan

We see a small caravan, a little sad-looking, slightly abandoned in the centre of an empty asphalt carpark, a slight desert mirage, a little phantasmagoric, dream-like, unlikely site for a work which quite simply frees up a thinking about the condition of exhibition, about a long tradition of visuality, about the white cube and its lineage, its genealogy, to the camera obscura. There is a constellation here that palpably arouses a Benjaminian thinking of the dream, of awakening, of the dialectical image, of the cross-roads of magic and positivism, mythic history and natural history. Its wish-word is "sleepwalker"; its mythos is the dream; its cryptonym is forgetting; its object is the commodity; its syntax is the uncanny—a ghostly dwelling.

Some great somnambulists

You are a man of leisure, a sleepwalker, a mollusc. The definitions vary according to

the hour of the day, or the day of the week, but the meaning remains clear enough: you do not really feel cut out for living, for doing, for making; you want only to go on, to go on waiting, and to forget.

Georges Perec, *A Man Asleep*

What we do in dreams we also do when we are awake: we invent and fabricate the person with whom we associate—and immediately forget we have done so.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

Let me dream a little about your falsehood, false duality of man.

Louis Aragon, *Paris Peasant*

Aragon was one of the great somnambulists—the heightened experience of Paris as in a surrealist dream. We must remember as well that there was nothing more intoxicating for Walter

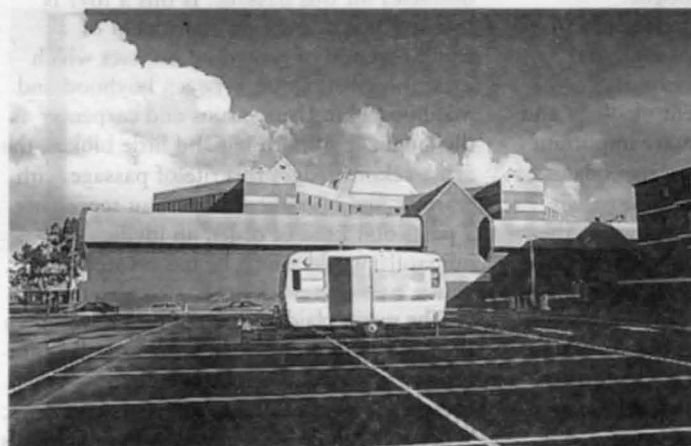
no longer capable of supporting a kind of nomadic dwelling, *unheimlich* for a caravan, a little ghostly, haunted by a two-fold precursor, ancestors who double up. One can hear them laughing, joking, mocking this condition of the white cube, the derailing here of a lineage of a bringing to an inside the very frame and condition of a capacity to see, the camera obscura's inverted capture of its own outside, in short, the stakes in exhibition itself. *Unheimlich*

not only for living, we could say, but for seeing, for showing, for any taking place. But here's that Benjaminian flash of recognition, that dialectical image. The camera obscura was one of the privileged metaphors used by Marx to describe the commodity. Another was the dream-image. For poor Marx there were always mechanisms that enacted misrecognition, mechanisms to be avoided,

to consciously step outside of. Benjamin's awakening was to a recognition that misrecognition was no dream but rather a coagulation of the political, the economic and the aesthetic, authenticating exhibition value of any thing as the condition of the work of art. Simply put, the things exhibited in *Sleepwalker* meet this condition of the work "half-way" as Benjamin would say.

Between title and thing there is something buried, some crypt, some keepsafe, something avoided, guarded against. Let's see: Veich's *The Wit of the Staircase*, with its hand-cranked tape recordings of dreams, Gawronski's *Switch*, an object of schizo-electric speech, Gerber's *Self Portrait*, a small wit of narcissism, O'Callahan's *Haunt*, Iwanczak's *The Crossing*, photo-document of a simian situationist, Redgate's *Fountain 1917 #1*, a doll's house Duchamp. The cryptonym is "forgetting", but forgetting what? I would say it is that sleepwalking never approaches the condition of the dream, that the ruse of sleeping eyes wide open with two feet on the ground is that it is simply not dreaming. *Sleepwalker* awakens us not from the dream, but, as Benjamin would have it, to the dream, to its veracity and its exhibition.

Sleepwalker, an exhibition curated by Bronia Iwanczak, Adelaide, June 8 - 28



Alan Cruickshank

Benjamin than to awake from this surrealist dream, but without the sacrifice of the unconscious. As he says in the *Passagen-Werk*, "Whereas Aragon stands firmly in the realm of the dream, here the constellation of awakening is to be found...of a still unconscious knowledge of what has taken place."

Taking Place

Sleepwalker is a collaborative exhibition curated by Bronia Iwanczak, which includes works by Mel O'Callaghan, Alex Gawronski, Matthys Gerber, Jacky Redgate, Philipa Veitch and Iwanczak herself. It is the second in a series of caravan exhibitions currently being staged in Adelaide, in conjunction with the Experimental Arts Foundation, and assisted through funding from the Australia Council. It is intended that the caravan move at some time to other metropolitan centres in Australia for further series of installed exhibitions.

A title and a housing, and that which is housed, we would always want to separate these out, to unravel the indeterminable in their binding, make it speak as the location of the taking place of a work, as if sleepwalking takes us nowhere that would not have been better traversed wide awake. Picture this: a small sealed room in the outdoors, a room with wheels, a room that can be towed around, a room lined internally in white board, a room

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Distinctly black

Cate Jones gets a serious laugh from seeing *Black Humour*

Black Humour is a big exhibition. Big in the sense that it represents the work of about 20 Aboriginal artists but also big in each artist's powerful and vigorous response to current and historical political conditions. If, as explained in the catalogue, comedy is composed of a combination of truth, pain, parody and hostility, then this exhibition is an exhilarated revel, countering dominant white versions of history, exposing the myth of representation and confronting contemporary dilemmas. Its humour is distinctly black.

Gordon Hookey's paintings reverse the power relationships between the subordinated and the oppressor. In *All The Natives Laughed As The Cruel Joke Was Played On Poor Li'l Pinky*, Aboriginal people are portrayed as laughing, native animals in a pub. A dingo poisons the beer of a half-pig, half-human John Howard-like creature who is choking and reeling backwards from his chair. The painting is crowded with detail. The animals gloat over the pig's violent end, beer cans fall from the table, a crocodile's gold tooth gleams from its jeering, gaping jaws and a kangaroo holds something in its paw that is either a bomb about to explode or an incredibly huge joint. The painting is cooking with all the elements of a drunken night at the pub.

In *Pinklash Backlash Backlash* an Aboriginal warrior spears in the chest a corporate-suited white man riding a rearing horse. A packet of McDonalds' fries and a can of Coke fall from the rider's hands as his chest

spouts blood. The horse foams at the mouth, shifts lumps of ectoplasmic green and pisses pus while the American flag is raised above parliament house in Canberra. If this painting weren't so profoundly incisive it would be reminiscent of those obscene drawings kids at school do of teachers they really hate.

The Campfire Group's installation is a parody of Pauline Hanson's fish and chip shop. "Pauline's Menu of Truth" stands against a display fridge full of crumbed Aboriginal artefacts. From the menu, for pre-referendum prices, political dishes such as "Fischer's Combo", "Seafood Pasta-ralist", "Cajun Katterfish" and "Van-stone fish" (char grilled) can be selected but "Borbridge's Balls" are not available because, as the menu board states, he has none. On top of the fridge are small tins of "tart-arse" sauces, and cans of preserved "Hanson ideologies." A photograph of Murri Island, that Eddie Mabo fought for and won, hangs at the back of the display fridge, framing the installation, and warning that while political manoeuvring fluctuates and wavers, Native Title will endure.

Harold Wedge's painting, *Pauline Hanson (Don't need to explain any further)*, is a straightforward, compelling statement. On a background of finely crafted dots Wedge has written, in the colours of the Aboriginal flag, the words, "Pauline Hanson" and "amoral." But Wedge's words drip and run, so that the painting bleeds, like a premonitory emblem. At first glance the word amoral read appropriately, but mistakenly, as remora [a sucking fish that



Brenda Palma, *Signs of the Times* (detail)

attaches itself to others like a parasite. Eds].

Brenda Palma's work explores representation and identity through the reconstruction of appropriated imagery and white definitions of Aboriginality. She uses old household paint logos, trademarks and newspaper articles to subvert the colonially defined, homogenised, anonymous representations of Aboriginality. Darlene McKenzie writes about these definitions as abstracted bodies of knowledge designed to subordinate: "Foucault views knowledge as a weapon that serves definite purposes, the principle one of which is the oppression and legitimization of the unequal power relations which exist in society. The monopoly on knowledge by the dominant ideologues and

its means of implementation, subverts and contains the interests of the oppressed." (Darlene McKenzie, "Looking at them looking at us", *Racism, Representation and Photography*, Inner Education Centre, Sydney, 1994) Palma's work articulates that for Aboriginal people, identity is directly linked to, and continues to grow out of, the racism of colonial history.

Black Humour communicates powerful energy, openly exposing racial antagonism and confronting issues and politics surrounding Aboriginality. Central to the works, is the deconstruction of imposed identity, and the reconstruction of Aboriginal identity based on a powerful system of support and humour charged with autonomy. *Black Humour* celebrates marginalisation as: "a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers the possibility of radical perspectives from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds." (bell hooks, "Marginality as a site of resistance", *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture*, MIT Press, Massachusetts, 1990)

Black Humour, curators Jane Barney, Neville O'Neill, a Canberra Contemporary Artspace touring exhibition; Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute, Adelaide, July 10 - August 16; Boomalli, Sydney, August; Melbourne's Koori Heritage Trust, March 1999

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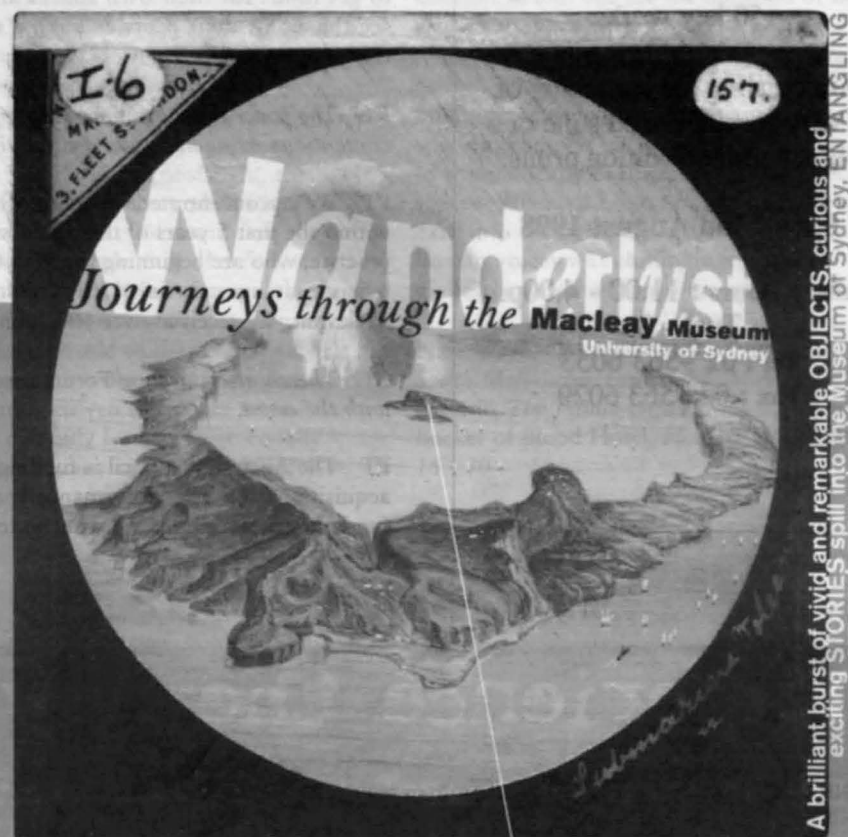
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Injection across waves to ease the pain

Keith Gallasch talks to Penny Thwaite about artists and infrastructure support

Last year the Australia Council's Visual Arts and Crafts Fund announced an initiative for emerging artists and artist organisations working in collaboration with contemporary art spaces. In response The Performance Space commissioned visual artist Penny Thwaite to develop her project *Injection* to devolve funds in a way that both supports artists in their practice while setting up some other significant principles.



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PT *Injection/Acquisition* means that as much money as possible goes directly to artists. The other part of the brief was that the project involve artist organisations in some way.

KG By "artist organisations" do you mean artist-run initiatives?

PT Two Victorian artists, Brett Jones (West Space) and Richard Holt (Platform), came up with a new term to bypass perceived discrimination. While there's no brief from the Australia Council saying only organisations with "professional" administration will be funded, for some reason, in the last round, no independent artist-run initiatives were funded in the categories open to organisations.

KG How will the injection be delivered?

PT There are three amounts of \$1000. We put out a national call for artists to send slides and CVs. We're in the process of selecting three works which we'll purchase, exhibit and then donate to a number of artist organisations.

KG Are the organisations in this case assumed to have galleries or spaces?

PT Not necessarily. The idea is that they put some kind of proposal to us that outlines the way that a work might be of value to that organisation. They might use it to negotiate a deal or a sponsorship or as an asset that they simply exchange for money. They may choose to pool the works, exhibit them and collectively charge an entrance fee or auction to the highest bidder. I see it as a way for them to get funds for their own spaces and to see the art of their peers as having value in that way as well.

KG The concept of the "emerging artist" is contentious. How have you dealt with it?

PT We've concentrated on artists who are within the first 5 years of their professional practice, who are beginning to exhibit. This bypasses an age criteria which is often irrelevant. We received over 100 submissions.

KG There's also *Injection/Forum* associated with the event.

PT The Australia Council is funding the acquisitions and The Performance Space funds *Injection/Forum*. We want to test the

premise that the best way for governments to support artists is to financially support artist organisations.

KG How serious is the situation?

PT Extreme. When a gallery like Sydney's First Draft loses its funding, its charges go up. So, not only have rental costs gone up and employment opportunities gone down but artists are now in a situation where it's becoming too expensive for them to exhibit. This seems to me a dire situation because, without these structures being affordable, you have less opportunity for artists to exhibit. It puts a whole new level of competition out there. For example, each contemporary art space is able to exhibit perhaps 10 solo shows a year. And it's hard to be an artist without exhibiting.

KG It's ironic then that the first of the Australia Council forums had as its topic "Are there too many arts graduates?"

PT Perhaps from their point of view, there are.

KG Let's go back to the issue of administrative professionalism. Is this a real problem?

PT I think the funding bodies are committed to a more hierarchical concept. I don't have an arts administration degree and yet I've successfully worked for 2 organisations. In studies of artist organisations, it's been shown that the artists running them are highly motivated and successful and you would have to function as an artist and an administrator plus hold down another job so you can support your art practice as well as your voluntary administrative position.

KG It's interesting that in the UK where funding was pulled from artist-run organisations in the Thatcher years, a lot of small galleries sprang up, run by artists with a very business-like mentality. Now these places have become totally commercial or folded and there's an air of disappointment and loss of idealism. I'm sure there's an element of this kind of thinking here now—if they're really motivated, won't artists go it alone.

PT In our line-up of forum speakers we have people who've received funding, no longer do or have never received funding. We have speakers from regional galleries, young artists like Anna Ephraim working in Newcastle,

Penny Metham from Watt Space, a gallery network funded by the Newcastle University, Melissa Chiu from Gallery 4A funded through the Australia-Asia Foundation, Brett Jones from West Space in Melbourne, Lisa Havilah from Project in Wollongong, Pam Lofts from Watch This Space in Alice Springs, and David Cranswick and Kathy Cleland from Streetlevel in Western Sydney. We also have Deborah Ely from the NSW Ministry for the Arts and Billy Crawford from the Australia Council's Visual Arts and Crafts Fund.

KG The sitting duck from the Australia Council?

PT No, he's very positive about the forum. We're not just saying we need money from the Australia Council. That's one option, but there are others and we want to get debate going. We're also setting up an internet message board to include people who can't make it to Sydney.

KG So then, the acquisition is a political gesture. The money is dispersed in a practical as well as symbolic way.

PT Obviously I feel very strongly that artists need infrastructure support and venues simply can't operate without money. There are other avenues like private sponsorship and user-pays though they're becoming less of an option in the current economic climate.

KG How do you choose the arts organisations that the works will go to?

PT We'll put out a call to Sydney-based organisations and ask them to submit ideas, taking into account the media used in the work purchased. At 6 pm on August 22, the day of *Injection/Forum* we'll announce the acquisitions and open the exhibition in the new Performance Space Gallery. At that point the money will be handed over.

KG Devolution complete.

Injection/Forum will take place at The Performance Space on Saturday, August 22 from 10.00 am to 5.30 pm (registration 9.30 am). Admission is free. On-line message board address:

<http://www.culture.com.au/scan/tps>

Injection/Acquisition will be exhibited at The Performance Space Gallery, opening August 22, showing August 26 - September 5. Enquiries 02 9698 7235

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Bebop as pivotal

Nicholas Gebhardt reviews two recent books tracing the history of jazz

Since the 1970s, most studies of jazz have discarded the radical materialist analysis and political critique initiated by the civil rights and black power movements. The advent of Reaganism and the increasing marginalisation of the post-1960s black leadership cemented this process, promoting an historiography that preferred endless literary allusions to 'strategies of signifying' to a clear political analysis of the relationship between jazz, racism, economics and American ideology. The result is an idealised concept of black music that finds in the accumulated conditions of black slavery, poverty, violence and disenfranchisement the ultimate source of a timeless black creativity, while ignoring the historically specific force of that creativity. In these terms, jazz is cast as a sign of a transhistorical sensibility, while the devastating effects of ghettoisation and state repression are offered up by multinational record companies and 'hip' academics alike as natural modes of self-expression and resistance for a disenchanted and cynical Western bourgeoisie.

Two new studies of jazz beg the question: how is the study of black music to pull itself out of this mire of neo-liberal thought and the conflagrations of textual idealism? Correlatively, how is jazz itself to break through the mould of individualised, existential hyperbole that has accompanied the backlash against free jazz and the experiments of 70s fusion? One answer has been to install jazz within the institutions of American high culture: universities, public arts organisations, the non-commercial media, festivals. This has been accompanied by a general reification of styles along a line running from New Orleans to Montreaux, to the point where jazz's radical creative achievement has been submerged under the weight of an historical imperative that would restrict jazz to its most essential elements and affirm its relation to the state as the benign 'soundtrack' to American prosperity. In opposition to this rampant historicism, there's been a recent renewal of materialist analyses of the conditions of jazz production that engage with the critical force of jazz creation and its complex relation to the political economy of late-imperial America.

Scott DeVeux's *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* is one such work. Vast in its scale, his study begins with the proposition that to really understand jazz, one must understand bebop because bebop is "...the point at which our contemporary ideas of jazz come into focus." Comfortable with neither the substantialist logic of the 'jazz tradition' nor the assumption of an intrinsic revolutionary imperative, DeVeux emphasises, as a prerequisite for any history of American

music, an adequate explanation of the role of art in a capitalist state and, in particular, jazz's place within the specialised economy of music. This amounts to a timely critique of the liberal historical consensus that would banish economics, race and class from jazz altogether so as to capture the music as a pure image of democracy. Against this nationalist ideology, DeVeux pursues the origins of bebop as a powerful, but contingent, musical force that, in the face of devastating segregation and economic hardship, attempted to "...reconstitute jazz—or more precisely, the specialised idiom of the improvising virtuoso—in such a way as to give its black creators the greatest professional autonomy within the marketplace."

The scope of the work is exhaustive and quickly establishes the limitations of earlier studies of bebop. Rather than an inventory of styles and players, or a hagiography of alienated genius, DeVeux proposes a different socio-historical framework. Through the figure of saxophonist Coleman Hawkins, whose career vaults the critical and ideological division of swing from bebop, DeVeux asks the question: "What did it mean for a young African-American man to pursue the career of professional jazz musician in the first decades of the century? In particular, what did it mean for him to be progressive?" This question informs the whole analysis and enables DeVeux to trace the constellation of social forces—musical, historical, technological, racial, political, and economic—that opened up the musical rupture wrought by Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, Max Roach and the other practitioners of the new music.

While DeVeux's text is exemplary in its attempt to grasp the creative moment of bebop as a material encounter with the oppressive logic of American capital, a less than satisfying work is Ted Gioia's *The History of Jazz*. Gioia aims to encompass, in a single narrative, the entire history of jazz from its precursors in the blues, spirituals and ragtime to every possible current permutation (John Zorn, Henry Threadgill, Geri Allen, Wynton Marsalis, David Murray, M-Base etc). In doing so, he follows a standard evolutionary narrative that foregrounds the role of individual musicians as general proof of jazz's global ambitions. This presents a number of difficulties, not the least the tendency to resolve complex political, musicological and economic forces into a series of truisms about the underlying role of tradition and historical continuity in securing jazz its musical and moral legitimacy. Names and styles are ticked off as the discussion lurches toward Gioia's main contention that jazz is "the most glorious of

mongrels", a form anticipated centuries before in the Moorish conquest of Western Europe, but only realised on the heels of American capital. This retrospective logic allows Gioia to emphasise jazz's historical inevitability and to institutionalise it as fulfilment of the "...image America had of its own destiny."

Although *The History of Jazz* might serve as a suitable introduction to jazz history, its Clintonite agenda reduces jazz to a symbol of the free market and a sign of America's manifest syncretic power. For Gioia, jazz has become a global perspective that could, like the American dollar, "...encompass all musics." DeVeux's *The Origins of Bebop* is a welcome antidote to Gioia's jazz pandemic, offering instead a sense of the essential dynamics of jazz production and its difficult relationship to both the commercial world of

mass entertainment and the machinations of the American art world. This is a study that turns on the important task of understanding jazz as an integral part of modern American society. As the novelist Ralph Ellison noted in the 1960s, "any viable theory of [black]-American culture obligates us to fashion a more adequate theory of American culture as a whole." DeVeux has set the study of jazz on that difficult path.

Scott DeVeux, *The Birth of Bebop. A Social and Musical History*, University of California Press, 1998

Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz*, Oxford University Press, 1998

Nicholas Gebhardt is the Music Producer at radio 2SER-FM in Sydney.

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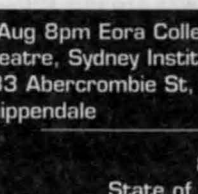
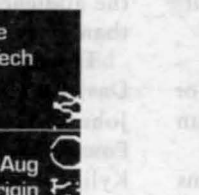



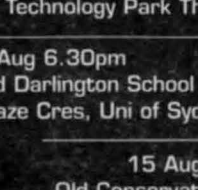
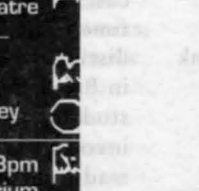




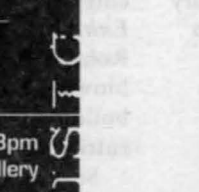

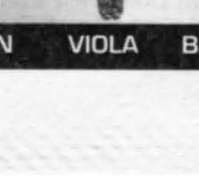
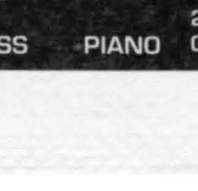
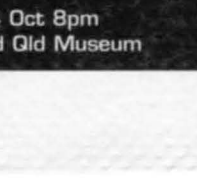




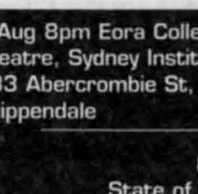
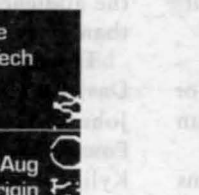



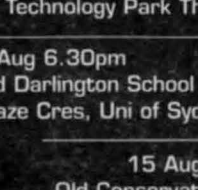
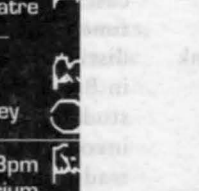




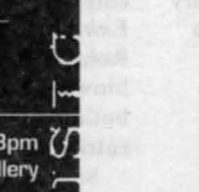
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SAX VIOLIN VIOLA BASS PIANO

Articulating worship

As Messiaen and Ligeti are celebrated in the concert hall, Chris Dench evaluates their legacies

If we were to ask a cross-section of composers in their 40s to list their formative influences, I would put money on all of them, no matter where in the world, mentioning both Olivier Messiaen and György Ligeti. Nowadays a small industry has built up around each of these senior composers and it is increasingly hard to recall the initial impact created by their music when first encountered. Also, each has generated ranks of imitators—not, on the whole, their pupils—who have numbed our collective sensibilities to an almost insuperable extent. It is a tribute to the individuality and integrity of Messiaen and Ligeti's music that it is still possible to separate out their distinctive characters from the mythology that has grown around them, their signal from the noise.

Messiaen was born in 1908, inheritor of the sound-worlds of Debussy, Dukas, Maurice Emmanuel (he of the *Sonatine sur les Modes Hindous*) and, particularly, Scriabin. A solid Conservatoire training doubtless led Messiaen to feel obliged to produce a series of treatises which lay out in great detail the technical armoury of his compositional method, and which explain...nothing: the *how* of Messiaen's music is, in my view, rather narrow and uninteresting. His titles, on the other hand, advertise compositional nonconformity of a particularly French variety, compounded by expansiveness, fervent Catholicism, exoticism, virtuosity, and plain-speakingness—Messiaen, not surprisingly, was an admirer of Berlioz. His gradual importation of foreign ideas, modes, Indian rhythms, numerologies, served to enrich a single purpose: to articulate musically some aspects of the character of his God. Worship, in short.

Despite his faith, Messiaen was clearly shaken by the Second World War—he had spent time in a Nazi prison camp—and both his first and second major post-WWII works, a song-cycle called *Harawi*, and the overblown *Turangalila-symphonie*, are rare diversions from theological concerns, although their musical voice is recognisably that of his pre-war output. Messiaen's conviction did not inoculate him against the urgency of Modernism, either. From his teens on, Messiaen collected birdsong; occasionally vestiges of this interest would influence his melodic writing, but from 1951, almost without warning, naturalistic atonal birdsong proliferated in his work, replacing functional harmony with kaleidoscopic, non-developmental, and almost directionless gestures. By the early 70s he had produced some of the most startlingly original sounding—and looking, these scores were unprecedented—music, a compositional vision *sui generis*. Not only that, but the musical language of much of his output was ingratiatingly sexy, which didn't yet strike any jarring note with the emphatic theological intentions.

Ligeti, too, had a hard war. Born in 1923, he was a young man when he endured a labour camp; in 1956 the Russian tanks precipitated his departure from Hungary; between, the deadening encroachment of Stalinism denied him access to music of any degree of 'modernness.' In the words of Paul Griffiths, "suddenly at the age of 33" he "became the 'real' Ligeti." (*The Contemporary Composers: Ligeti*, Robson Books, 1983, 1997) This 'real' Ligeti, after producing a series of extraordinary works, from *atmosphères* to the *Chamber Concerto*, was effectively 'outed' from the cloisters of the New Music by the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*, in which Stanley Kubrick

used his *Lux Aeterna*, and part of the *Requiem*. Like almost everyone else, my first experience of Ligeti's music was indissolubly wedded to Kubrick's images of higher intelligences manifesting themselves to humankind through the medium of an oversized credit card.

Thirty years later, how do the works of Messiaen and Ligeti fare in my estimation? Messiaen's music, I have come to find, does not bear well repeated listening. There are no hidden depths, driven as it is by an urge to clarity, to unambiguous symbolism. Excepting very few instances, the discourse is expounded by juxtaposition, and punctuated by little-modified statements of leitmotifs ("Theme of God" etc) with barely any developmental subtlety. A whisper of flimsy theatricality hovers around the musical logic. Similarly, what sounded sexy in 1970 strikes as saccharine today; Messiaen's harmony, in his most famous, pre-war, pieces at least, has a mawkish quality that threatens to sabotage the piety of his intentions. The works which continue to impress are, surprisingly, the later, leaner, Modernist pieces, which largely eschew the self-indulgent extravagances and predictabilities which give the earlier works their kitschiness.

I doubt that there will be any argument if I assert that Ligeti's music of the 60s has lasted better than that of many of his contemporaries. Today, the works that were most often compared to Ligeti's, Penderecki's early, Modernist, pieces, elicit smirks rather than admiration. Xenakis remains the great untamed genius of the last 40 years, but he was always a rather lonely, isolated, figure and that has not changed. Ligeti's impact on American minimalists is undeniable (when Ligeti's music was new we drew no distinction between the various threads of modernism: Terry Riley was as exhilarating as Stockhausen, and *vice versa*). Ironically, subsequent works of Ligeti's since his opera *le Grand Macabre*, the *Piano Concerto*, *Piano Études*, *Horn Trio*, seem treasonously postmodern in their allegiance. And what about Ligeti's big break: *2001*? The 'good fit' of the music to the film is questionable; had we known Ligeti's music *first* wouldn't we have protested its appropriation? The inevitable and perpetual association of film and score has permanently compromised the music's right to an innocent ear. Also, for me a difficult tension arises between the prosaic, cut-and-dried patterning of the musical mechanisms and the implicit broader expressivity. In the *Requiem* and *Lux Aeterna* Ligeti is dealing with eschatological themes, but his means to this end are anything but transcendental—Ligeti himself has said, "I love whatever is constructed." And yet, I find the equally artificial compositional technologies of Ockeghem, or Tallis's *Spem in Alium*, no impediment to an appreciation of those composers' faith. Perhaps we are still having to come to terms with the religiosity of much Modernist music. Could that be why a few postmodernists seek so insistently to debunk such music: the suspicion that some of it, however painfully, actually delivers the spiritual goods?

Sydney Symphony Orchestra, 20th Century Series series, includes concerts devoted to Messiaen, conductor Simone Young, July 17; and Ligeti, conductor Reinbert de Leeuw, August 28

Chris Dench is a Melbourne-based composer. His most recent work is ik(s)land[s], with texts by berni n janssen, premiered by ELISION on July 9.

Bite and danger

Andy Arthurs hears new works by Topology and speculates on new music audiences



Bernard Hoey, Kylie Davidson, Christa Powell, Robert Davidson and John Babbage, Topology

Chris Osbourne

Topology goes from prolific strength to strength. As usual they selected a quirky space, the charmingly run-down brick cathedral of the Old Queensland Museum and home of the Queensland Youth Symphony Orchestra. It felt like a furtive act to be engaging with Topology in a corner of this massive shell of a building. John Cage would have indulged in the total experience during the first part of this concert as a lone piper relentlessly practised his highland tunes outside in the car park.

There is so much going on in new music in Brisbane—not the case a few years back. Whilst Topology and Elision satisfy different sensibilities, there are loose organisations for performance and music such as The Cherry Herring, Compost and NuMB. These are starting to make inroads into an important problem in Brisbane, the lack of an audience culture to attend such events.

So here's my theory about audiences for cultural events in Brisbane. Although it is a fast growing city, the motivation for people moving there seems to be primarily economic. Therefore the population growth has been out of proportion to the cultural growth. As we see the second generation of these newcomers emerging, their support for the arts is more likely. And that support will start at the younger end of the market and will branch out over a period of time. There is therefore hope for new work. At the Old Queensland Museum the audience was around 120—greater than I had witnessed before.

The line-up for Topology is Robert Davidson (contrabass and keyboards), John Babbage (saxophones), Christa Powell (violin), Bernard Hoey (viola) and Kylie Davidson (piano). As is often the case, a special guest joined them, this time Francis Gilfedder from a distinguished family of innovative artists in Brisbane. Francis has spent many years studying music in Indonesia and is involved in much music from oral traditions including the didjeridu. His entry was in a musical sparring game, *Exhibit A* (Davidson/Gilfedder) where Robert Davidson and he were heard blowing horns from another part of the building, bursting into the space like two rutting deer.

Sean Heim is an American composer who has been studying composition at the University of Queensland since 1997. Both his pieces, *Kulbuku* (first

performance) and *there are flowers that grow in the water and in the plains* (Subduing the Power of Pride, 1995) could be described as nascent works upon encountering a new culture. Gilfedder played didjeridu in both these. Well intentioned, they were consciously "Australian" pieces, but resembled more a list of ingredients than a baked cake.

Robert Davidson, leader of Topology, is a prolific composer who seems able to balance the concept of working music and art music. On the night we heard *Exterior* (first performance) an adaptation of a section of his concert-length work *Four Places*, with significant improvisational input from Bernard Hoey and John Babbage. The setting was perfect for this architectural work. This contrasted nicely with the restless energy and shifting on and off beats of *Convex/Concave* (also first performance). Topology have described their repertoire as post-classical music. This is a neat tag and removes them one step from their minimalist roots. The compositions of Davidson have more bite and danger than so many of his minimalist gurus.

Other first performances were Graeme Dennis' *Tunnel Web*, a gentle introduction to the evening and John Babbage's *Dance of the Pleiades*. We also heard a well executed version of the Steve Reich classic *Piano Phase* (1967) from the Davidsons, a sensitively played solo viola piece *Cadenza* (1984) by Kristof Penderecki, and a first Australian performance of *Allegrasco* (1983) by renowned English composer Gavin Bryars.

Topology are musicians who feel their music. They are all good players, though in this performance John Babbage occasionally erred on the sharp side. A total of ten contemporary works is not bad for an evening of music. With this range of stimulation it was encouraging to find that the audience were not shell-shocked, but wanted more. Now if the Brisbane Festival can gain a little confidence from this about marketing new work, in addition to promoting a diet of Handel and Tatuos, then there is hope yet.

Topology, Old Queensland Museum, Brisbane, May 28

Topology plays Sydney, August 7 - 9 (see page 51).

The cost and pleasure of new music

Keith Gallasch previews the 1998 Sydney Spring music festival and 2nd Spring Academy

Now in its 9th year, *Sydney Spring*, a contemporary music festival directed by its founder, pianist Roger Woodward, is not unlike the season after which it names itself, unpredictable. Spring in Sydney, unlike Autumn, does not always promise good weather. Now *Sydney Spring* invariably offers good, often challenging music, often in the late modernist mould (with exciting exceptions like the Arvo Pärt program and visit in 1997, or forays into jazz in previous years) and welcome serves of Xenakis and Reich, and a lot of Australian compositional and musical talent on show. What is unpredictable is the response. Some concerts are packed, some near empty. All deserve better. What's the problem? Well, even this always generous season is not inexpensive, say, compared with a film festival. Tickets are \$35, or \$25 for Friends, or, more encouraging, \$10 for concessions—ideally. I guess for that hoped-for young audience. A series pass is \$400, \$300 and \$120 respectively. Even so, given the costs of royalties, rehearsals, venue hire and performer fees, it is amazing the event has survived and, doubtless, Woodward has invested in it heavily.

One thing is certain, like Spring itself, we need it. We need that energising experience of week to week, wall to wall new music. However, for a long time now

new music in Sydney, and the celebration of its immediate antecedents, has been a hit and miss affair. Yes, the work is there, but not in any palpable, collective, audience-building sense. *Sydney Spring* has been part of our salvation, but even it requires a curious, energetic audience nurtured across the 12 month intervals that engender *Spring*'s forgetting. The emergence of the New Music Network, driven by harpist Marshall Maguire's intelligent enthusiasm, offers hope, linking 12 contemporary music groups in Sydney in an act of mutual support—newsletter, publicity for each other at their respective concerts, joint marketing. The long term effect has yet to be felt, but hopefully New Music Network and *Sydney Spring* will complement each other, yielding the audience new music warrants in Sydney.

Featured guests at Sydney Spring IX are composers David Lumsdaine and Rolf Gehlhaar (originally scheduled, Franco Donatoni the Italian composer was too ill to attend). Roger Ford in *Illegal Harmonies* (Hale & Iremonger, 1997) writes of Lumsdaine's fascination with birdsong: unlike Messiaen, Lumsdaine works recordings of Australian bird calls into his works rather than transmuting them into instrumental passages. Ford concludes, "The paradox inherent in David Lumsdaine's soundscapes is that

while we are made aware of a sort of prelapsarian, pre-human music—an avian *Ursonate*—we also encounter the complex relationships and simultaneities characteristic of the modernist aesthetic to which Lumsdaine still adheres. If modernism is in crisis no one has told Lumsdaine."

London-based Rolf Gehlhaar also works in a world of sound. His considerable CV reveals that he has been Stockhausen's personal assistant, a member of the Stockhausen Ensemble, and founder of Feedback, a composer collective in Cologne. He has researched live electronic music, directed composition courses, and was commissioned to install "Sound Space" at La Villette and the Pompidou Centre in Paris. Using the same technology, he has worked more recently in education and music as therapy for children. His association with Australia goes back to being sound designer for the Sydney Dance Company's interpretation of Xenakis' *Kraanberg* in 1988.

Lumsdaine and Gehlhaar will be involved in a significant adjunct to Sydney Spring, the Sydney Spring Academy of New Music, now in its second year, presenting lectures and masterclasses about the works, with composers (Anne Boyd, Roger Smalley and others) and performers (Sprung Percussion, Spring

Ensemble and Woodward) involved in the festival. Here's a sample of the Spring Academy: on September 9, Gehlhaar will deliver a lecture on electronics and new music and there will be an open rehearsal of Lumsdaine's *Kangaroo Hunt* with Roger Smalley and percussionist Guy du Blët. The interplay between concerts and the Academy is a vital relationship and can be witnessed first hand through a subscription to the Academy.

The concert program overflows with riches: Busoni's *Fantasia Contrapuntistica*, Reich's *Six Marimbas*, Cage's *First Construction*, Anne Boyd's monumental 75 minute *Dreams for the Earth* and her *Book of the Bells III*, and works by Skryabin, Donatoni, Andriessen, Feldman and Australians Glanville-Hicks, Kos, Lentz, Dench, Henderson and Sitsky. Anne Boyd's *Dreams for the Earth* is a premiere performance involving 500 young musicians, its subject environmental warming. The performance of four of her works (the others, the String Quartet No. 2, *Book of the Bells III* and *Kahan*) make this Sydney Spring a tribute to a significant Australian composer as well as the adventure into often unfamiliar music territory it always promises.

Sydney Spring and Spring Academy,
August 29 - September 26, tel/fax 9660
0140 forrest@mpx.au

The personal versus the global

Matthew Leonard attends the 24th International Feature Conference in Warsaw

Comrade Stalin had a moment of grim humour in 1955 and donated the Palace of Science and Culture to the people of Poland. It now phallically dominates the grey residue of one of Europe's great pre-WW2 cultural centres. The vigorous social allegories hanging from the facade decorate a building that remains an essential part of the intellectual infrastructure—the TV station, kinos, theatres and the hysterically moribund Museum of Technology. In the surrounding grounds, stall-holders sell bootlegged *Nike* gear and cabbages. Welcome to Warsaw.

Twenty four years ago, Berlin-based Peter Leonhard Braun, generally acknowledged as the driving force behind the radio feature, inaugurated an annual conference that would enable radio makers from around the world to gather, listen, learn and, above all, bitch about each other's work. While 'Leo' has now officially handed over control of the event to colleagues from the European Broadcasting Union, his presence, both physical and otherwise, remains formidable. Producers have been reduced to tears after a hammering from him and a thick skin is indispensable if one of your own pieces is up for discussion at the event.

Unlike the glamour prize events, such as the *Prix Italia*, the Feature Conference has remained a space for egalitarian discussion and a chance to expose your work to a receptive, if intensely predisposed, professional audience. It remains the most serious forum for professional development in this field. The highly-crafted production-intensive feature occupies an important position within state broadcasting across Europe. This is particularly noticeable to those of us from the ABC, where feature output has come to be regarded by some as

an expensive luxury. An example of the kind of audacious project still undertaken in Europe is that conceived by German freelancer Helmut Kopetzky. *A day in the life of Europe* will air as a 16-hour broadcast starting at dawn, networked simultaneously through a collective of German stations.

Programming over the 5 days of the Feature Conference is a result of both intent and serendipity. Two overall themes emerged this year out of a total of 30-odd programs played: auto/biography and personal narrative, and the landscape (in every sense) of post-war Europe. Of the former, Annemiek Schrijver's *I'm the Way*, about growing up in a Dutch Orthodox Reformed Church enclave, was the best written script of the conference. It skilfully placed Annemiek the reflective program maker in a relationship with Annemiek the child, her gypsy grandmother and the voice/s of the church.

The work of many Central and Eastern European radio makers continues to deal with the legacies of the war: in the account of a Russian man searching for the grave of his soldier father on the River Elbe, or the untold story of extermination camps run by the Soviet army after 'liberating' Poland. In the midst of this deeply serious material the ear craves the playful and positive work which is, it seems to me, far harder for feature makers to accomplish.

The scandal of the conference came in the form of Lisbeth Jessen's piece *Why Didn't She Ring Back?*. Two years ago a young woman phoned Danish Radio's Youth Talkback line in Copenhagen with an account of abuse. Two years later producer Lisbeth goes in search of the caller, and the story of what happened when she dropped out of contact. Superficially, it's a conventional social documentary that

intercuts the original phone calls with the search for the girl, but all the time the producer is signalling that something doesn't quite sit right. Did two high school girls manufacture the abuse story as a means of getting on the radio, or, as some suspect, is the whole documentary an elaborate hoax which pushes all the listeners' buttons through clever manipulation of performance and 'actuality'?

The mere possibility of manipulation sent many people into paroxysms of hypocritical self-righteousness, as if this kind of red herring was somehow an affront to the more 'authentic' forms of the radio feature and documentary; all of course manipulations of another magnitude.

The event is a strong challenge to the truism of 'global culture' as it quickly becomes apparent, both in example and discussion, that national narrative modes remain stronger than the international. An understanding of cultural specificities (moreso than language) is essential when interpreting the subtle moments and gestures in programs, even with the almost universal trend towards using personal stories to reveal larger themes. Lurking beneath many programs too, is the spectre of orthodox journalism which seeks symmetry, pseudo-objectivity and closure. Resistance is essential.

The 24th International Feature Conference, Palace of Science and Culture, Warsaw, April 25 - 30

Matthew Leonard is Executive Producer of the feature and documentary program *Radioeye*, broadcast on Radio National every Sunday night from 8.20pm. Australia will host the 27th International Feature Conference in 2001.

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Concerted effort

Keith Gallasch encounters 20th century music in Sydney

Sydney is rarely so awash with new music. You have to watch out, read the small print in the press and on handbills, but it's increasingly in evidence and amplified too by a recent visit from Elision and a forthcoming trio of concerts by another Brisbane ensemble with a rapidly growing reputation, Topology. The Song Company are doing a return concert of their nationally lauded account of Stockhausen's *Stimmung*. Richard Vella and Andre Greenwell got an intimate hearing of vocal works recently at the Conservatorium. Most significantly, The New Music Network, a newly formed organisation of 12 Sydney music groups is promoting contemporary music with brochures, newsletters and a strong membership campaign aimed at the curious listener.

At the big end of the scale, the SSO's contemporary music series began boldly years ago with 6 concerts in one year, but almost immediately reduced to 3 per annum with a smattering of Australian content and some very memorable experiences, for example the late Witold Lutoslawski conducting the SSO on the floor of the Sydney Town Hall lit largely only by music stand lights, Dene Olding on violin executing a staggeringly good *Chain 2*; the Peter Sculthorpe birthday concert with the SSO shifting through surprising and confident permutations of scale and ensemble under the baton of the late Stuart Challendar; and a concert with the Song Company hard at work, clustered and miked around the conductor doing Berio with the orchestra. Three concerts a year still seems hardly enough. However, new music takes many forms and sometimes small but potent is what it's about.

A recent sample of accessible new work in various formats came in *A Night of New Music* from Darlington School Composers Drew Crawford, William Frasier, Michele Morgan and Nick Wales. Each composer

presented several works, allowing the audience to listen for that distinctive voice. Michelle Morgan as performer (not always enunciating clearly) and composer ranged from scat to Laurie Anderson speech-song ("Just the other morning before i woke i dreamed of victory"), and performing with herself on tapes with Berbarian/Berio gasps and orgasmic cries, made her strongest impression in a work where she shared the singing. The a capella *Book of Ruth* exploited the use of microphones with hard consonants, heavy breathing and guttural patterning, characterful voices and a democratic distribution of parts. Over all, Morgan presented too many compositional voices for the audience to know which was the one that counted.

William Frasier's *Dissemble*, a clarinet trio, didn't live up to the composer notes promise of "night, bars, alleyways, hotel rooms", offering instead a genteel Poulenc-ish pastoral harmony. The well-received *Vals*, for tenor, shakuhachi, bass clarinet, electric piano, guitar and cymbals, emerged from precious fragments into a hypnotic near-resolution. *Vals* suggested a distinctive voice, especially in the shape of the work, while the closing pieces, *Music for String Quartet and Tabla*, established only a tenuous relationship between the instruments and, despite all the hard work, inevitably sounded like something out of the Kronos canon.

Drew Crawford's *Quadrivium*—marimba, vibraphone, glockenspiel, crotales, Chinese cymbals and crystal glasses—with its open-ended scoring simply pulsed with increasing speed and intensity to a white hot shimmer (and some nice relaxed playing), a sonic drama popular with the audience. The utterly different 5 excerpts from the musical *Why Are Our Porn Stars Killing Themselves* were sung with varying ability, the music landing somewhere between Lambert, Hendricks and Ross virtuosity and Stephen Sondheim lyrical theatrics and replete with nightclub

moodiness, musical grit and melancholy arias. Just as soulful was *String Quartet 2, for Jeff Buckley*. Initially reminiscent of Kronos' foray into Hendrix (opening stabbing chords), it finally evoked, without literal reference, Buckley's arching hymning. *Quadrivium* aside, here is a compositional voice capable of narrative emotional depth, not quite distinct, but close.

Nick Wales offered a less conventional, more perplexing set, the only one of the night that embraced contemporary popular culture and technology. *Crank: Set* is for miked solo violin with a range of absorbed influences, pop and cross cultural; *Indian Giver* is a dance track with moody string sound; *Stevie* movie music with wind and percussion giving edge to the strings; *Butterflies* an interesting mix of song, spoken word, string quartet and quirky percussion in, writes Wales, "an acoustic rendering of drum'n'bass." Wales' work proved the least and the most familiar music of the concert, an unusual voice working with an unusual mix of means acoustic and electronic.

Second hearings are vital and rarely offered for new music. *A Night of New Music* will be broadcast on ABC Classic FM, on New Music, August 26, an opportunity to hear not the most challenging of contemporary Australian music but a variety of emerging voices working their way well away from academic formalism.

In the same venue Ensemble 24 presented a largely well-executed and ambitious concert of works by Carl Vine (String Quartet No 2), Georges Lentz (*Caeli Enarrant IV*, introduced by the composer), and Olivier Messiaen (*Quartet for the End of Time*). The Messiaen was accomplished, very good in bits (the clarinet solo, *Abyss of the Birds*), but worth hearing for its inevitable and moving sense of totality. The Lentz is a curious, sometimes powerful, sometimes meditative work replete with silences, an enormous eruption of sound (the spatial-

aural arrangement places four percussionists with a cymbal each in a semi-circle around the quartet), a satisfying atonal evocation of the universe and a curiously ordinary tonal resolution. Unlike the disturbing power of such resolutions in Gubaidulina and Silvestrov, this one seemed out of place, the work had already achieved its cosmic sense by other means. (Ensemble 24's next concert comprises Steve Reich's *Different Trains* and Tan Dun's *Ghost Opera* for string quartet and pipa; September 27.)

The committed and the curious packed Sydney Town Hall to hear Simone Young conduct a Messiaen concert. The 1936-37 work, *Poèmes pour Mi* about marriage and its sacred correlatives, provided an acute and sustained dialogue between the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and soprano Deborah Riedel. The orchestral writing looked back to Debussy and Ravel, the soprano voice emerging angelic out of the strings, and offered glimpses of the post-war Messiaen. Nigel Butterley's *The Woven Light, for soprano and orchestra* (1993-94) was unfairly pitted against the Messiaen, its relationship between singer and orchestra short on dynamic (and clarity), until the long melancholy string-dominated close. Messiaen's *Couleurs de la Cité Céleste* (1963) and *La Ville d'en-haut* (1987) offered string-free transcendence and Michael Kieran Harvey adroit on piano against majestic clouds of brass and waves of percussion. Young's taut direction yielded better Messiaen than Edo de Waart's account of *Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum* at the Adelaide Festival. The opportunity to play more of the Messiaen repertoire might account for at least some of the difference.

A Night of New Music, Darlington School Composers, Eugene Goosens Auditorium, ABC Sydney, July 3; broadcast, Classic FM New Music, August 26

Ensemble 24, Vine, Messiaen, Lentz; Eugene Goosens Auditorium, ABC Sydney, July 12

Sydney Symphony Orchestra, 20th Century Orchestra 1998: Messiaen, Butterley; Sydney Town hall, July 17

Acoustic power

Keith Gallasch on a new CD from the Nova Ensemble

Junkelan
Nova Ensemble
NOVA CD002
Distrib. Nova PO Box 692 Fremantle WA 6959
nova@opera.iinet.net.au

This WA outfit of six composer-performers, formed in 1983, is about to participate in a Synergy concert in Sydney with their distinctive percussion sound, and if the sound on this CD is anything to go by, theirs should be an intriguing performance to watch. They have a long history of making instruments out of scrap metals and plastics, the *Junkelan* tracks representing the refinement of metal instruments developed over recent years. Here and there the musical metal clangs with the pulse and waver of gamelan—sometimes wittily and delicately at 'toy' gamelan pitch, sometimes with a rich industrial rumble—and at other moments drifts into delicate melodic flute against a tin tinkle. Yes, there is a harmonic flute, the occasional clarinet, bass and piano, but there is no gamelan—many of the ensemble's instruments don't ring a bell (sawrus, cog bonang, PVC berimbau, frog tubes, stop-sign-a-phone etc), but make delicious sounds, and many a gong and prayer bowl is struck and metal dropped and glass (apparently) shattered and water let drip. Remarkable sonic textures are achieved acoustically and layered rhythms seduce with an eerie depth of field. The melodic invention is simple,

occasionally bordering on New Age quaint, but sonic inventiveness and rhythmic complexity always win out. Mind you, you can miss a lot if you don't turn the sound right up—I don't know if it's my feeble old sound system or if this CD has been cut at a very low level.

Nova also do great things with rustling, murmuring and guttural voices, for instance on Track 10, the introduction to the second work *Ritual Fragments* (a dance theatre commission). They're also adept at bird whistles, beginning conventionally enough but transforming (continuously from Tracks 13 to 15) into a rabble of bird calls and human cries and then into a chorus of monkeys from Balinese dance who are soon accompanied by a forward plucky funky bass running with them note for note on one of the theatrical highlights of the album. Three final brief tracks constitute *Etchings*, lyrical alto saxophone wrapped around with dancing bass and a plethora of voices, and signing out in an all too brief tango, a gentle ending to an album full of percussive pleasures and surprises like the massive, pulsing *Cosmic Chord*. I want to see how they do that.

In RealTime 27, *Peter Constant, Sympathetic Resonance*, Classical Guitar music by Australian Composers on *MOVE* and *Machine for making Sense's Amanda Stewart solo on SPLIT*.

Letter

12 June, 1998

Dear Editors,

"Blame REM or The Hunters and Collectors—Sandro are an insistent reminder that post Kurt Cobain, 20 something white boys MUST be heard." (Vikki Riley, "Counter histories, future directions and manly regressions", *RealTime* 23)

I didn't mind the "anti-hero" sound-bite so much as the mention of REM and Hunters and Collectors. I would not have thought we were so offensive. Interesting cut-and-paste style review, though, and by far the most damning I've yet to read.

"...imitation Leonard Cohen"—hell, we must be boring. Perhaps somebody should sew up the mouths of all 20 something white boys, so's we can listen to some authentic angst from the remainder of the population. I would be interested to know which sectors of the population hold the monopoly on valid emotions and experience, according to Vikki Riley.

It's not often I get the opportunity to reply to journalists. I like to think that I would never bother, but this review was just a little too much of a character attack. You're more likely to stir people up if you have a go at somebody famous, rather than some local nobody like me.

Regards,

Gareth Edwards

Disc politics

Vikki Riley reviews new CDs

Various Artists
Dislocations: incestuous electronic remixing
 Zon:R2
 Zonar distribution: mds
 zonar@ebom.com.au

Halo Produksihuns
Biff
 Seraphic
 distrib. Box 1, 168 Flinders St.,
 Melbourne 3000
 www.alphalink.com.au

Ryuichi Sakamoto
Discord
 SK 60121
 Sony Classical distrib. Sony

Unless you're a member of The Angels, TISM or The Dirty Three there's no need to panic over the current CD legislation. The brouhaha spewing out into the mainstream press from Gudinski Inc and his protégés at big 'independent' titans like Shock is all about defending the mutinational deals which see Natalie Imbruglia on the cover of US corporate citrags like *Spin* and making sure Aussie Rock stays on those turntables at JJJ.

Independent labels who use the corporate industry to get their discs into the stores have long been relegated to destination Reminders: last month's huge warehouse sellout of the mds/Shock catalogue of Euro electronica and the 'difficult' genres of black music as well as literally boxes full of unpromoted local independent titles was about as blatant as it gets—Autechre, Snowboy and Benjamin Zephania for a few bucks each. Then there's the Cold Chisel story, 31,000 fans staying up till midnight to hear *Yakuza Girls* exclusively on the net—no corporate representation for this revival of hard rock as specialist underground media event.

The Zonar label may well be Australia's first true independent media venture, lining up next to Psy Harmonics and Extreme with a serious experimental agenda and a national brief of 'indigenous' electronic music which takes on board older outfits like Severed Heads and newer entities like Alternahunk, the latter a kind of Henry Cow atonal rewrite of Sydney's Black Eye label scene from the last decade. This second Zonar sampler compiled by Brendan Palmer (one of the original founders of Clan Analogue) is pretty much the equivalent of Talvin Singh's *Soundz from the Asian Underground*, like the Nation Record's ideological charter, remixes are the key to the disc's handle on cultural autonomy. Zonar impress with a palatable handle on things like world percussion, spacy mantras and a residual schema of dub and reggae infused organisation, foregrounding personal texts as opposed to the now customary 'freaky' weirdisms we've all been programmed to listen for. Stand out tracks include the Orbish remix by Shannon O'Neill of Size's *1000 Bambis* and my favourite, Synchronensch's version of Alternahunk's *Snake Arms*, which should be the cue for Sydney avant garde forgottens Voight 465 to dial up the Zonar site and reform immediately.

Biff is a one man operation. Halo Produksihuns is Indonesian born Iman Poernomo from Clayton, a Melbourne suburb home to the Nissan, Bosch and Sigma factory headquarters as well as the chosen location for Victoria's first migrant hostel, The Enterprise, which was torched last week by vandals. In the early 80s Industrial music told us that music could replicate the timbre and actual rhythms of



the manufacturing prisons that working life threw up as obligatory sound environments of oppression and control. In the 90s the home studio, the private dubplates born of subliminal generic machine memories is the 'style' commodified by solo masters like Squarepusher. *Biff* is all those things, part soundtrack of confinement, part pristine, miniaturized bubbles and magic fibres of whirring fragile beats, a crystal ball of transparent emissions, digital lacework which makes Panasonic sound like future Nike ad dub-over. If generic dance rhythms are the Seraphic label's niche, then *Biff* shows us the way forward into a more culturally specific place—global electronica as happening next door, over the back fence.

Tragedy, the poetics of absence, are not exactly popular themes in contemporary electronic music: *Discord* changes all that with a future soundtrack where fun and art collage experiments aren't part of the weave. Like his mentor and West German nemesis Klaus Schulze, Sakamoto and 'The Orchestra' dispel music straight from the osmosis processes naturally occurring in the bleed-over between the classical world and the machine generated cosmos. Dance music and DJ culture are already infused with the grandeur of such a project and the glory of the one man symphony: Laurent Garnier, definitive 'works' like LTJ Bukem's *Mystical Realms*—the concept album, with its monopoly on long extended atmospheres seems back for good. *Discord* is a radical rewrite of all these conventions, old and new, only four tracks (cryptically titled *Grief, Anger, Prayer and Salvation*) take us straight back to Arvo Pärt's 1991 *Miserere* with a number of performative variations.

There's the 'players', David Torn and Afro American sound art theoretician DJ Spooky (aka Paul Miller), then there's the colour theory, a blue disc in blue, mirrored paper packaging, a kind of meditation 'blank screen' minimalism once employed by Derek Jarman as diversion away from unnecessary media images. But the real innovations in *Discord* come in at a production level: this is another remix artefact all about the illusion of seamless alchemy, string instruments redone sans the moment of 'first contact', a kind of utopian universal music which dares to perfect the unsmooth edits of a conductor-led ensemble but with the conductor, Fuminori-Marō Shinozaki, relegated to second position after digital arranger and engineer Goh Hotada. Sakamoto is down as saying the disc is a response to starvation in Africa—

(meanwhile his next release is his cinescore to De Palma's *Snake Eyes*) which is a bit hard to take from a wealthy Japanese pop star. The last track gives a clue to what I suspect is Sakamoto's sneaky underlying contempt for Western art's sincerity fix. A 'found' recording of an inane conversation about redemption and spiritual atonement in a gallery space among Laurie Anderson and friends, the plight of the world reduced as a chatline epitaph—a nice little



postscript to whack on the home hi-fi system after taking in *Kundun* at the movies, all those American accents competing to soak up the linguistics of New Age guilt and ethereal awareness.

Vikki Riley will be presenting a series of underground electronic capsules from the past during August and September on Second Amour, midnight Wednesdays on 3PBSFM, Melbourne.

Sport

TEE OFF

with Vivienne Inch

Teeing off at The Bennelong is always tricky. With all that glass it's difficult to hit the green safely. So at the launch of the Sydney Festival's Star Supporter Program last month I played the room instead. I'll come clean, Leo Schofield is in my opinion an over-rated player—a flash rat whose game lacks finesse. He is, however, a stickler for diction—his Saturday column in the SMH is required reading for linguists and cultural studies commentators of all denominations. On Saturday 25 July he offered a biting analysis of the speech patterns of a couple of young graffiti artists from the suburbs caught in the media spotlight. Anyway, the launch hosted by Kerri-Ann Kennerley backed by a pub band was hardly Royal Sydney. But then the whole affair was nothing more than an opportunity for Sydney business to collectively empty out its change pockets with donations of five, ten and twenty thousand dollars. The room was full of pissed Junior Executives and Community Liaison Officers given the cheque books for the night. Aside from myself, the only A-listers I spotted were Gough and Margaret. Bored with the chit chat I found myself paying somewhat more attention than it deserved to the opening speech. Channel 9's David Leckie did the honours, talking up "Sinney in the summa" and "geddin be-ind Leo's ecsepshunal festival. Jus exsepshunal...an doan be supried if ya fine sumthin ya acshully like." I remarked to one of the flotilla of Business Development officers passing around the buckets at the event that Leckie wasn't what you might call a gifted speaker. No, said the suit, but he knows how to read figures.

TOOTH AND CLAW

with Jack Rufus

The biggest cultural event in the history of the world concluded last month in Paris, so now it's time to sort out the winners and losers. The final, contested by those great old rivals Adidas and Nike, proved a real upset. Adidas had done poorly in the early rounds, its star players all red-carded off in disgrace. But in the final the Nike team, playing in the colours of Brazil, appeared to trade in their high-tech footwear for thongs, leaving the Adidas side to lift the trophy in a co-franchise deal with France.

In the more important rhetorical contest, the Brazilian coach Zagallo provided an early flourish, dropping one of his players forever for "playing like a bureaucrat." Bureaucrats around the world filed a motion in protest. Winner in this category though was the great philosopher and ex-footballer Eric Cantona, who immortally dismissed the French captain as a "water carrier."

You can lead a water carrier to water, but you can't make him drink—which leads to the Cliché contest, effortlessly taken out by England coach Glen Hoddle. "At the end of the day, when all's said and done," he droned on, "all credit to the lads, they done their country proud." The wily Hoddle controlled the midfield of this division, leaving plenty in reserve for his Cliché assault at the next World Cup. "At the end of the day, when the horse has bolted, a stitch in time saves nine, I'll be back in 2002. When all's said and done, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, the grass is always greener, never count your chickens, all credit to me, I am the once and future Cliché King, look on my wonders and despair!"

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