

RealTime

27

October–November 1998

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cover image: Rehearsal photograph of *Stung*, choreographed by Sue Healey for
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Dancers: Carlee Mellow, Sally Smith, Rachel Roberts, Joanna Lloyd and Belinda Cooper
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Editorial

Welcome to the elite

It's the morning after the election and it's unfairly sunny, but at least a cool breeze damps the humidity of what was a tense, tropical election night. In the mild delirium of the after effects of an excellent election party (bizarrely spiced by a guest who monologued astonishing tales about the lives and loves of our leaders, bodies of political victims under front lawns, US satellites singeing us by focussing the sun's rays onto Australia etc etc) I'm wondering what's going to happen to sales tax exemptions on things like printing, of course, under a GST regime. Just as worrying in its own way, is a black and yellow handbill mailed out to various electorates last week which declared on one side, "Labor set to sneak in." On the other it read, "Choose your preferences carefully. A vote for Labor can give you...[photos of Kim Beazely and Gareth Evans]...An extra \$61 million for elite art funding [the last four words in bold], Work for the Dole GONE, Capital Gains Tax on Personal Assets, Gareth Evans...Treasurer? NO PLAN FOR THE FUTURE." What did artists do to deserve such elevation in Liberal Party demonology? Who decided to run with this absurdity?

When Arts Minister Senator Richard Alston talks about elitism he's usually referring to the Keatings as if they are still on Labor's agenda. Otherwise, Alston's attitude to the Australia Council in the course of the election campaign has been positive, though his funding promises are nothing to get excited about as we continue to struggle with the cuts of 1996. At its 25th birthday celebrations he warmly praised the Australia Council, confirmed on-going government commitment to it and ran a kind of bi-partisan line that Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party was the enemy of the arts and that's what we had to collectively fight (notably, this worthwhile celebration was *not* graced by a Labor Party speaker, nor was Labor's contribution to the arts invoked).

The Australia Council responded to the anti-elitist assault with a press release the day before the election defending "Australia's leading artists from criticism expressed in election campaign advertisements run over the past week on national television, radio and in some newspapers. The Council's Chair, Dr Margaret Seares, said she was surprised at the criticism of elite arts and artists which appeared at odds with the government's own previously stated support for arts funding and recent comments from the Federal Arts Minister, Senator Richard Alston." The release goes on to argue that of course there is an elite just as there is in sport, and that's something that brings Australia international recognition, and (music to Liberal ears) "the arts and related industries are worth \$19 billion a year to Australia and employ more than 500,000 people. The arts network is pivotal to the network of small businesses across the country which indirectly thrive from growing arts activity." These days fame and a decent contribution to the GNP make the arts worthwhile, funding is well spent.

However the release also cites "a recent research report by the Bureau of Statistics and the Australia Council (showing) a very high level of public support for the arts and government funding of the arts. The Council will be sending this report to all the political parties and their campaign managers so they are better informed about the real views of the Australian community towards the arts." Of course, these kinds of statistical data are not new, and the argument of public support has been touted often enough before. So too is investment in scientific research and improved education lauded as having enormous long term benefits for the financial well-being of the nation, but it hasn't meant that successive governments of either persuasion have made serious commitment to that investment. There's still something in the Australian psyche that flinches at doing too much about education, the arts and research despite all the evidence of what these can do for small nations. I've just been to Denmark, which with a population of 5 million people has a profound belief in the benefits of education, the arts and research, and has a prodigious output to show for it, and an acceptance of the arts as integral to the life of the nation.

The Australia Council press release concludes: "Dr Seares says the ads reinforced the Council's recent decision for the need to take on a major national arts awareness campaign." Australians favour the arts and government spending on them, now we need to tell them and, especially politicians, that this is the case and that they'd better not forget it. In the meantime, we've heard often enough the debate about whether or not sport is political, well it now appears that the arts have become indelibly political in Australia in the narrowest sense, as electoral barter, and it's sad to reflect on the unfolding narrative of recent years that made it so.

KG

Contents

4 - 11 The MAP Report

RealTime presents detailed coverage of Melbourne's first MAP dance and symposium event including responses to new works from The Australian Ballet, Dance Works, Company in Space and Dancehouse

12 - 14 More dance

Sarah Miller on dance issues and new work in Perth; Tasdance work with Murphy, Obarzanek, Koltai; Chunky Moves' *Fleshmeet* in Sydney; Dance Compass in Melbourne; *Which Way's Up?* in Brisbane

15 - 16 Writing

Dean Kiley maps out hypertext genres; plus writesites

16 Culture

Doppio Teatro's *On Contested Ground*; The Reconciliation Forum in Melbourne

17 - 28 OnScreen

Adrian Martin on Abel Ferrara rarities now on video; Adrian Miles places Chris Marker; narration in new documentaries by Gillian Leahy and Belinda Mason; Adelaide Short Film Festival; reviews of *Mousetrap*, *<stuff-art>*, *British Bulldogs*, *Tissue Culture*, *No Wave*; Anna Dzenis on the international Cinesonic conference; Sue Best in Telediction looks at lady lawyers; Cinesonic greets *Armageddon*; reviews of *Welcome to Woop Woop*, *Buffalo 66*, and Rolf de Heer's *Dance Me to My Song*

29 - 37 Performance

Barbara Karpinski and Heidrun Löhr meet Lydia Lunch; Aleks Sierz on kidnapping as performance London; Ollie Black of Port Youth interviewed about an Indigenous performance initiative; *It's Queer Up North* forum report; Glenda Adams—novelist as playwright; Caitlin Newton-Broad on the Open Week phenomenon; Backbone Youth Arts, Brisbane; Vitalstatistix' *My Vicious Angel*; Stopera/CIA's *Threepenny Opera*; Salamanca's *Reality Check*

37 - 40 Visual arts

Jacqueline Millner on the return of Minimalism; Linda Wallace on Chinese artists in the Biennale of Sydney; *Ecologies of Time & Space* at Hobart's Plimsoll Gallery; *Procrustean Bed* at Adelaide's EAF; Robert MacPherson at Perth's John Curtin Gallery

40 - 43 Music

Gretchen Miller celebrates Mauricio Kagel with the Seymour Group; Robert Davidson on Elision's *Strange Customs* in Brisbane; Harriet Cunningham on the Topology-Coruscations state of origin match; David Hyde attends the net.radio conference in Berlin; Robert Lloyd reviews Bang On A Can's CD of Brian Eno's *Music for Airports*; Vikki Riley's CD reviews ponder the fate of Riot Grrls

43 Sport

In *RealTime* 28

Festivals:

our writers report from Melbourne and Brisbane

Performance:

Bruce Keller on Australian-Vietnamese theatre; Michael Kantor's Caucasian Chalk Circle; Josephine Wilson's Theatre of Desire, The Kosky-Bell *Lear*; Head to Head Physical Theatre Conference

Dance:

Sophie Hansen on the significance of London's The Place

Arts politics:

Ed Scheer on Performance Studies (held over from this edition)

Writing:

Kirsten Krauth at The Young Australian Writers' Festival in Newcastle

International:

Keith Gallasch reports from Denmark

Visual arts:

Margaret Moore at ARX (Singapore), Jacqueline Millner at the Biennale of Sydney

Music:

Amanda Stewart's I/T, Machine for Making Sense's *Dissect the Body*

OnScreen:

Darren Toft's *Memory Trade*; dLux media arts *future screen*; Rebecca Coyle's *Sound Scores*; Brisbane's multimedia festival MAAP; *New Narratives contain.her* from Anna Sabiel and collaborators

RealTime OnLine

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

Online Articles:

John Potts

Vicki Englund

Clare Marshall

Cultural collisions: recent music theatre in London

Steep learning: self-financing young Brisbane filmmakers

The memory room: *Personal Effects*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art

Maryanne Lynch

Clare Marshall

Uncertain ground: the *Black Humour* film program

Deceptive surfaces: *Strange Days*, Fourth Guinness

Contemporary Art Project

RealTime at



A RealTime feature report on the MAP dance season and symposium in Melbourne

Talking dance, in the context of doing it, appears to be seriously on the increase across Australia. Sydney's The Performance Space will present its second *antistatic* in 1999 (curated by Rosalind Crisp, Sue-ellen Kohler and Zane Trow), PICA (Perth Institute of Contemporary Art) will present its bi-annual *Dancers are Space-eaters* in the same year, and in Brisbane the *Body of Work* dance conference was held recently. In Melbourne the demise of *Greenmill* left a gap which was quickly filled by MAP.

RealTime became part of MAP (Movement and Performance), a new dance event in Melbourne featuring a season of dance works and a 2 day symposium at the Malthouse. In this edition (which first appeared online in August), a team of RealTime editors and writers (Zsuzsanna Soboslay, Philipa Rothfield, Suzanne Spunner, Eleanor Brickhill, Katrina Philips Rank, Elizabeth Drake, Simon Ellis, Virginia Baxter, Keith Gallasch and MAP symposium co-curator Erin Brannigan) respond to the dance works and symposium themes and debate they experienced at MAP.

MAP dance season

A QUESTION OF VISIONS

Mixed Metaphor Week One, Dancehouse: *Heliograph*, Sarah Neville, sound Matthew Thomas, light Nick Mollison, image Nick Gaffney, text Becky Jenkin; *Blindness*, concept and design James Welch, movement Gretel Taylor, co-dancers Renee Whitehouse, Telford Scully; *St Sebastian*, director Tony Yap, music arrangements Jennifer Thomas, performers Lynne Santos, Ben Rogan, Adam Forbes, Dean Linguey, Monica Tesselaar, Pauline Webb; *Quartet*, Jennifer Thomas, Jasmine Aly, Siona McLoughnane, Mark Gandrabur; *Kitesend*, Lou Duckett, Kate Sulan, Hanna Hoyne; Dancehouse, North Carlton, June 25 - 28

Do bodily suffering and the etching of emotion and identity go hand-in-hand? Is the quandary of living, breathing (and hence performing) concomitant with agony? Classically speaking, an agon is a trial or contest between humans and the gods. What humans are we? And, in performance, whose gods are being served?

1. Saints: Tony Yap, *St Sebastian*

St Sebastian lies bound downstage in a white square. Four mourners (are they?) approach through a curtain of incense, in distilled expressions of hope and/or despair. The piece is a kind of apotheosis of Tony Yap's work: the best crafted, the most unified of his visions, with (thank god) the almost trademark suffering taken off the female body (or male body in a skirt) at last. I smell Renato Cuocolo and IRAA here, as I have in all of Tony's work: the slow group walk, the contained, strained emotion, the sense of a cruel enormity. But, as with much of Renato's work, I wonder what we are being called into, the purpose of the event beyond the actors' portrayals of suffering.

St Sebastian's references are Mishima and the Holocaust via Gorecki. Yet what's Mishima to

him, or he to Mishima, that he should weep for him? The escalating voice reading from Mishima's *Confessions of a Mask* is a give-away: a steady crescendo from whisper to bellow that leaves little sense in the words. There is a titter in the audience—a response, I think, of laughing at the artifice. Says my companion, tellingly, "Why do they have to make it sound like Orson Welles?"

Whose suffering is it, and rendered to what end? I do not feel for, with or about the



Angela Pötsch in *Temporal*

Graham Farr

performances onstage. Watching becomes voyeurism, perhaps less so here than in Yap's earlier works because of the sweeping immediacy forced on us by the inherently internalising power of the tear-jerker second movement of Gorecki's Symphony No. 3. But, as Mishima himself warns, the "intoxication" found in the "conjunction" of spiritual impulse and music can be "sinister", and the sado-masochism (not to mention homo-eroticism) of this source is, it seems to me, quite dangerously at odds with Gorecki's dedication to the Gestapo-incarcerated 18-year old (Yap unthinkingly writes "await(ing) her punishment"!). One has to be careful with one's sources. Mixed metaphors indeed.

2. Sinners: James Welch, Gretel Taylor, *Blindness*

Blindness seems to me a work of good intentions, tackling a situation of hidden domestic violence. Its source is the "installation" (really a simple exhibition) of photographs of shuttered windows by James Welch. Structurally, this piece suffers from an unvaried rhythm, each channel-

switched episode of equal length, dulling the dance's emotional potential. This feels like student work, albeit with chilling moments, not prodding far enough in movement or concept into the violence and complicit silence it seeks to expose and in some ways understand. Like a newspaper report, it fails to make one recognise one's own violence in order to help change the givens in the world.

3. *Weldschmerz*: Sarah Neville, *Heliograph*

Applause for *Heliograph* was loudest for the highly accomplished visuals and sound track. The dance—an amorphous body in a torrent of urban environments—moves to one rhythm whatever the source, the face is placid throughout. We may be amoeba, but we are also human: to dance one and not the other denies evolution of substance and

nerves, with its relentless calling, yelling and falling. I saw the piece only on video document (at the artist's request after I had been called away), where the camera's more intimate frame helpfully rendered both intimacy and distance.

2. Tributes: Angie Potsch, *Temporal*

Reading Thomas Rimer's account of working with Grotowski, about creating work from personal myths. Grotowski is punishing on Rimer when he keeps trying to be huge and meaningful, Rimer noting the way others slowly built long pieces from the smallest of honesties. Potsch's piece seems to me to have such beginnings: glass, candlelight, the music of glass drawn round the perimeter of a water bowl. The body dancing here sometimes visible only as a fracture. Moving memory(ies). This is a piece which takes time with

ideas, and it could be argued that even free-floating molecules have consciousness and will, which the best Butoh work (which this tries to emulate) understands.

4. Tigers: Lou Duckett, Kate Sulan, Hanna Hoyne, *Kitesend*

Miss seeing you. See missing you...The kites flown in *Kitesend* are the people themselves, the holders of the strings, a motley trio each lining different clouds. One is ruggedly nuggetty, one a controlled hysteric, the other an Issey Miyake mistake completely covered in an avalanche of paper folds. Her own eyes papered invisible, she waves from atop her plinth to the others who do not see. The gesture is poignant and powerful in its minimalism. She slowly concertinas to the floor, supine to the others' erect continuous. An audience member gently pats her in her isolation. The moment is incredibly moving.

Zsuzsanna Soboslay

its qualities—simple elements built into a whole via an exquisite sense of rhythm. The only unfortunate segment is the "hair dance" (like the proverbial "hair acting") where a private moment—perhaps of grief or loss—is veiled and kept introspected beneath all that lusciousness for too long.

3. Traces: Margaret Trail, *Hi, it's me*

Hello, who's speaking? the voice, vocaliser, or cyborg? Trail's tripartite *Hi it's me* progressively disappears the body, using strands of speech like rope, dissecting speaker from spoken and reknitting the weave. Part One is a jibbering of paranoid and more liberal selves, enacted as a dialogue between her real time, embodied voice (as Trail alternately sprawls, lounges and wriggles in a chair with an almost-endearing self-consciousness) and several taped versions. We next view her, "live with headphones", seated at a mixing desk. She listens to her own recordings, wiggles her toes, occasionally calls out edits to a phantom producer, like Plato calling out for more light. The third part is a sound-and-light sequence in a darkened room: the edited tape and glimmers of colour like ribbons of remembered substance of the body(ies) which once spoke or telephoned. Are "bodies" ever more than this? I like this last piece, finding it very fine; the first two segments for me a little trying in real time.

TESTS OF THE TIME

Mixed Metaphor Week Two, Dancehouse, North Carlton, July 2 - 5

1. Tolerance: Christos Linou, *FIDDLE-DE-DIE/safety and uncertainty*

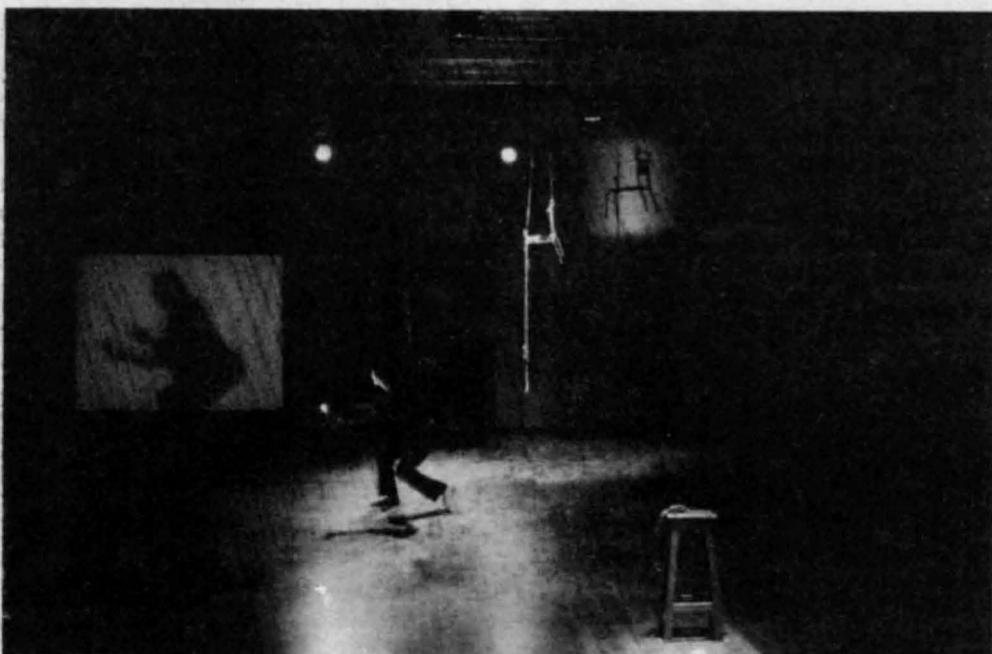
He enters, descending a ladder, (literally) loses his marbles, walks backwards in, a towards that is also away, his shadow looming as he walks, enlarging, taking over. Later, he talks to it: a man in sheep's mask, coercing his own shadow. Video shows legs running, stomping in corners of white floorless rooms. Voices invade, aspirations fail. This is a painfully fractured self who can barely tolerate himself, whose own ladder, his place of beginning, falls on top of him. Linou has devised a performance "dealing with drug addiction and AIDS", the first of which is apparent, of the latter I'm not so sure.

At first, I am bothered by the angular restriction in Linou's upper torso, though conjecture it may be appropriate to the portrayal. It is an empathetic piece on fractured self-obsession, that nonetheless might be trying of

4. Pellucid testings: Philipa Rothfield, *Logic*, with Elizabeth Keen and Jenny Dick

Philipa Rothfield's *Logic* tests an intellectual proposition but does so in a way that engages the physical space. The body itself undergoes computations, negations, patternings; a parallel between a body thinking and a mind teasing out its own processes. The proposition of recited text and formulae projected on overheads, the body moving in a distinct yet parallel (con)sequence, sets the stage for the final "body solo" where the formulae, suggestions and patterns are allowed to follow their own logics, double, invert and redouble in a kind of gestural mathematics that is nourishing on many parallel planes and very finely honed. This is a thought-full and feeling-full piece

• continued next page



Christos Linou in *Fiddle-de-die*

Janet Williams

• from previous page

with a gentle, sinewy strength that lingers long.

Logic makes no attempt to render the relationship of performing to seeing as $a = b$ in a literal sense. The "equation", if you like, is a matching of equal complexities, equal respect, between mind and body, audience and performers, maintaining their distinct qualities (speaker, writer, dancer, see-er). The performance, framed deliciously in a spare rectangular frame of light with projection screen behind, allows both space and fullness of response. Meaning comes through the way one takes a breath—before one equates an association.

These dances are tests of the time, struggling with the threats of ideas, emotions and disappearances, questioning what is human, looking to what survives.

Zsuzsanna Soboslay

designer Hugh Colman and lighting designer Rachel Burke, Natalie Weir in *Dark Lullaby* investigated the potential of a surreal and vaguely ominous environment. In this Caligarian world comprising two massive structures, an industrial fan-like apparatus and a bookshelf, a mysterious drama of sorts was played out. Although the plot was elliptical, one could not fail to notice Weir's use of familiar archetypes: Hero, Seductress, Villain and Virgin danced by Geon van der Wyst, Nicole Rhodes, Robert Curran and Lisa Bolte respectively. The simplicity and clean lines of the design suggested a black and white frame of reference that sustained the valid use of such archetypes. Throughout, collaborative vitality was evident in the close association of choreographic and design ideas, producing a sophisticated work that ought to be included in the Australian Ballet's repertoire.

Adrian Burnett's *Intersect* had happier results. With percussionist and Australian Ballet dancer, Roland Cox, a collaboration was established that afforded Burnett a good deal of creative freedom. Unpretentious and completely engaging, this work experimented with and responded to a variety of percussion instruments and rhythmic scores. Burnett's work is most successful when he moves away from traditional ballet moves—which he does most of the time in this piece. His reversal of gender roles in the duet form is an example of his eagerness to go beyond tradition, crossing into contemporary and club dance genres. He seems to be at home in this context and more likely to be at his innovative best when exploring dance through 'alternative' perspectives.

Not every venture in *Collaborations* paid off, but with more new blood, ideas and less emphasis on elaborate stage production this event could become, with the Australian Ballet's commitment, an exciting annual one.

Katrina Phillips Rank

MYSTERY POINTS

Dance Creation 98, hosted by the Australian Institute of Classical Dance, National Theatre, St Kilda, July 10 - 11

The concept of judging new dance works created specifically for a choreographic competition would appear to go against the dance community's best efforts to value process over product, and its well-founded scepticism at assessing quality. And yet on July 10 and 11 at the National Theatre in St Kilda, the Australian Institute of Classical Dance (AICD) presented such an event in the second biennial *Dance Creation* choreographic awards. This year's event fell under the umbrella of MAP, Melbourne's eclectic response to the demise of *Greenmill*, and both the AICD and MAP must be congratulated for taking another step towards bridging the often tedious cleft that exists between classical and contemporary dance organisations.

As is any reasonably significant junior sporting event, nervous excitement permeated the air, mixed with healthy doses of cliché concerning the value of participation in such competitions. Much



Paulina Quinteros' *Fie*, Dance Creation 98 Roy Varley

of the text in the program alluded to the importance of developing choreographers by giving them an opportunity to present their work. For Rosetta Cook, the winner of *Dance Creation 96*'s Robert Helpmann Award, winning is not paramount, whereas having a work seen is. Personally, I am not convinced that having work seen is nearly enough to help choreographers develop a thorough understanding of the subtleties and nuances of dance-making. At most, it's a start. Without setting up some form of dialogue concerning the works (particularly between judges and competitors), the event becomes a void in which a would-be choreographer presents a collection of movements only to learn whether the work is a winner or not.

There were 20 works entered in *Dance Creation 98*, 12 less than in 1996 which might immediately suggest that the lure of prize money alone is not enough to entice emerging and established choreographers to create work specifically for a competition. Disappointingly, the 1998 Edouard Borovansky Award for student choreographers was cancelled and the handful of student works were judged as part of the non-professional Peggy Van Praagh award.

Watching the works themselves, I gained immense pleasure from seeing so many dancers moving in such extraordinarily diverse creations—from the stripped back formalism of Francis D'Ath's *Praw* to the romantic theatricality of Tanja Liedtke's *Thru Time*. Sadly though, in this most human of forms, the majority of works ignored the subtle intricacies, quirks and gestures

• continued page 6



Vicki Attard and David McAllister, *El Tango* in *Collaborations*

Jeff Busby

CRITICAL COMBINATIONS

Collaborations, The Australian Ballet: *Dark Lullaby*, choreographer Natalie Weir, design Hugh Colman, lighting Rachel Burke, dancers Geon van der Wyst, Nicole Rhodes, Robert Curran, Lisa Bolte; *El Tango*, choreographer Stephen Baynes, composer Astor Piazzolla, designer Michael Pearce, lighting Rachel Burke, dancers Vicki Attard, David McAllister; *Intersect*, choreographer Adrian Burnett, composers Matt Rodd, Roland Cox, Andrew Jones, percussionist Roland Cox, dancers Matthew Trent, Daryl Brandwood, Joshua Consandine, Benazir Hussain, Rachel Rawlins, Felicia Palanca, designer Richard Jeziorny, lighting Rachel Burke; *Slipstream*, choreographer Bernadette Walong, composer Brett Mitchell, designer Judy Watson, costumes Jacques Tchong, lighting Pascal Baxter, dancers Gabrielle Davidson, Lynette Wills, Paula Baird, Lucinda Dunn, Christopher Lam, Gaetano Del Monaco, Alex Wagner; C.U.B. Malthouse, Melbourne, July 1 - 4

Away from the pressure of subscription season tyranny, the Australian Ballet presented *Collaborations*, a program of new Australian choreographic works. Under this title 4 experienced choreographers teamed up with designers, musicians and composers to create the "new ideas, new blood, new music and new creativity" that Ross Stretton proudly proclaims as part of his unique vision for the company's future. Collaboration by definition is the working together of various individuals to realise or sustain a shared vision. This is notoriously difficult to do, involving far more than effective communication and a desire to work with another artist.

Working in conjunction with set and costume

Shorter though no less striking was Stephen Baynes' *El Tango*, a light-hearted duet to the seductive tones of the tango. Astor Piazzolla's treatment of this musical form elicited from Baynes' comic nuances in timing and composition and was danced by Vicki Attard and David McAllister. The choice of these two dancers was insightful. Their ability to identify the cliché in both musical and choreographic scores and to then emphasise this with a look, a pause or sinewy stretch showed the importance of a dancer's interpretation. This may not have been a radical piece, but I suspect it was liberating for Baynes to present a study in a subscription-free context without having to create a masterpiece. The subtle wit of *El Tango* is evidence that this venture paid off.

Despite the Australian Ballet providing fabulous technical, administrative and artistic support for those with their necks on the blocks, there was no one work that stood out in terms of audacity. Two works initially displayed this potential. Bernadette Walong's *Slipstream* unfortunately fell short with too many undeveloped ideas and an over-enthusiastic lighting design. As lights flashed and drew focus with increasing persistence, we waited in vain for concepts to develop—the sounds of stones on corrugated iron, cocoons suspended mid-air, a tractor tyre tutu lined with fur skins and three women draped in metres of clear, thin sheets of plastic. *Slipstream* alluded to meaning without providing the necessary developmental links needed for the interpretation of symbols. It was as if we had been invited to a sacred space where life flourished but, like the story of the Japanese Santa Claus nailed to a cross, signs seem to have become confused in the cultural shift. The three women in plastic became rubbish floating downstream and the rubber tyre remained ridiculous.

Towards a New Theatre

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RealTime at

• from page 5



of human movement. Also, the choreography tended to lack any discernible editing. Perhaps this problem was exacerbated by the AICD's time regulations which, ironically, restricted the range of works and made most of them far too drawn out. Martha Graham ("Every dance is too long") must surely have been turning in her grave over the course of the two evenings.

The most bizarre and disturbing aspect of *Dance Creation 98* was the simplistic judging mechanism. Judges gave each dance a mark out of 10 without being required to adhere to standardised assessment criteria to do with form, content, innovation or design. On the first night, this led to a great deal of uncertainty as to why some dances were rewarded places in the finals whilst others were not.

I do not doubt that the AICD had the development of dance in mind when organising *Dance Creation 98*, but I'm not so sure that this particular model of choreographic development gives value for money. In this event, perhaps only the two winning choreographers will benefit from the competition and that as a consequence of receiving some fiscal support. For the others, simply placing a work in a competitive environment does not necessarily constitute development. In future, it may be worthwhile to consider how each choreographer might be provided with feedback that will in itself inform their choreographic process and develop their creative abilities. There is nothing more disheartening to any dancer or choreographer to create without feedback. It is a void bereft of the potential for anything other than self-doubt,

According to Gestalt psychology, every perception always involves a figure and a background. At any moment, a perceptual foreground may be in focus whilst its background isn't, and vice versa. We, as perceivers, actively focus upon the objects of our experience. In order to do so, inevitably, other objects fall out of focus. One of the famed examples of Gestalt psychology is a drawing of a shape—looked at in one way that shape is a cube; observed in another way, it becomes a square with lines emanating from its corners. The three pieces of Dance Works' 98 season variously evoked Gestalt's perceptual divide, here a split between the *abstract* and the *real*.

The first piece, *Waiting* (choreographer Sandra Parker), progressed from the real to an increasingly abstract terrain. Perhaps inspired by the snippet from *Romeo and Juliet* quoted in the program notes, *Waiting* opened with lots of getting up and down, posing, pausing and stillness spilling into motion. At first, I wondered at the meaning of all this. Then it struck me—the unforgiving temporality of yearning, waiting ("...so tedious is this day/As is the night before some festival/To an impatient child that hath new robes/And may not wear them...").

Rather than evoke a recognisable lexicon of emotion (not to forget Umberto Eco's claim that "I love you" is so trite a statement that it is now emptied of all meaning), Parker chose to illuminate her theme in much more abstract terms. Having acknowledged the plane of representation as non-literal, I found the kinetic landscape of *Waiting* became increasingly surreal. This peaked for me where one dancer occupied the middle of a rather Gothic looking scene—a dark red, barely lit, former church with a tilting floor—while three others moved

it did seem that a certain unity was forming, partly achieved by an interaction between the dancers who, increasingly, constituted a kinetic and spatial intertwining. I also think it was an effect of having experienced this piece over time. Like those 3D computer graphics, letting go of a narrow focus allows other elements to come into play. What might initially be perceived as pure heterogeneity is able to become something else. Is that what harmony is, a set of differences perceived as a whole?

After *Waiting* and *Live Opera Situation*, I found the very grounded nature of Sue Healey's *Stung* difficult to take in. I was stuck in the abstract register of the first two pieces, whereas this one required a somewhat different appreciation. Not everyone seems to have shared my difficulties. Some who didn't like the first two pieces found *Stung* a welcome relief. They laughed at its humour and earthy subject matter. Darrin Verhagen's music also cited familiar rhythms and recognisable allusions.

A work about the life and times of the bee, *Stung* also touched on bee sociality. Although the work was not simply direct representation of bee-hood, its strongest moments for me were in its most literal references—to the swarm, and to bees crawling over honeycomb. Some of the movements had a sensual delight about them, the best being a bee solo of wiggled hips and curled arms. Spatial coverage and speed were used more consistently in this piece than the others, suggesting elements of design within Healey's choreographic vision.

I am quite struck by the divide which seems to have applied to the appreciation of these three pieces. It seems that the perception of the first two works required something quite distinct from what was required of the third. The variety of views here, in conjunction with the heterogeneity of values manifest in the MAP Symposium, just goes to show the inadequacy of the response "it was/was not good" (a banality I myself have been using for years). When we judge a work, we speak not only about the object of our judgement, but about the subject who judges.

Philipa Rothfield

DANCERS BEHAVING COMPLEXLY

DW98, Dance Works, Wesleyan Hall, Albert Park, July 15 - July 26

It's time again for pause at Dance Works, DW98 being their last season at the Wesleyan Hall, Albert Park, a space which has been integral to a number of the company's works. For me, it's reminiscent of an earlier Dance Works closing season, 1987's *Last Legs at the Y*, then under the directorship of Nannette Hassall, with so many of those dancers having been the teachers and choreographers for members of this current company. So (it seems from my sporadic vantage) this program marks not only another change of venue, but yet another generation of dancers and choreographers. And it seems appropriate too that the season features prominently in the MAP program which is itself a new-generation *Greenmill*. So what are they up to now?

Sandra Parker, the current artistic director of Dance Works, has created the first piece in a triple bill, *Waiting*. She sets the scene with a program note, a quote from *Romeo and Juliet* which describes that condition of intolerable impatience, the infinitely prolonged expectation before a promise is fulfilled. We see 5 dancers in the hall, the oddly angled walls and vaulted ceilings, the decorous light. These women are sparsely placed, reclining, but not settled, leaning in torpor; they shift weight and place with small, almost purposeless gestures—vacant, somniferous, distanced too, as if by a glitch in time, or a video freeze-frame function. The actions never quite stop, but also seem never to run properly to speed. Forward-stop-forward, stop, back for a moment, fast forward, pause—as if the audience might be moved to think the obsessive thoughts of these women who wait, over and over.

Another scene comes to mind—a speedy solo, under a low ceiling far to the side of the main floor. It's as if we happen to glance through a high window, and catch sight of this dancer, waiting under a railway lamp to meet a train. Matched with another simultaneous, almost languid unison trio, there's that same stop-start, fast-slow, forward-back juxtaposition.

But *Waiting* struck me also with its clean and immaculately rehearsed quality, with its strong rhythm and line which never faltered, despite the fraught theme. And it was this, along with the delicate lines of vaulted ceiling, pillars, and shadowed corners, which rendered the piece more pleasantly harmonious in the end, than something disturbing or passionate.

Shelley Lasica's *Live Opera Situation*, on the other hand, created its own dissonance, a kind of weird but subtle gawkiness of action and relationship in a piece which, because of that, moved with wit and comic understatement. A general feature of Lasica's work is that it's hard to know whether her movement quality is deliberate or not, but whatever it is, the 4 dancers managed to recreate it in a sort of benign but fiddly orchestration of starts and stops, overextended joints and slack muscle tone, which was really a relief after the generic beauteousness one is more likely to encounter in dance.

Lasica has used an operatic conceit as the starting point for *Live Opera Situation*, examining the behaviour of a quartet of characters, their spatial, physical, emotional, and musical relationships being revealed in this work more as purposeless posturing as they act out the emotional and relational dynamics, if not the actual moves, of the conventional operatic ones. It is also strongly reminiscent of the dynamics of *Melrose Place*.

The movement is often behavioural, jerky, stop-start, idiosyncratic, lacking in much adhesive unison, although there is a lot of stylish, layering of beige costume fabric. The curiously unfinished feel of each of the character's sequences sets up a kind of awkward, unrehearsed, 'conversational' quality in their relationships. They come together in duets, separate, cluster in cameos, and bounce off each other unpredictably. But these relationships are the central feature of the work, providing the humour and the interest. The music too, from composer Franc Tétaz, provides another unifying aspect, a sense of time passing, as if a clock is slowly striking for this particular soap opera.

Coming out of left field was Sue Healey's *Stung*, with the dancers in Adrienne Chisholm's purple bee costumes, including little hats with feelers on the sides, suspiciously suggestive of WWI aeroplane pilots' helmets, and little wings etcetera. With the dancers doing a lot of bee-like buzzing and humming and quivering and vibrating and so forth, with their bodies and limbs, especially their elbows, its seriously-silly quality gave it a sort of grand hilarity.

The design of the space was fantastic: Eferpi Soropos' hexagonal spots, honeycomb-shaped beams on the floor and walls, as well as a number of long stemmed red flowers, weighted at the bottom, which could be moved around or stand in variously shaped clumps, and fall down when required.

Inspired by the children's "Billy Bee Song", the program also notes Sue Healey's interest in the complex social behaviour of bees and other animals, including their territorial desires. And whether this is a serious investigation or an excuse for some light relief doesn't seem to matter much, because while its choreographic complexity belies any suggestion of naivety, *Stung*'s imaginative inventiveness and capacity for wilful child-like pleasure is of a sort that's hard to find any more.

Eleanor Brickhill

WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

DW98, Dance Works, forum, Wesleyan Hall, Albert Park, July 24

The three short works in DW98 —*Waiting*, *Live Opera Situation* and *Stung*—involved three different choreographers and three different composers. Works by two of these composers were played two weeks before, as part of *somewhere nowhere*, an evening of sonic experimentation, at the gallery space at 200 Gertrude Street.

At *somewhere nowhere* I arrive late and am preoccupied with the number of chairs, 40 for an audience of 200. A space provided. A space where the audience is the event. A gallery space filled to overflowing, four speakers, one in each corner surrounding the audience who sit or stand in the centre. The chairs are in 2 or 3 rows. You can lean against the wall. I speak to strangers. I find them interesting.

We are invited into a space somewhere between our own living room and a public

• continued next page



Carlee Mellow, Rachel Roberts, Joanna Lloyd (hidden), Belinda Cooper, *Live Opera Situation*, DW98 Jeff Busby

uncertainty and, inevitably, apathy.

For the record, the Peggy Van Praagh Award (\$5,000) for non-professional choreographers was won by Yumi Sollier for *Sensing the Undercurrent*, a coherent if overly-long work filled with suitably raw subterranean imagery, and marked with surprising displays of virtuosity. The Robert Helpmann Award (\$10,000) for professional choreographers was won by 1996's Van Praagh winner, Paulina Quinteros, for *Fie*—compelling evidence of Quinteros' ease in creating rich and complex movement phrases, and then immersing them simply into a tight thematic structure.

Simon Ellis

BETWEEN PERCEPTUAL FIELDS

DW98, Dance Works: *Waiting*, choreographer Sandra Parker, composer Lawrence Harvey, costumes Adrienne Chisholm, dancers Belinda Cooper, Joanna Lloyd, Carlee Mellow, Rachel Roberts, Sally Smith; *Live Opera Situation*, choreographer Shelley Lasica, composer Franc Tétaz, costume coordinator Shelley Lasica, dancers Belinda Cooper, Joanna Lloyd, Carlee Mellow and Rachel Roberts; *Stung*, choreographer Sue Healey, composer Darrin Verhagen, costumes Adrienne Chisholm, dancers Belinda Cooper, Joanna Lloyd, Carlee Mellow, Rachel Roberts, Sally Smith; Wesleyan Hall, Albert Park, July 15 - July 26

underneath a stone window lit in silhouette, and a fourth pensively roamed an antechamber. At that point, my perception flipped and the space became a mind, populated by columns and bodies, the connections between dancers, neural synapses. It is not clear to me whether the 5 dancers were one entity, facets of the one entity or more than one being. Nor, ultimately, do I know what happened. What interested me about the piece was the way in which my perception shifted gears away from the real, and further and further into an imaginary landscape.

Live Opera Situation choreographed by Shelley Lasica followed suit in its allegiance to the abstract. The motivating premise of the piece was articulated pretty clearly in the program notes: this is a work exploring the ways in which 4 "voices" work together and separately, as in operatic forms. The juxtaposition of choreographic difference was asserted throughout the piece, emphasised by costuming, music and a surprising array of gestures. Although much of the movement had the mark of Lasica's distinctive corporeality, the dancers were given very divergent tasks. Various fronts were assumed, sometimes implying interaction, sometimes not.

If there was harmony to be found between the 4 elements (dancers) it was not represented by repetition or similarities of movement. Any sense of harmony or coherence had to be built upon difference rather than erasing it. Over time,

• from previous page

space, between our own living room and a dance club. This ambiguous middle ground. The crossover from popular culture into acoustic art. Pop music sensibility in an art music context. An impure art. Two of the works do not involve a performer. We are there in their place. We talk, our voices mingling audibly with the voice(s) in the speakers. Later on I listen to the same works on CD in my studio.

The LP record can be seen as an archive, accompanied by extraneous noises which we have trained ourselves to ignore. In the work of Darrin Verhagen these artefacts (as he calls them) have been separated from the music recording and given musical focus. Artefacts, glitches, crackles, little clicks and pops, hiss, scratches, distortion, overloads, these have been used as musical content. In the work *3ppp* there is a long delicate section made up almost entirely of clicks and pops. In another section distort is at assault levels.

From one event to another there is a displacement.

In DW98, the composers Franc Tétaz and Darrin Verhagen, whose works we heard at 200 Gertrude Street, have composed music for the dance works by Shelley Lasica and Sue Healey. Here the space produced by the (absent) performer is occupied by the dancers and the audience is seated in a block or clump in heavily raked seating. The music is played through speakers high in the church roof. It charts the space for us, causing us to move into the height and the width of this large hall.

The dancers are on the floor. I feel too high looking down on them. This feels like an unintended dislocation. A rift, a separation. I expect the dancers to become airborne. To swing in the space with the music. To cross over into the trajectory of the music. To play in the air. The dancers focus towards our block. I wish they would leave by another door, look somewhere else. We are in a clump. They have the whole floor, the whole space, all the other walls, and yet they turn towards us.

In the program notes for Lasica's *Live Opera Situation* we are told that there is an unheard (of) opera, *The Haunted Manor* by Stanislaw Moniuszko, which has informed the choreography. It is interesting that there is no reference to this opera in the music composition, given that such quotation would be well within the genre of computer processed music. Instead a series of small fragments have been recorded on different instruments, a piano, a Fender Rhodes electric piano and various percussion instruments, and processed electronically. The dancers have not rehearsed to this music. They maintain their rhythm and tempos from the rhythm and tempos of the opera. There is no attempt to mirror this musical information in the composition. We see movements that seem unaccounted for. We become curious. We puzzle over these inconsistencies. "There is a sense of worlds colliding. The different elements do not always sit comfortably together. It is necessary that a slender thread of light search out not other symbols, but the very fissure of the symbolic." (Barthes) A fissure, a narrow opening. At these moments something within me is activated. I feel a shift of perception. I feel there is an exchange. No longer a showing but an exchange.

I write this as a process of memory, surprised by what I remember. Like an involuntary memory I have returned to these events uninvited, to invoke a voluntary memory from which to begin. Memory issues strict instructions. To be true to the memory, to the recollection, less so to the actual event. It is to the memory that we pay our respects. To our own desire to see ourselves, our desire for the impossible.

Elizabeth Drake

CURIOUS INTERSTICES

Dance Works, DW98 forum, July 24, Wesleyan Hall, Albert Park, July 15 - July 26

Waiting: empathetic evolution

Choreographer Sandra Parker tells us she has a bank of movement phrases, fragments, unformed images that she brings to the creative process. Composer Lawrence Harvey too, she says, brought different sounds to the studio; "the sound grew as the dance grew, a lovely experience, movement and sound filling the space at the same time." Harvey notes that in this cumulative process he would find what

direction the dance was going, "geometrically, not just gesturally."

Someone asked how *Waiting* came about—from the quotation for *Romeo and Juliet*? "No", answers Parker, "that came later. I was experimenting with how still you can be for how long." Someone else asks, "How do you convert motion into stillness? Music always sounds like movement." A dancer responds, "When waiting you create a diversion, you're never quite still, and Lawrence picked up on that."

Stung: trust

Darrin Verhagen tells us that Sue Healey was in Russia when the work finally came together in Melbourne, that she knows that he knows what she likes, "pops, scratches, tiny sounds", and that he didn't know the work would be humorous, it was not discussed, not that it mattered.

Live Opera Situation: languages

For Shelley Lasica "music is like a parallel text", in this case several parallel texts—an obscure Polish opera and Indian music that the dancers listened and rehearsed to (but not heard in performance by the audience, but maybe 'heard' by the dancers) and then the composer's offering added last. A dancer declares, "It was difficult, we had these other rhythms and then we had to match them with Franc Tétaz's." Another dancer says, "We establish our own rhythm, our own score, add another and have two sets of rhythms." Franc Tétaz adds, "I was doing something very similar to you, though we speak very different languages." Lawrence Harvey says that he "strives towards a common language through watching, through talking with dancers."

Franc says he likes "to create an environment to invite the audience into Shelley's work." Something in Lasica's body language suggests, "No, that's not it." Lasica says, "It's a matter of how music and dance intersect," that she "creates a gap between movement and music."

Dancers and music

The dancers say, "We always draw on the energy of the music, but sometimes it's better to be grounded, to not go with the rise of the music, not get whipped up by it, just pick up on the cues, resist the music. Though with Darrin's music we could get into it...but with Franc's we had landmarks." Tétaz muses, "I composed as if I was writing for scenes."

Harvey declares, "The body is already polyrhythmic, the heart beat, the breathing, the issue of psychological time."

Lasica closes, "Movement is not generated by music, but by many things, music is another layer."

Keith Gallasch

ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE

Company in Space, *touchwhere*, devised and designed by John McCormick and Hellen Sky in collaboration with sound designer/composer Garth Paine, choreographer and performer Hellen Sky in collaboration with Louise Taube; computer graphics Marshall White; performed live simultaneously and interactively between SIGGRAPH 98, Orlando, Florida, USA and MAP, Melbourne, Australia, Melbourne Town Hall portico, midnight July 20 - 24

Thirty years ago I remember staying up until the small hours of a freezing winter night to watch the first worldwide live satellite broadcast on television. The high point was watching The Beatles perform *All You Need Is Love* in a London studio. The Great Cities of the World all fed in short live segments and I recall Melbourne's featured the first tram of the day leaving the Kew depot.

Standing in Swanston Street at midnight, stamping my feet in 2 degrees of winter, watching *touchwhere* by Company in Space recalled that event in 1968. *touchwhere* was a realtime online performance by two dancers—Louise Taube in Melbourne and Hellen Sky in Orlando, Florida. They danced across the globe, "the earth beneath their feet", the same dance together but separate, mirroring and replicating each other's movements in the reflective pool of the video camera and the computer. The dance duet was projected on three large screens set into the portico of Melbourne Town Hall—two at street level, on the same level as the live, present performer and the third in the upper balcony level, the place (as a matter of symmetry) where The Beatles stood in 1962 to wave to the assembled populace of Melbourne.

The intriguing thing about *touchwhere* was the way in which it gathered and placed its audience. The performance was free of charge and available to anyone who chose or happened to be there, passing by on foot or in one of the many trams whose route takes them along Swanston Street.

So there were huddled dance-goers outside McDonalds, watching the dance from the place I was told was the intended viewing position on the other side of Swanston Street. Directly opposite us was a fortuitous audience—couples in tuxedos and ballgowns, clutching bunches of helium balloons who'd just left a ball in the Town Hall where they'd been dancing.

Many of them sat on the steps and watched mystified as a dancer in a silvery sort of space-suit made movements, tracked by a video camera. The audience was placed effectively on raked seating (the Town Hall steps) watching Louise Taube's live performance in front of a triptych comprising two wings—the video screens projecting her dancing with Hellen Sky and in the centre, in the far distance, on the other side of the street, another audience—us watching them.

From time to time our view was obscured by a passing tram whose passengers, watching out of either side windows, could see the performance and two of the three video projections as well as two differently disported and attired audiences. For the ball-goers, the whole thing was framed by a proscenium arch—the Town Hall portico.

Meanwhile, we watched almost the whole thing—the live dancer whose presence was as significant as the trams, the ballgoers and the three video screens. These various modes of spectatorship were all animated as well as the imagined other audience in Florida. The



Gideon Obarzanek's film *Wet*

Brilliant Images

resonances with De Chirico drawings of figures within architectural spaces or the image in a mirror in a Van Eyck painting were all there too.

At the end of the live performance there was another show—more like a cheerio segment or a chat show as the gang in Melbourne talked and saw themselves talking to Hellen Sky in Orlando about what it was like to be here—freezing cold, but on time tonight, and what it was like to be there—cold in the sense of lacking an audience or space of reception. And the people over there said they wished they were back here with us. The contrast between the exponential advances in technology which make an event like this possible and the smallness, ordinariness of the desires of the participants to make face to face connection was strangely moving. Cyber space is at once so vast and so domestic, so indifferent and yet so intimate.

touchwhere was more event and spectacle than performance. In the role of indented audience, you took on the part of artist advocate to explain to the confused, accidental audience filing past McDonalds who wanted to know what this was. You were also constantly drawn to the other elements constituting the event: the behaviour of the other audiences; juxtapositions—like watching dancers through tram windows; the melding of the images of the dancers responding to the virtual but actual other on the screen; the coolness of the lone, live performer who was centrally placed on the stage from any of these myriad vantage points but who was somehow not the focus of the event.

Suzanne Spinner

MAP Symposium

LET'S GET LOST

The MAP Symposium, curators Vicki Fairfax, Erin Brannigan, The Bagging Room, C.U.B. Malthouse, Melbourne, July 25 - 26

Overheard: "...independents need guidance—they're flailing about with spoken word and new media." "I thought that's what independents are supposed to do, flail about, get lost, go their own way..."

Maps come with a purpose, with exploration, measurement, verification, namings. Maps offer hope and certainty though they can be inaccurate and knowing how to read them is a whole other matter. Maps can be confining. Maps capture a moment, only a succession of maps tells a story. One map can be overlaid with another—same terrain, same time but different story. So it was at the MAP Symposium, a genteel reading of half-formed dance maps, chance meetings, misdirections, losings, fallings off of the edge of the known.

Although only an acronym (for Movement and Performance), the MAP title and aims represented a conscious choice, a suggestion of let's get everyone on the same terrain (hence the ballet presence), let's help find a way through the barely charted paths of new media and popular culture and the competing spaces for dance—the theatre, the studio, the site.

For a symposium aimed at harmonious mapping, there was no more provocative way of setting out than with guides Libby Dempster and Amanda Card. Not that anyone actually got upset and pulled out of the expedition, but we

were left bemused, pondering two maps, both of occupied territory—the imperialism of 19th century ballet and subsequently of European and American modernism over Australian dance.

Dempster's map was at first glance binary in form, but every inch of the terrain she revealed turned out to be occupied by ballet, ballet and ballet, its self-mythologising and its fundamental denial of the feminine—ballet's 'other' was pushed off the map, if it was ever on it, a lack rather than a counter-force or a substantial difference. Nowhere to go. Map? What map?

Amanda Card looked at the dance landscape and saw "not the hegemony of the classical but a society of bricolage" and took us off on a dialectical jog on which she established first that because we don't remember a dance counter culture it doesn't mean there wasn't one: "lack of a memory of a counterculture—not a lack of a counterculture." We went with that and she led us back through the century to the life and imagined work of Sonia Revid in Australia to...a dead end. Revid left no legacy, no inheritors, no school...Just when we thought we were getting a footing, the map was whisked away, it had no history. Dance is not literature, words are not enough. It's about bodies and the embodiment of tradition.

But Card was kind enough to lead us a few tentative steps in a new direction on a new map, one that acknowledged that the choreographers and teachers that came after Revid did leave a legacy that was, yes, European or American, with a reminder that we

• continued page 8

RealTime at

• from page 7



ourselves were “foreign, colonial, illegitimate.” She pronounced, “our uniqueness is our lack of it,” declared us “the ultimate postmodern culture” and threw down a collaged map which Australian dancers have created from foreign traditions, imitation and sheer bricolage. But what kind of map was it—she deftly removed the romanticised Australian landscape, noting various attempts by Graeme Murphy, Jill Sykes and others, even Russell Dumas, to make the time-honoured link between the arts and the bush. We were left standing about looking at what was left, wondering is it any good? and what's wrong with a tradition from somewhere else, if we're still part of it? Will we go on?...But our guide had gone. Both of them. And we'd only just set out.

Of all the art forms in Australia, dance is the one that seems most beleaguered by the weight of imperial tradition, the same weight that crushed Indigenous culture and guaranteed imitative white arts in the colonies. The other arts don't have anything quite like the ballet as bogeyman, though the opera and symphony orchestras can be similarly if less devastatingly invoked. Whatever, the Dempster-Card mapping was mildly received. Had their audience heard it before? Had they been ‘hegemonised’ into silence by ballet? Were they shocked at the small space offered them on these maps and their apparent insignificance? Well, it's not always easy to read the mood of a conference in Australia; participants are slow to formulate questions, issues are not pursued, chairpersons these days have become ‘facilitators’ instead of interrogators, disparate papers are read in queues, connections are not made, no one wants to appear too smart. And there were many at the Symposium for whom this ballet issue was not worrying or they'd accommodated it in some way—as illustrated in Mathew Bergan's video with ballet-trained choreographers who'd moved into other dance. They were interested in other maps. And there are those who think that we are at the end of a period of domination, in an era of manifesting our own identity, drawing still on the overseas traditions of which we remain a part, but making our own distinctions. It's a pity therefore that (and for a number of good reasons the curators explained) there wasn't an Indigenous component in the symposium.

Even more than our white colonial plight, the initial repression of Indigenous culture and its recent ‘acceptance’ (as art, as spirituality, as cuisine, but not too readily as politics or ownership of the map)—is even more telling about this place we are mapping, in the relationship between Indigenous and modernist dance traditions, say, in the constant querying of Bangarra about its syntheses.

Some places we were led turned out to be mapless, the paths evaporating and reforming in a few dialectical turns—“dance is a dematerialisation of modern life...an ethics of dwelling”; dance is “ungrounded...(but)...located in the entire phenomenal world.” These came from Duncan Fairfax in a session on dance and the new technologies. Fairfax had been citing Heidegger, “Dance's purpose is to

open us to a primordial experience of being, a verb, not a noun.” While this was satisfying for the true believers, a nice interplay of the physical and the transcendent, its claim to convince us of the problems inherent in the deployment of new media in dance were problematic in their absolutism—technology “denies corporeality”, puts us at a greater distance from our bodies, it's “a new drive for control”, “it reinforces rather than transgresses.” Dance is good, technology bad, no dialectic here, no steady ground on which to map our present. The baddies are Stelarc, Orlan and Robert Wilson—“rumoured”, said Fairfax, to want to replace his performers with techno-substitutes!

From the other side of what was soon to become a session of vaguely competing cosmologies (well, that's what it felt like, another kind of mapping), Chrissie Parrott did an interesting if undialectical turn. On the one hand, motion capture technology for her is functional, a tool for choreographing without dancers and for saving dancers pain and injury. On the other, the result, which Parrott described with loving lyricism, is an animated dancer (built from the performance of a real one), a very real creature with the potential for an ethereal internet life of its own, exploring various choreographies.

A queasy floating sensation brought on by hovering between Fairfax and Parrott's opposing universes was relieved by Trevor Patrick, working with the old technology of film, but technology nonetheless, and declaring a Taoist “impulse to unite mind, body and universe” in “a performance about transcendence, self transformation and change.” He said he saw “film as an important adjunct to performance” (something that Parrott was insistent on too, but watching her video presentation, we weren't really sure what she had in mind). Patrick spoke of the “experience more and more of going into my own body, but people were not necessarily seeing that”, so he turned to film: “dealing with the desire to show what I felt.”

I felt my feet touch the ground and then caught Gideon Obarzanek's declaration that he was not interested in dance on film, or new technology, but in making films (not about or necessarily including dance, as in his film *Wet*), and that in dance, picking up on the lingo, his “dancers' bodies are grounded”, that he works from “the qualities of the bodies, pushing the limits, achieving a hyperreal quality.” The blur between self and other in his own work is through choreography; he said of working with Fiona Cameron recently: “It's true that I'm not on stage but it's hard to tell which movement is hers and which is mine.”

The ground had shifted, the conceit of dance as a terrain, a map of competing forces and traditions had shifted to a philosophical, even spiritual, plane and onto the body as map. But it was no ‘mere’ body, but the body as psyche, the body philosophical, ‘hard-wired’ (the techno-talk in the symposium for the inscription of ballet on the body), transformable, the cyborg even.

William McClure, abetted by Sue-ellen Kohler in a rare physical/existential moment in the symposium, took us off the edge of the map of received technique and stepped into...“pure sensation, unmediated by culture”, with *the next step*, “not a technique, but to keep

feeling”, a moment of forgetting...and finding that meshed in various ways with the primordial of Fairfax and the selfless states of Butoh described by Yumi Umiuare and Tony Yap (“you have to stop the mind thinking”) in a session on Asian dance experience (where this time Peter Eckersall tried to keep our feet on the ground). Is this a quest for a new map, or no map? Were we also heading back to the Dempster-Card ‘maps’ when we heard McClure oppose “dance as a type of memorial...and European at that” and ask, “Does the next step have to have its authority in the past?”

In the closing session I noted the flood of binaries (male/female, culture/nature, body/technology, theatre/studio, high culture/low culture, ballet/other, tradition/moment etc) across the weekend, not as a bad thing, but interesting given the attempt to bring a range of very different artists and topics together, and also to indicate that there was much that was ‘in opposition’ that was neither resolvable nor worth fighting over with any intensity. You don't think of maps as binary, but as complex representations of difference. However, they are mostly two dimensional, drafting the high and the low, pointing north and south, east and west, and like binaries in general providing ways of thinking...as long as they don't become the only way of thinking, ignoring the third factor (the dialectical spin-off), change, or all the points in between. A map is as good as it is useful, as long as it is current, as long as it can be queried. Maps in MAP were variously fatalistically fixed, liberating, pragmatic, cosmological, fluid, physical, generated by dance, abandoned. As postmodern diversification of forms and the ideas that go with them persists and intensifies, the likelihood of drawing a common map in an event like MAP steadily declines. Occasional points of contact can be made, interests shared, common causes fought for. Some maps simply cannot be overlaid without creating something unintelligible. Nonetheless, the poetry of these sometimes competing maps was the most striking thing about them, the strangeness of their envisioning, the metaphysical yearnings, the blurrings between choreographer and dancer, artist and technology, the autobiographical impulse, the existential moment that took us off the map.

Keith Gallasch

MAPPING THE IN-BETWEEN

MAP Symposium, The Bagging Room, C.U.B. Malthouse, Melbourne, July 25 - 26

As well as giving us a meticulous and enlightening survey of footwear at the MAP Symposium (I almost wore my gold glittery tap shoes), the *RealTime*-hosted closing session demonstrated how very close to the beginning of discourse and debate this ‘dance community’ that had gathered in Melbourne was. Trajectories beyond the weekend were signposted by this session, along with questions from the floor throughout the weekend that fizzled before they could be bounced around and discussions at the bar that had no place in the ‘public’ body of the event.

As the curators of the symposium, Vicki Fairfax and I were asked to present a “legend” that would facilitate a reading of the current “topography” of dance practice nationally. With an emphasis on “new choreography” and “cross-form development”, the forum was to draw on the associated performance program to develop this map.

The inclusiveness inherent in MAP's agenda can be traced back to the spirit of *Greenmill*, the annual dance festival whose impetus MAP was expected to build upon, and the Project Control Group set up after the demise of that event. This group represented a real will within the Melbourne dance community to maintain a discourse across genres and included Josephine Ridge from the Australian Ballet, Angharad Wynne-Jones from Chunky Move, Hellen Sky and Sylvia Staehli from Dancehouse and Paul Summers from Dance Works.

Coming from Sydney, I was struck by the determined insistence in Melbourne upon a notion of dance community, something that remained problematic for me throughout the project. As Eleanor Brickhill said to me, butchers and bakers perhaps have more in common than some of the dance practitioners involved in MAP. What they do have in common is movement and performance, and

even so, the “Performance Space” session certainly gave the idea of movement and spectatorship a good going over. A community, by definition, involves some kind of agreement and people's attendance at the weekend was proof of this. But what actually constitutes this ‘agreement’ still bears investigating.

Given that we were mapping a community, where were the parameters set? We were asked where the Indigenous content was by an audience member during the closing session. But where indeed was the Indian and the Spanish dance which are now negotiating cultural and disciplinary boundaries in an Australian context? The speakers in the “Asian Connection” session were proof of the enlightenment non-Western practices can provide. In Yumi Umiuare's description of her creative process—in the dark moving towards the light, the process as the art—I was reminded of Sue-ellen Kohler's struggle with the competing histories within her body. And Tony Yap's description of ecstatic religious mediums from his childhood was a perfect illustration of William McClure's body in “the moment of dispossession.”

Bound as we were to the performance program it became, in fact, a welcome framework. Our decision to include as many practitioners as possible was based on the program's richness and a belief in the value of the artists' dialogue in accessing the true state of the art. This strategy also provided a means of overcoming binaries by not conflating the individual with the institution, looking at the ‘grey area’ of particular cases rather than the black and white of theoretical and exclusive ideals. Talks by Lucy Guerin, Yumi Umiuare and Shelley Lasica, just to name a few, were invaluable and I cannot believe students did not flock to hear these people speak.

This raises the issue of who this event was for. For the dance community? For the arts community at large? For students? What about all those people interstate who couldn't make it? In terms of attendance, there was a tension between answering the needs of the practitioners and advocacy issues. DJ/composer Jad McAdam told me a good story. He was telling his friends in Sydney that he was going to Melbourne to talk about popular culture at a dance forum and they said, “Oh, are they trying to make dance more popular?” Incidentally, the session that McAdam participated in, along with Gideon Obarzanek, Lucy Guerin and director Michael Kantor had the highest attendance outside the film session.

The big question for us was—how can you maintain an inclusive agenda without jeopardising the rigour of the discussions? What ‘common ground’ could offer us a means of getting beyond niceties? Space, technologies, training, cultural cross-referencing—these topics allowed for discussion across disparate practices. There was also an idea to open the forum up beyond the dance community in order to broaden perspectives. People like Michael Kantor, McAdam and philosophers William McClure and Duncan Fairfax provided an ‘outside eye’ within sessions.

Another problem was overcoming the binary which we decided to deal with up front in a session on classical and contemporary dance practice (“Ballet and its Other”). Interestingly, as a few people pointed out, it was the contemporary practitioners who attended the sessions with some degree of commitment and there was a general impression that the ballet ‘knows its place’ well enough not to require much further discussion. In regard to “new choreography”, perhaps there were issues that could have been raised had Stephen Baynes been available to attend. The scarcity of choreographers working in this idiom was one of the realities that surfaced throughout the process, a fact that perhaps should be addressed directly.

The video that Matthew Bergan and I made, *Arrival and Departure*, grew out of the necessity to create a bridge between classical and current practice. To this end, it focused on the fact that nearly all of our dancer-choreographers began their training with classical dance. If Libby Dempster was asking why we have no “significant counter-culture” to ballet in this country, then here we had the answer—an homogeneous form of dance training dished out across

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• from previous page

geographic and cultural borders (and shores as well if we consider Butoh artist Umiumare's initial classical training in Japan). There was some idea about looking honestly at the current state of affairs in order to move ahead; confronting our demons if you like. The 'Utility' section of the film sign-posted a negotiation process that some practitioners are undergoing—attempts to deal directly and thoughtfully with their personal histories. One way or another, this area 'between' is where our current map is most dense and it is an area that is offering solutions as well as problems.

As Keith Gallasch pointed out in the final session, the binarisms articulated in Libby Dempster's opening paper did prefigure a whole series of other oppositions. (Dempster couldn't believe we were still talking about them when she returned for the last session). These included Eleanor Brickhill's rhetorical "ideals" in regard to performance space—the proscenium space and the studio space, pop culture and counter-culture, the ungrounded body of technology and the grounded body of the dancer. In retrospect, the agenda of the weekend perhaps created a need to describe or reiterate these relationships before proceeding. If, in an ethics of discourse, "we are obligated, through our mutual adherence to the logic of the discussion, to be open to the possibility of the other", as Duncan Fairfax has said, then perhaps there is still a need to establish who the other is via these binarisms.

Taking this possibility into account, the MAP weekend in fact did what it set out to do. It 'mapped' the current state of dance practice by mapping the discourse across forms, and the issues this raised, demonstrating in the process 'where we are at'—collectively. How useful this is in terms of particular practitioners is uncertain, but what it does reveal is the willingness of some to question their position, the choice of others not to do so, and all the struggle that lies in between. There is a danger, I believe, that we could have a repetition of the type of hierarchy that has stymied dance in this country, with new forms taking an intellectual position where ballet had enjoyed a cultural one. What MAP did was to uncover this difficult terrain. What is important now is to move forward and keep accumulating the knowledges shared at these events so that we don't have to spend forever on introductions.

What MAP didn't do, to some degree, was allow room for more explicit and penetrating investigation. One of my greatest regrets of the weekend was the disappearance of issues raised by participants such as Trevor Patrick. When someone asked during the closing session if technique is a technology, I wondered whether there had been a lack of desire to listen, or an ability to hear amongst so much detail. For me, the "Ungrounded Bodies" session pivoted around the practice described by Patrick in relation to his film, *Nine Cauldrons*. Cinematic technology and movement technique became equal partners in this alchemical fusion of forms, the technology of the camera to meet its demands. Here was rich ground for the case of overcoming binarisms in the form of practical evidence, ground that fell away through a desire to cover more—quickly, rather than less—thoroughly. This problem was perhaps symptomatic of the brevity of the event.

With interstate participants strictly limited due to the budget and myself drawing on contacts in Sydney, participants from that city almost equalled those from the host city, Melbourne. (Chrissie Parrott from Perth and Natalie Weir from Brisbane were the exceptions.) Rachel Fensham's comment at the end of the weekend that she could see MAP becoming a festival focusing on new movement practice, overlooked *antistatic* in Sydney which was inaugurated in April 1997 and will return next year under the curatorial direction of Sue-ellen Kohler, Rosalind Crisp and Zane Trow. *antistatic* focused solely on the dense area of dance research and, given time to develop, should give that sector of the community an effective forum. There was a conscious attempt to make links to *antistatic* at MAP in the hope of building on issues covered there, and I imagine that two such events could work together in future to provide rich ground for discussing dance and its related issues.

Erin Brannigan

SHADOW BOXING?

MAP Symposium, The Bagging Room, C.U.B. Malthouse, Melbourne, July 25 - 26

One of the arguments rehearsed during Melbourne's MAP Symposium concerned the place of ballet in relation to contemporary dance practice. According to Libby Dempster, the dominance of ballet is such that all modern dance in Australia is conceived in relation to ballet. In other words, ballet 'others' the rest of contemporary dance. Dempster further argued that no significant counter-tradition exists in Australia.

The view is that ballet is identified with dance (ballet = dance), and anything else is necessarily other to that identity. There are those who took issue with this position. For example, Amanda Card gave a brief history of a dancer, Sonia Revid, in the 1930s whose contributions have never been acknowledged. The implication is that there are subjugated histories of non-hegemonic practices—the trouble is that they are not written and, more critically, have no inheritors.

From the point of view of history, this is fair enough. Theory often skates over the historical in order to make its claims. But what do we say today? Is ballet the controlling term in the governing imaginary of all contemporary dance in Australia? If one were to look to money as the criterion of dominance, then one would have to say, yes. Who else is funded to have a 60-strong company, a school and a secure audience around the country? As regards education, one would need to look at all the institutions across the land in order to ascertain how they stand in relation to ballet. What about the practitioners themselves? A number of performers who had trained in ballet were asked about the influences felt from such a training. Given the histories of those consulted, it was not possible to conceive of a practice which did not in one way or another emerge from ballet. And then there is the question of the audience.

To compare ballet with contemporary dance is to raise matters of power. So, also, is the question of whether there are other dance traditions which significantly contest that ascendancy. What fuels the view that there are no challengers is the fact that we lack the genealogies of British or American dance, a lack which can never be "made up." Given that there are alternative practices (if not traditions), how influential do they need to be to challenge the singular dominance of ballet? What does it take to challenge? Is a challenge only a challenge if it *actually* topples a given order of power? Did the resistance expressed in the recent waterfront dispute challenge the new/old Right's attempt to disempower unionism?

Finally, what of the hegemonies of contemporary dance in Australia? Russell Dumas' name came up a lot in relation to personal histories and the undoing of ballet training. What is Dumas' place in the topography of Australian influence? In terms of political economy, what of companies such as Chunky Move (Gideon Obarzanek), Sydney Dance Company (Graeme Murphy), Expressions (Maggie Sietsma), Dance Works (Sandra Parker), Meryl Tankard's Australian Dance Theatre and others. And I haven't begun to speak of Indigenous dance in Australia, or of the place of heterosexism and other sexualities (a matter which seems to come up more in contemporary performance).

Questions of power are complex. They involve overlapping histories of domination, recognised histories and unspoken viewpoints. Perhaps I could finish with a position which completely contradicts the foregoing. Susan Manning defines postmodern dance as a break with one (or both) of two conditions of modernism, (1) "the reflexive rationalisation of movement" and (2) "the dual practice of modern dance and modern ballet" (*The Drama Review*, vol 4, 1988). In a break with the dichotomy between modern dance and ballet, as in Twyla Tharp's *In the Upper Room*, what happens to the domination of ballet form? Does it inevitably re-emerge or is it transformed? And where would we look for an answer?

Philipa Rothfield

A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

MAP Symposium, The Bagging Room, C.U.B. Malthouse, Melbourne, July 25 - 26

Even at the initial stages of organising the MAP Symposium, there was a sense of apprehension, as if great care was needed if something unpleasant was not to seriously damage the fragile health of our national dance community. What was needed therefore was a good dose of comfort food, a sweetened porridge of common ground. And so, via the unifying elements of 'space' and 'time', it was thought, a safe, polite environment might be provided in which differences of practice and tradition could be rendered harmless.

In the spirit of fair play and equality, each panel had its even spread of philosophical approaches. But in panels of only a few people, such broad scope often seemed to leave gaping holes between speakers, gaps which the speakers themselves sometimes despaired of crossing.

'Binary' was a term I heard used often to describe the state of an argument, and in my ignorance, it seemed that it meant something bad, not wholesome, dead-end. There were histories, known and unknown; ballet and its 'other'; the embodied and the out-of-body; subjective and objective bodies; public and private spaces; pop and elite culture; the 'railway tracks' trajectory of choreographic choice versus that 'moment' of losing touch with a known repertoire of choices. I took the 'binary' to describe a way of thinking which forced an impasse, precluded creative development, maintained the dependence of each 'side' on the other to reinforce their differences. If the 'binary' approach was loosened, perhaps the 'sides' might disappear and things would be less contentious and much more pleasant for everyone.

Sally Gardner brought to my attention a brief comment—I can't remember from whom—which suggested that perhaps, speaking of ballet, one might "be more spontaneous" as if that, somehow, would change everything. And a private rejoinder suddenly opened, for me, a crack in the niceness which threatened to descend on all of us: this idea of 'spontaneity' lies at the heart of the matter. 'Being more spontaneous' is a glib description of what a different dance tradition might encompass. Because there are not just competing practices, but competing traditions and all that they imply: learning to think differently, to see differently, to feel differently, to occupy a different intellectual and psychic space, to develop work along different trajectories. One doesn't just leap from one tradition to another.

It became obvious to me in several of the forums (for instance, "Ballet and its Other"; "Next Steps: In Search of the Body"; "Performance Space"; and in the comments from some of the artists in Matthew Bergan's video interviews, *Arrival and Departure*) that a level of frustration was evident among proponents of philosophical stances other than the balletic tradition. One problem seemed to be that often speakers were trying to discuss not so much actual conscious practices, but the

traces left in behaviour, the hard wiring of the nervous system. One is unable to easily slough off what is not simply a movement technique, but a way of thinking, a set of assumptions about the world and about human values. Libby Dempster was not only discussing conscious practices or beliefs, but a kind of unconscious stance, beliefs which are imagined as fact, values not normally available to scrutiny without profound changes in perspective.

Proponents of balletic tradition have rarely sought to investigate this. Many of the artists who work within that tradition were smart and articulate, being able to discuss their own ideas freely. But they seemed to demonstrate little understanding of the ideas of their fellow speakers. Frustration arose, for example, when William McClure and Sue-ellen Kohler proposed the possibility of a different sort of matrix by which choreographic decisions might be made.

Paula Baird-Colt spoke well about her understanding of ballet training and the capacity for choreographic and technical diversity within a company, suggesting that within a ballet company's fairly stringent technical requirements, that one could see markedly individual differences in dancers and choreographers over time, that in fact it too could be concerned with diversity and individuality. But my experience of ballet is that its primary requirement is that the dancers are physically and technically similar, that differences outside a slim margin are not really tolerated; and it is only after being able to see work many times, close up and from an insider's viewpoint, that the differences in dancers and choreographers are amplified, becoming inadvertent but lovable idiosyncrasy.

My point is that Paula (and many like her) does not *need* to understand what her fellow speakers are saying. There is, as yet, no compulsion for change within balletic practice in Australia. And if there is to be dialogue, it will be forced into the ballet arena by virtue of its inability to go outside its own understanding. One can afford to be magnanimous and tolerant of other practices when it is evident that those practices need never pose a threat.

Amanda Card mentioned some early pioneers of Australian modern dance traditions, and their lost history, as if this history might be reconstructed via its traces in the media. But while we can know the theatrical conventions of earlier periods, the ways those artists were represented to the public, we can never know about their actual practices. Our assumptions might be that their work was radical, revolutionary. But the fact is we don't know what it was, because we did not see the bodies moving. It's very easy to discuss different practices from an historical viewpoint as if we know what we're talking about, because words are inexact descriptions of real experiences. And real understanding of the differences in practice only comes with actual experience of these practices, not just as a kind of cook's tour variety of experience, but as serious study.

I started this article with a touch of cynicism because I thought it was only too evident that

• continued page 10

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RealTime at



• from page 9

language by itself was inadequate to clarify real diversity in practice. Sue-ellen Kohler said about dance on film that there ought to be another word to describe what one saw there, because it was too different from a live body to be called the same thing. Similarly, one can continue to talk about 'alternative performance venues' or 'different practices' and continue to hear the words repeated as if they are understood, and the words themselves might gain political currency of their own, but without actual experience of the differences, the words are empty.

It is frustrating, in the event of this lack of full understanding, to be so contained by the need for 'unity' and common ground, that those very differences, the diversities in practice and values that we are trying so hard to elucidate are in danger of being swallowed in the effort to render them acceptable, tolerable and benign.

Eleanor Brickhill

FILLING IN THE BODY MAP

FEET. We are seated in a semicircle, as if we are the audience. Six pairs of feet askew, leathery pairs. The softness of mediating what we've seen, the trying to prod further questions open. Still, as in any of the performances, we are on display. I hope my haircut is forgiven.

ANKLES. I go weak at the ankles without my daughter in the room. She is three months old. Amazing what constitutes our being, our vision, our capacity to absorb. At the moment, without her my eyes are nothing, my tongue is dry. With her, the world opens. I am not divided. What are the parallels that keep us closed to dance?

KNEES. My knee-jerk reactions. Techno-ethics. Gideon likes to be "in control"; Chrissie is playing digital until she gets her dancers back. Keeping in work. Being paid or not. I shudder shudder. There are ethics in the calling forth (or failing to call forth) of movement from the body of another being. I speak of the censoring of movement: corridors, shadows, dance, not-dance. Studio vs public work, said Eleanor. The right next move, and not the wrong one. The ugly and ungainly—does it have a place? The multiple, beautiful, untrammelled dancings of a child. Listening to doubt. William McClure's suspended moment is an inclusion for which we can be thankful as a reminder of how much goes on in the nothing, no-thingness. Sue-ellen silk-slips in, around, a small turn: dancing an option without her shoes on. What opens from silence.

THIGHS. Support. 1) Those impossible squat-walks in Butoh. 2) Ros Crisp talks of classical dance-training as a ticket to ride. Like a plastic card opening the doors to teach—almost anywhere, almost anything else. This is muscle-power; background steroids, still legal. 3) There are four babies here. Rose Godde says next time they will organise a crèche. The inclusions are starting to happen.

PELVIS. Sue-ellen had made a piece following an accident. Others clearly make pieces just out of a desire to (watch the body) move. Sometimes watching motion is enough, sometimes not. Macbeth was in a bad mood when he said we are but shadows and dreams. Strutting, fretting, yes, but there's always a context out there. Our histories leak into our bodies and sometimes these stories cannot be ignored. The personal is political as soon as it steps into a room.

PELVIS/HIPS. Someone talks of being an "empty vessel" for the choreographer, yet of fulfilling herself as an individual in the dance. (The man next to me says he is horrified, "Think what she's saying!") Residual oil from salad days in our mouths.) This is not Zen. Trevor Patrick talks about the interrelatedness of outside and in. This is Zen. Tony Yap wonders how we share presence, presuming that sharing as a given. Is this Zen?

WAIST. Who helped unbind the feet, release the waist. Russell Dumas gets two guernseys.

SIDES. Where (some of us) began. Bend and stretch, reach for the sky. Stand on tippy-toe oh so high.

CHEST. Pass.

CHEST. Try again. There are more women than men here.

SHOULDERS. Response-ability, and who's to blame. There can be laziness in whatever we do: technologising or non-technologising,

looking, making, sensing. You have to do the work of seeing—audience too.

ARMS. I embrace you, you adoring audience. Matthew Bergan's film where dancers enact and debunk their bows.

NECK. Rubbernecking. Remembering our histories.

We FACE up to ourselves sitting down, rise to drink coffee and tea, dine on frittata and hams. We wanted to trace/find the ground. Does the old *Greenmill* sink or swim from here? Mapmakers copyright mistakes—one added road, an extra contour—to protect their pages from the unscrupulous. Pity the driver lost in a phantom street or drowning in a fake causeway. But at conferences, the value is unmappable. It's the whisperings in the brain, in the body, the troubled slip-ups in corridors that, like ghost spirits never mapped, stir the next journey on.

The way forward is to remember what we've forgotten to say.

Zsuzsanna Soboslay

WAYS OF SPEAKING

Collaborations forum, The Australian Ballet, The Malthouse, July 7; *Mixed Metaphor* forum, Dancehouse, July 5

The Australian Ballet's *Collaborations* program and Dancehouse's *Mixed Metaphor* and their associated forums were my first experiences of MAP as an event. The first had me worried, the second hopeful and together they represented the very different approaches to "movement and performance" and accompanying critical engagement that MAP was expected to encompass.

The Australian Ballet (AB) forum was ultimately hampered by the chair, James Griffin from Radio National, chosen by Ross Stretton the artistic director of the AB. His lack of knowledge about dance placed him—and consequently the discussion—at an alarming disadvantage, which left me questioning Stretton's logic. With so many informed, engaged dance commentators in the audience, this was an unnecessary impediment.

With Stretton by Griffin's side, the conversation hinged around the AB's "new" direction in inviting four "new" choreographers, Bernadette Walong, Stephen Baynes, Natalie Weir and Adrian Burnett, to create work on and for the AB dancers. Baynes' comments on inspiring dancers, referring to his experience overseas in the company of dancers such as Marcia Haydee, made sense of this scheme while words failed Walong. Her difficulty was discomforting as she spoke about sound and memory in relation to her original score for *Slipstream*, surrounded as she was by Mahler, Astor Piazzolla, techno music and the instruments of Ghana.

Magnanimous statements from Stretton about "innovation" punctuated discussions on the novelty of pointe work in a contemporary context ("What about 20th century ballet?" from the audience was greeted with silence from the panel), and the alarming physicality of this new work described by Griffin as "intimate" or "erotic." Natalie Weir countered this by saying she had never intended her work to be sexual and didn't consider it so.

Baynes' attempts to suggest that classical and contemporary are not so discrete were overwhelmed by an insistence upon the "traditional" and the "innovative." Stretton's comments about the importance of maintaining the classics in the company's repertoire, keeping this "tradition" as "the point of reference" was particularly ironic with Walong sitting on the panel. Her tradition picked its way en pointe through a river of stones.

Innovation was not mentioned over at Dancehouse where the question was not why but how. This forum seemed to articulate a real anxiety about the place of the body in a dance-based multimedia environment. The discussion finally seemed to crystallise with Tony Yap and Mixed Company's highly charged *Saint Sebastian* epitomising "presence" and Margaret Trail's *Hi, it's me*, "absence"; Trail's work placed her live interaction amidst pre-recorded voices that introduced a performance place elsewhere.

Keynote speaker Angharad Wynne-Jones opened with a definition of metaphor and mixed-metaphor and a description of the project of performance in articulating a persuasive example of one or the other. (For Wynne-Jones, Mixed Company's piece seemed sure of its methods/media and therefore presented a persuasive metaphor.) She spoke of

the position of the body within this context as "vulnerable" and the difficulty of controlling the expression of the body particularly when you are creator and performer—how the body "leaks" meanings.

Tony Yap's description of the "organic" creative process that his group underwent seemed to challenge the more methodical approach that Angharad suggested and Philipa Rothfield introduced Christos Linous' active, invulnerable body to the discussion.

Methodologies, processes and ideas replaced the design, music and space of the AB forum and the discussion flowed without interruption or clunky changes in direction. At Dancehouse the line between audience and panellists became indiscernible, with choreographers, practitioners and participants spilling across what had been an uncomfortable divide at the Malthouse.

Erin Brannigan

MAP REFERENCES

As the MAP Symposium unfolded, RealTime charted some responses on audio and videotape. Here are some samples.

Rachel Fensham It's really about the question of the will to know, which seems to me to be split between those who are choreographers now (Chrissie Parrott and Gideon Obarzanek) and those who are dancers. It's the question of knowing through seeing, and the extension of seeing through the camera. Whereas what Trevor Patrick, and to some extent Duncan Fairfax (though he's not a dancer), was saying was about the will to know being developed through the multi-sensorial body. Now I don't want to dismiss the will to know through the *technos* but for those people to deny the multi-sensorial in relation to the technology when it's in their own histories as dancers working in companies is a great loss. When Gideon was talking about watching someone's tensile movement, his excitement suddenly came into play. Now he's trying to use that through the *technos* but it is actually about the knowing of bodies in relation rather than just bodies through the eye.

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Rachel Fensham What Libby Dempster said was that we have a white, foreign, illegitimate dance history in ballet. I think she's absolutely right. It is about the colonial heritage and our inferiority in relation to the rest of the world. But if you take that on board, the flipside is that you might want to celebrate it. Sometimes the benchmark might be going to see the Australian Ballet and watching it as a complete parody of what our culture might be. Concomitant with that there is imperialism, power, exploitation, degradation of the land, denial of the existence of Aboriginal people. Can we really just celebrate that? Or does that version of our dance history imply some other kinds of questions. ... It's interesting that for all the problems with the Bangarra liaison [the Australian Ballet-Bangarra *Rites of Spring*] in a way it is the Australian Ballet that creates the first mainstream cross-over.

Keith Gallasch When ballet was addressed it was always about the Australian Ballet, not for example William Forsythe's engagement with postmodernity. Here's a choreographer who reads Deleuze and Guattari and Derrida and works with new media artists, and who has an architectonic view.

Rachel Fensham The point about ballet re-inventing itself is almost the more interesting one, the ways that ballet can change.

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William McClure Silence is not what I was advocating but a sense of silence that comes between phrases which is the question of what is going to come next. There's an ambivalence, an equivocal sense of how you're going to get to the next phrase...where you might think, there is no natural necessity which is pushing me on to make the next decision. It's ungrounded.

Rosalind Crisp It's grounded by certain choices that you make and the elimination of others. I don't think there is a state of nothingness. It's more a state of listening and, depending on the sensitivity and awareness you have in your body, you might make certain choices of movement over others. When I come

to craft a work, I'm making choices about certain parameters.

Richard Allen In the moment of nothing is the moment of meditation. I remember when I was working on a piece called *The Frightening of Angels*, I had this sense of an incredible dark cloud within me and my necessity was to move that dark cloud out of me and into the space, into the light. If there was a sense of nothing, I wouldn't have done it.

William McClure It's not an intellectual process I'm talking about. It's a way of confronting what is happening in a way that doesn't come with criteria, background, tradition. It's an existential position.

Rosalind Crisp I find accidents the best creative moments. I'm working in the studio and someone drops by and interrupts me. I keep working while I'm talking to them and suddenly I realise I'm doing something more interesting, more connected. I think it's a dialogue between pathways that are established in your body and a space where there isn't anything pre-coded. If I direct myself to feel a part of my body so I'm more aware of it, it might make me do something (HER ARM SHOOTS UPWARDS) within a certain sort of parameter. It doesn't feel like nothing. But there has to be a space.

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Peter Eckersall Companies like Zen Zen Zo in Brisbane are directly appropriating a post Dairakuda-kan style—shaved heads, white body paint. Some members have also worked with Tadashi Suzuki, so there's a crossover. They have a very particular idea about Japanese performance which I find a bit rigid. It's very homogeneous, essentialised. Obviously within the company are different opinions but some seem fixed on this idea that, you know, this mysterious, spooky oriental form allows us to discover ourselves as performers. Butoh doesn't exist in order for late 20th Century Australian artists to discover themselves. Maybe it exists in order for us to discover our own problematic culture or identity as a nation.

Virginia Baxter There is Butoh and Suzuki-inspired work in Australia in which the Japanese form has been so deeply absorbed into the practice that it no longer looks like Butoh or Suzuki, as in the work of artists like Deborah Leiser, Mémé Thorne or Nikki Heywood in Sydney

Peter Eckersall Deborah Leiser's work is very much about identity. The Japanese influence in her work is not obvious, it's not worn on the surface. It's been absorbed through a series of processes. If you're going to engage in an experience of another performance culture the trick is then to locate it in the context of your own.

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Yumi Umiumare [Classical ballet] is probably still inside my body. It's a centredness or a direction. I think it's very important for technique. I had to get rid of certain kinds of steps, certain rhythms. I had to chuck it out to learn Butoh. It takes a while. I was often told by Butoh teachers, you're useless because you step. You are good at movement. But in Butoh you shouldn't "move." In ballet you need the technique to achieve more quick movement. You have to slow down in Butoh.

• • •

Peter Eckersall The idea of an Asian body needs to be dismissed very quickly. Does somebody who works in the rice fields in the north of Japan have the same body as a Balinese shamanistic trance dancer for example? Where this gets very ideological is in Japan where there's a debate within Butoh about a Japanese body, with some Butoh artists who've achieved semi-guru status saying, this is the

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Japanese body. It's essentialising the Japanese body, saying we are all one. It's not acknowledging the pluralities, the minority cultures within that culture.

ALL SWANS TOGETHER

DW98 and post-show forum, Danceworks, Wesleyan Hall, Albert Park, July 24; MAP Symposium, The Bagging Room, C.U.B. Malthouse, Melbourne, July 25 - 26; *Arrival and Departure* (video), director Mathew Bergan, producer Erin Brannigan

1. Up there for thinking...

In Sandra Parker's very musical choreography for *Waiting* movement is synopated through bodies, space and time. In the post-show forum she says that once she heard Lawrence Harvey's music, she could have just kept going. The composer says the collaboration alerted him to all the things to which he was blind.

In Shelley Lasica's elegant *Live Opera Situation* music is used contrapuntally. The dancers rehearse to other musics (Indian music, opera), then internalise those patterns and absorb them with others from composer Franc Tétaz. The instability of the relationship between the music and the dancers' bodies is one of the aspects of the work that the choreographer suggests the audience may experience, but not necessarily.

In Sue Healey's *Stung* it's not humour but strangeness that grabs. The stricture imposed on dancers to embody bees perversely allows us further into the human bodies. Without hands as the logical extension of arms, we concentrate more on the subtleties of shoulders and backs. With new rhythms we observe the ways a body can buzz. This work began with Darrin Verhagen's music. He's worked with Sue Healey before and knows what she likes. He knew it would be about bees but is surprised by its humour.

The post-show forum with choreographers, dancers and composers was intimate, relaxed and tentative. It reminded me of the discussion after the screenings of the *Microdance* films at *Intersteps* in Sydney last year. Listening to choreographers fresh from the collaborative experience speaking about the difficulties and pleasures of working with film and music, it occurs to me how much more there is to know.

All three collaborations in DW98 broached potentially interesting topics for discussion. What would happen if Sandra Parker had kept going? What is the relationship between Shelley Lasica's agenda and her audience's; what if bees were not funny at all? Watching these and other works like them, I can't help wishing for more—more investigation, more time to refine, more performances and of course, more thinking and talking about the process of creation and its reception by audiences.

Organisers of the MAP Symposium, responding to a "burning need" for critical appraisal, proposed bigger and, on the surface, more crucial questions than these: the place of ballet; the impact of technology; the indelible inscriptions of training; Asian influences; attitudes to space; pop culture. There's an urgency in the tone of the promotional material suggesting that dance is at a watershed with lines between forms blurring, disappearing. The implication is that dance may have lost its way and that one of the aims of MAP is to "locate" contemporary dance once again in all its forms in our time and along the way, while maintaining crucial distinctions and countering hostilities, to bring it back into conversation with ballet.

One way into this conversation was an interesting prototype shown at the MAP Symposium, Mathew Bergan and Erin Brannigan's video, *Arrival and Departure*. Young Australian choreographers talk about the ways they accommodate and make use of their ballet training. Formerly with Bangarra, Bernadette Walong likes working with the dancers from the Australian Ballet but finds herself trying to "soften their joints"; Garry Stewart likes to re-contextualise ballet vocabulary in his work; Brian Carbee is surprised to find himself returning to it. In a later forum Lucy Guerin says she uses its disciplines as a platform for departure. For Rosalind Crisp, it lends a level of legitimacy that gets her teaching work to support her contemporary practice.

Beyond this, the weekend symposium presented a huge array of dancers attempting with varying degrees of success to connect bodies of work with the designated topics. Some prepared papers, some extracted from longer ones. Others improvised. One showed a film. Only one danced. While considerable ground was covered, for me nothing came quite as close to crucial as the more intimate discussions I saw after DW98 which might be why, in the rare breaks between talk, I began to compile a taxonomy of shoes and some sketches towards a choreography of the panel.



Lucy Guerin, *Heavy* (forthcoming) Atheneum 2, November 7 - 15

2. ...down there for dancing

A democracy of Blundstones pervades the MAP Symposium with some notable exceptions, like Vicki Fairfax trying to set the tone at the opening session in blue suede pumps and Op Art stockings. First up, Libby Dempster and Amanda Card and Chair Robin Grove introduce a sober topic ("Ballet and its Other") in buckles and brogues. Dempster ventures a binary or two—Ballet is the governing tradition in Australia and counter-traditions don't exist. Philipa Rothfield jétés from the audience, "Must the other be counter?", down and up again, "What about Irigaray's idea of difference as plenitude?" More diverting are Dempster's gestures at the fictions that sustain the mind of the ballet—the ballet dancer's body as signifying not simply harmonious beauty but efficient functioning of musculature with nothing wastefully complex; an extroverted body; a phallic body; the female ballet dancer's body as a public body, freed of interiority, a body fit for bearing universal values.

In a classical ballet scenario, Amanda Card would be the wise maid with the basket on her hip, deftly plucking fragments from a forgotten history of contemporary dance in Australia and, finger under chin, casually questioning the importance of a local, distinctive dance product. Her final comments, more in keeping with Card's contemporary training, spring from internal stimuli, abandoning all identifiable technique. Australia's history she says, legs out and crossed at the ankle, is full of ideas of the foreign, the colonial, the illegitimate. Our uniqueness may be our lack of uniqueness. The place is an afterthought, a dumping ground (to which, thanks to Jerry Seinfeld, we can now mercifully add an anus).

In the question time that followed we experienced the first of the always awkward dance between the "any old bodies" in the audience thinking on their feet and the "superior bodies" of the panellists whose steps have been choreographed into refined arguments.

In session two ("Ungrounded Bodies/Escaping the Body") panellists individually tango round the topic of technology. Gideon Obarzanek shares boots with Duncan Fairfax in refusing it—though for different reasons. Gideon takes inspiration from television (especially animation) and film (especially editing) but using technology to create dance doesn't interest him. He talks about creating a hyper-real, an "animated look" on stage and of working with the idiosyncratic bodies of his dancers—choreographing the by-products of yoga in Narelle Benjamin's body, coming to terms with Luke Smiles' tensile, fast logic. I move him into a sexy duet with Chrissie Parrott in high heels at the other end of the panel. She's hooked on Motion Capture for good reasons

(choreographic possibilities) and controversial ones (a desire to remove the monotony and potential injury for dancers in rehearsal). In the audience, Christos Linou, fresh from his performance dealing with drug addiction and AIDS, shifts uncomfortable at the mention of the disappearing of the dancer's pain from the choreography. Chrissie teeters on her heel then glides forward, imagining her digital dancer wandering the net picking up choreographic ideas. Duncan Fairfax raises his eyes, "Gee, I'm gonna seem like even more of a Luddite now", but dives in, executing a few grand jetés

along the way. I was expecting wild applause or hisses as he concluded his paper on dance as among other romances "the primordial experience of being" as opposed to technology which "forces us into a picture." But no. In the choreography of the panel, a polite symmetry pervades. Good dancers don't bump into one another. Opposing ideas line up and, like the panellists, rarely touch. In one small (very Australian, I thought) gesture, Duncan sends a smile in Chrissie's direction as if to say, "nothing personal."

Anticipating splinters, Trevor Patrick wears earth shoes to elucidate—hands poised perfectly on either side of his papers—the subtle body in his impressive work *Nine Cauldrons* (*Microdance*). I'm struck by the difference between the speaking artist (slight man in cardigan) and his dancing self (intense, hip, wry). He pulls us inside his calm bubble, talking softly about the subjective camera versus the static stage, the way the moving eye takes the audience closer. "Of all the *Microdance* films", says Rosalind Crisp in time, his is the one that "lets me into the body." Zsuzsanna Soboslay, rocking the baby Mir Mir, whispers in the panel's ear that theatre audiences are more alert to the subtle body than they might think. Before the shutter was open, she believes, they were already letting themselves in.

"In Search of the Body": hyphenated dancers in a leggy line compare histories of training. Ballet dancer Paula Baird-Colt joins Jennifer Newman-Preston and Sue-ellen Kohler vamping till ready in medium high boots while stage right Italian booted philosopher William McClure argues for moments of pure passivity of thought between moves, something like...fainting. In a shocking move, Kohler removes her shoes and in the middle of one of William's sentences ("Dance is a form of...") adds a few phrases of her own (sinewy squats, high stretches). "...thinking", they conclude. In her recent work *Premonition* with Mahalya Middlemist and William McClure, Sue-ellen spoke more eloquently on the subject of next steps than this environment permits. Attempting to explain her position, she stretches her fingers and shakes them in the air, casts her eyes up and out. "When I look at dance, I look at dancers she says, "At people, not technique."

The tradition of talk I gather is not strong in ballet circles. Nevertheless, Paula Baird-Colt in long and certain sentences lays to rest the notion that for this dancer anyway classical ballet limits individual expression ("There may be 60 dancers but also 60 different ways of dancing even though we're all being swans together"). Of her relationship to choreographers like Kylian, Duarte, Tharp, she says, "They are you. You offer them things." How can there be any conversation between this dancer and the one next to her, thinks Rosalind Crisp in the audience, her toes curling inside her shoes.

Paula's position is totally objectified. But then she executes a perfect pirouette: "Twyla Tharp's *In the Upper Room* I would perform for myself every day without an audience", she says.

In the lively boot-oh session ("The Asian Connection") colour is suddenly an issue: brown Blundstones for Chair Rosemary Hinde; Yumi Umiumare in lace up bovver-boots; Tony Yap in brown Docs; Michelle Heaven, recently returned from Japan with Sue Healey and company, still has dust on her tan riding boots; Peter Eckersall anticipating a quick exit from even vaguely essentialist agendas, opts for grey leather scuffs. Eckersall worries at the transition of forms—Butoh is about the body in crisis and sprang from a set of social conditions in Japan. The Australian version, he fears, ditches the politics and replaces it with a new-age version of the oriental as meditative, Zen-like, primitive. I contemplate a cast change and shift Yumi Umiumare and Tony Yap to the panel with Kohler and McClure. Both are engagingly fluid in their talk-journies. Yumi trained in classical ballet from 9 years of age, lost herself to the intensity of Butoh and is in the process of retrieving her body's memory in Australia. Due to a clerical error in his home town of Warrnambool via Malacca, Tony Yap became a visual artist instead of a performing one. Re-directing himself via Deborah Hay and Grotowski-inspired companies like IRAA he wound up with his own Mixed Company creating dance-theatre inspired by Taoist traditions in which he attempts to achieve an emptiness, a method not of training but of being human. "Before a performance" he says, "I want to die."

In the familiar territory of performance space, Angharad Wynn-Jones' boots are well-travelled. Eleanor Brickhill's, like her essay on studio practice, appear nicely polished. Shelley Lasica wears rubber soles and Natalie Weir half-boot, half-shoe. For Shelley, explaining her attitudes to space is a writhing dance. Words must be substituted, sentences restructured for precision. She speaks about the space between speaking and doing, space as behaviour, about bringing the audience into the space of personal enquiry. She has updated her thoughts to make space for those of speakers at the forum just before this. Natalie Weir is a little nervous and moves in straight lines. Creator of works for companies such as Expressions and Queensland Ballet, Dance North and recently The Australian Ballet, she sees space as defined for her. She works within proscenium arches, many of them in regional centres. Her works must tour. Space is self-contained ("as in real life"). She is excited by dancers, their breath, their energy, the way they charge and truly create the space and, sure, she'd like audiences to experience more of this but often she must work with front on staging, the audience looking as if at a picture. Eleanor Brickhill steps tentatively forward to address the unbridgeable gap between.

Popular culture unleashes the sneaker. While Philipa Rothfield time-steps in lace-up boots, Michael Kantor, unlaced, freeforms his desire for a vulgar, provocative, unaesthetic theatre of ideas ("Prepare to be hated"). Before he started working with dance companies, DJ Jad McAdam believed that dance was something to do, not watch. Now, displaying the word "Simple" on his shoe tongue he queries the counter (to what?) while Gideon Obarzanek in dyed Docs pays homage to the popular culture that's modelled him more than any other. Lucy Guerin neatly marks out in mid-heels the way she uses popular culture (especially music). "Trash and profound thought may co-exist." In *Robbery Waitress on Bail* she takes a tabloid story as a starting point, projects it so the audience's desire for narrative is satisfied and then attempts to dance the endlessly elusive everything else. A woman in the audience comes up with one of the best questions of this popular, though (except for Lucy Guerin) oddly culturally unrevealing session. She asks McAdam "How come club music is getting better and better while club dancing is getting worse and worse?"

I remember in a collaboration with dancers in the early 80s being warned by the choreographer not to overtax the dancers with talk because their bodies would seize up. In one shocking moment I learned that dancing and talking about dancing are different. Up there for thinking. Down there for dancing. Postmodern dance readjusted my centre of gravity. For very different reasons MAP has temporarily tipped it off balance again which is no bad thing. Now I desperately need to see someone dancing.

Virginia Baxter

Aesthetic positionings

Marketing, audiences and reviewing in dance rich Perth trouble Sarah Miller

Every cloud has a silver lining as the saying goes and the sad demise of the Chrissie Parrott Dance Company in early 1997 has meant that Perth has benefited enormously from the flowering of a range of independent dance practitioners. There are of course the usual problems: the small audience base, the lack of profile for such practitioners and the rather more intangible sense of lack—we don't have a *real* dance company. Yet aside from the obvious financial problems suffered by the Chrissie Parrott Dance Company, there has been little or no discussion of the ramifications of one company playing to the same, tiny population year in and year out; the undisputed pressures on a single full time artistic director/choreographer and subsequently, what other models might develop, should they be given the opportunity to do so without the constant pressure to perform, to market and to present a commercially viable product.

Aah yes—to market to market—and therein lies a sorry tale. When will the powers that be recognise that, in order to market, there has to be somewhere—if not something—to market (or even just publicise) into, if you want that audience reach.

Yet on the far side, there may never have been more opportunities to engage with contemporary dance in its many manifestations than at the present time. These productions have run the gamut, from project-based dance companies such as David Prudham and Dancers—whose aesthetic and repertoire bears a strong resemblance to the Sydney Dance Company for whom he

worked for many years—to the techno pop aesthetic of skadada and the rather more ambient performances of Fieldworks as well as a number of emerging and mature independent practitioners.

You could say that dance in Perth is thriving. In fact, given the paucity of contemporary performance work at the moment, it is dance that has provided the most interesting experiences of the past few months and frankly, the longer that Perth resists the pressure to lock itself into one company, the better. Not unless a lot more money becomes available than seems likely at the moment...

The trick of course is to get audiences to see this work. Audiences are small for dance at the best of times. Yet one of the major problems confronting local dance artists—as is no doubt the case in other states—is the lack of a reliable, regular and affordable vehicle through which to publicise work widely. *The West Australian* newspaper carries no daily or even weekly listing. They apparently believe that a daily performance listing would mean losing income from display advertising so they prefer to exclude smaller companies and individuals altogether. On top of which, the standard of reviewing in *The West* is awful—dull, badly written, not interested and ill-informed. This is justified—as elsewhere—by that favourite newspaper response: their reviewers represent the views of the broader community. Oh really!

So you have the experience of a respected company like Danceworks from Melbourne performing *in absentia* recently and the best the reviewer can come up with is that it's one line short of a narrative. The lighting, by

national and international award winning designer Margie Medlin, is dismissed as "too bright" or "too dark" (the lighting and projections were fabulous). That this particular reviewer clearly knows nothing about dance or its histories, that she is clearly incapable of distinguishing between work that is polished and work that is not, that the fine performances by all the dancers are completely ignored, that she has no ability to address the sound composition by young composer Amelia Barden etc etc, just has to be endured. There is no choice. I don't give a flying !*@? whether a reviewer likes a work or not. There are differing views, different tastes and many aesthetic positions. As someone who is paid to reflect on work in public, I expect a certain degree of responsibility, consideration and information. I expect a reviewer to have the nous to admit when they're out of their depth or it's not to their taste or they've had a bad day and look beyond to what is happening in the work.

Perhaps skadada had the right idea when they screened their first short narrative video at PICA. It was free. I didn't see any review at all. They had a full house and people loved it. *Auto Auto* is a bright piece of urban pop featuring Claudia Alessi, her big red cadillac and a car wash, on her way—endlessly sidetracked—to a job interview as a dental assistant. Very cute.

Paul O'Sullivan's *Hanging in There* was an equally charming piece of work that explored such questions as why aliens never kidnap intelligent people; the relationship between yoga and classical ballet; lapsed Catholicism and the effects of sleep

deprivation (a new baby) on the independent practitioner. There's a kind of paradox for me in this friendly piece of work which addresses life's endless frustrations with such patience and admirable good humour, but then maybe that's because I'm the grumpy type. Paul, on the other hand, uses the simplest means to create a modest but engaging performance that should have had broad audience appeal but, sadly, only attracted very small houses.

Danielle Michich and Natasha Rolfe are two of the brighter young dancers currently 'emerging' as choreographers. Danielle (or Dank as she's known) presented the outcome of a recent creative development period at the Blue Room Theatre in collaboration with Natasha. *On Contact* was an exploration of—you've guessed it—contact inspired movement. It was both skillful and engaging but for me, didn't have quite the edge that their respective performance works for PICA's *Putting on an Act* had earlier in the year. Their works for that season were far more streetwise and witty, but then they were 'performances' as opposed to an exploration in movement.

I've only mentioned a few of the projects that have taken place over the past 3 months. Maybe Spring has sprung, but I for one find the fact that there is so much going on great cause for pleasure. Given the opportunity, these artists will continue to develop in both range and maturity. If, however, the level and calibre of movement-based activities continues to go unacknowledged by local media and audiences, we'll be left to wonder, yet again, where all the birdies flew off to.

in absentia, Danceworks, PICA, August 9 - 23; Auto Auto, skadada, PICA, July 19; Hanging in There, Paul O'Sullivan, PICA, August 5 - 16; On Contact, Blue Room Theatre, August 23

Excuse me for staring but...

Maryanne Lynch wonders *Which Way's Up*

Excuse me for staring but...Have you ever had sex? Do people in your country have washing machines? Do you have a drinking problem? Want to go walkabout? Excuse me for asking but...Do you cry when you're upset?

Four faces peer out from behind rope bars. Four figures enact 4 stories of 'difference.' The Indigenous woman, the migrant man, a woman with cerebral palsy, a male CP'er too. But against what or whom is this difference reckoned? Which is precisely the point of writer-director Lowana Moxham's *Which Way's Up*.

This is a performance work made up of composite parts—thematically, stylistically and in terms of the artists who've contributed to its development. Specifically, inside and outside of 'the world of the drama' are 4 people thrown together because of the perception of others; but Elizabeth Navratil, Guiliano Perez Reyes, Sharman Parsons and Michael Pini emphasise in their wittily ambivalent stage presence the dubious quality of 'us/them' definitions.

Two actors and 2 dancers, the 4 performers make their way through a series of vignettes depicting the world of 'difference' from either side of the line of dangling ropes which transforms itself from frame to prison cell to patio lattice to, as overarching metaphor, the weave and weft of the small moments that define us. Their actions are given added texture by musicians Simon Sheedy and Martin Lippi, although these 2 performers are themselves removed from the drama (a missed opportunity?).

In one of the show's most powerful sequences, a couple (Navratil and Pini) are dining at a restaurant. She needs a straw; he has a ready supply; the exchange is deeply sensual. In comes a waiter, impatient yet polite, moving the wheelchair out of the way with exaggerated care, again, and again, and again. Eventually, seizing the day, the couple simultaneously climax in a



Michael Pini and Elizabeth Navratil in *Which Way's Up*

Melanie Grey

shower of pink straws—and the waiter is left open-mouthed at the possibility of...sex?(!) He's the one who seems strangely limited.

Moxham aims to show up old prejudices and break down stereotypes by a careful analysis of the everyday. Not for her a broad sweep through her ideas but rather a playful interrogation of gesture, look and silence. *Which Way's Up* is a little uneven in its assimilation of action, artforms and performers

but the intentions—and integrity—of the work are clear.

Which Way's Up, director Lowana Moxham, designer Kate Stewart, movement consultant Scotia Monkivitch, lighting design Geoff Squires, featuring Elizabeth Navratil, Guiliano Perez Reyes, Sharman Parsons, Michael Pini, original music by Simon Sheedy, Martin Lippi, Metro Arts Theatre, Brisbane, July 21 - 25

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Three for the road

Kate Fletcher sees Murphy, Koltai and Obarzanek works in Tasdance's *Vital Expression*

The Hobart Theatre Royal Dance Subscription Season *Made to Move* has been a boon for Tasmanian dance enthusiasts and it is both exciting and appropriate that the home-grown company Tasdance has been included in the 1998 series. *Vital Expression*, a broad mix of contemporary styles, is an innovative, high quality, triple bill featuring leading Australian choreographers.

In *The Fragile Garden* the curtain rises on a haunting, gloomy set, dancers languidly reposing on chairs against a rich black velvet backdrop, the set simultaneously electrifying and chilling with its striking crimson velvet central couch and a huge slash of vibrant red cascading from the heavens. The work, created for Tasdance by Sydney choreographer Chrissie Koltai in collaboration with the dancers, is no ordinary narrative work but a fascinating "picture book of emotional landscapes" performed to a variety of music from soul-melting classical and atmospheric harmonies to the confronting discordance of Jeff Buckley. The audience is taken on an emotional joyride, alternately entrancing, jarring, sensual and aggressive. We journey through myriad responses overlain with a confusion of personal entanglements, as the dancers variously become lover, mother, father, brother, sister...

Whilst the work was not entirely captivating, there were moments of great poignancy—the playfully provocative floor work between Jay Watson and Michael O'Donoghue and a powerful "pas de trois" featuring Wendy McPhee, O'Donoghue and an armchair...a dance fragment which aptly represents "love that hurts", rejection and desire rolled into one. Experience and a long, successful working relationship between O'Donoghue and McPhee is evident in this

segment—power in motion. One of the most striking images is of O'Donoghue apparently melding into the chair (it has a personality of its own) to become a kind of mythical headless creature.

The eclectic emotional content of *The Fragile Garden* is in stark contrast to the 'pure' dance of Graeme Murphy's *Sequenza VII* named after the accompanying Luciano Berio score. Created in 1977, this vintage Murphy offering was received with appreciative chuckles from the audience. Performing in the original 1977-style costumes—white sleeveless bodysuits taking full advantage of bodylines were quite revolutionary at that time—Watson, McPhee, and O'Donoghue weave their way as one through an array of shapes and patterns, evoking kangaroos, horses, flautists and other instrumentalists emerging and re-configuring with split-second timing. Leaving nothing to chance, this fast-paced, exacting and tightly structured work is playful, witty, and thoroughly engaging.

The final piece, Gideon Obarzanek's 1994 work *While You're Down There*, with music by Joey Baron and Melt, opens with some startling, body percussion involving work boots, caterpillar movements and singing by the performers. A quirky mix of solos, duos and



Michael O'Donoghue and Wendy McPhee in *The Fragile Garden*

trios, this fast, physical and funky work further explores Tasdance's individual and collective versatility.

The company took *Vital Expressions* to Canberra as part of Ausdance's 21st birthday celebrations. It is very apt that they included *Sequenza VII* which was created 21 years ago.

Vital Expression, Tasdance, artistic director Annie Grieg; *The Fragile Garden*,

choreographed Chrissie Koltai; *Sequenza VII*, choreography Graeme Murphy; *While You're Down There*, choreography Gideon Obarzanek, Theatre Royal, Hobart, August 12 - 15; toured to Launceston, Queenstown, Ulverstone and Deloraine in August and The Choreographic Centre, Canberra in September.

Kate Fletcher is a Hobart-based teacher of drama and dance.

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9-25 OCTOBER SEYMOUR THEATRE CENTRE BOOKINGS 9364 9400

Another mapping

Zsuzsanna Soboslay feels the textures of *Thresholds*

Dance Compass packed *Thresholds* at Theatreworks with what seemed a loyal following and a varied, textured program of both forthright and meditative dances. Martin Krasner's *Stop Go Man* is a teetering exploration of balance, overbalance and sass. Colin Davey's slide image shows wonderful whimsy: 20 men atop telegraph poles, a hard-hat ballet, chrysales ready to peel out and fly.

Simon Ellis' *Touch* with improvised voice by jazz singer Christine Sullivan begins with his body suspended over a thumbprint block-mould on the floor. Who/what makes contact? The thumbprint-gelled hand-torch picking out body fragments, stretching shadows, is beautiful. But if light touches, so too could sound: there is little sense of voice shaping body too. Ellis' strength in his and others' pieces is his quirkiness, which needs to be extended and encouraged, rather than his tendency to smoothness which is lithe but does not ring as true.

For *Reflections in Y*, Jillian Pearce uses some standard teaching exercises to choreograph a work on rockclimbing (but one *can* be too knowing an audience). Alongside its literal ideas are nice realisations in movement and musculature, playing the edge between hard labour, desire, and ecstasy as these dancer-climbers come close to simulating flight.

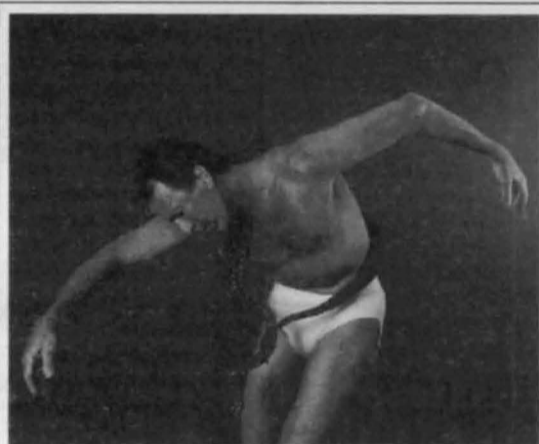
Robin Plenty's *An Echo Early* opens with 5 bodies like brain cells computing the world. A delicate sense that hiatus divides, rhythm unifies. Echoes slip, memory opens. Two bodies sway together for a while; my brain turns. This work is very fine.

Dance Compass is a positive choreographic force, producing enjoyable and highly intelligent work, the eclectic background of its dancers no doubt feeding the diversity of its practices.

Thresholds, *Dance Compass*, *Theatreworks*,
August 6 - 9

Mollie Kelly and Louisa Duckett. *Thresholds*

Ian Dun



Patrick Harding Irmer in Vesalii Icones

Babette Griep

This is a rare opportunity for Sydney audiences to experience a classic music-dance-theatre work. A solo dancer, a cellist, an instrumental ensemble, a live snake, and the Images of Vesalius (14 engravings by the great 16th century anatomist from flayed gallows specimens) are the potent ingredients of music theatre innovator Peter Maxwell Davies' *Vesalii Icones* (1969). This is not a music theatre dialogue between voice and accompanying instruments, but between a modern Christ, the dancer, moving through the Stations of the Cross, and instrumentalists with a theatrical life of their own, principally the cello, described by Paul Griffiths in *Modern Music after 1945* (OUP 1995) as the dancer's shadow, partner, or ideal." Griffiths regards the work as "the most intense" of all Maxwell Davies' creations, its blend of high seriousness and

shown on stage is a violence which the music is doing to itself." Patrick Harding-Irmer is the dancer, one-time Australian Dance Theatre artistic director Jonathan Taylor directs and choreographs, and Mark Summerbell conducts The Seymour Group. *Vesalii Icones*, Music Theatre Sydney, Newtown Theatre, October 8 - 10. Bookings 9519 5081



Chunky Move. C.O.R.R.U.P.T.E.D 2

Branco Galca

There's a moment in Gideon Obarzanek's *C.O.R.R.U.P.T.E.D 2*, the final work in Chunky Move's latest offering, *Fleshmeet*, when a solo dancer in diaphanous clothing moves in white light to a slow walking pattern beside a vast tilting screen. The scene starts with its scale and starkness. The movement is beautiful. But too soon the moment evaporates. After the sharply evocative opening, the architectonic relationship between dancer and screen dissolves and what was a vertiginous, ominous presence assumes secondary role to the enactment of more predictable trios and solos, as impressively fast and lyrical as they are from the fine ensemble of performers. *C.O.R.R.U.P.T.E.D 2* feels like a work awaiting its full realisation.

Paul Selwyn-Norton's *The Rogue Tool* is a reverie on transformation, an engagement with objects as supports for and extensions to the body. It's a more sustained piece that gives the audience time to decipher and enter its disturbing world. Dancers move purposefully into position and rigidify, propping each other up with poles like prostheses. People become objects. Their stillness is total, eerie. Through this strange landscape skirts the fabulously dexterous Luke Smiles in routines reminiscent of vaudeville but extending way beyond the limits of time and body. Damien Cooper's lights have their own rhythm, cutting out in the middle of a movement or coming up to full strength at the end. Fred Frith's unusually lyrical guitar is sublime, recorded with perfect clarity and played as it should be—loud and clear.

No doubt about it, *C.O.R.R.U.P.T.E.D 1* is virtuosic. While sections of the audience revel in Obarzanek's hyper-animated parody of soap opera, for others its strangely old-fashioned with none of the moral urgings of contemporary soap. It's classic farce—accelerated action, comic personae, simple suspense, clever detailing of body movement especially from Fiona Cameron in a fabulous dress that seems to have a mind of its own. Like some entr'acte from burlesque, the piece is performed on the forestage in front of the curtain. The sexual politics are as musty—repressed wife discards spectacles and blossoms in momentary sexual dalliance with TV repairman. What satisfies at the level of virtuosity and dramaturgical inventiveness, in substance doesn't connect beyond cliché. Chunky Move has power and precision, and now in evidence a sense of delicacy, but the pleasures of the company's work still appear to rest on the surface, something darker, more thoughtful waiting just below, unseen. VB, KG

VB, KG

Fleshmeet, *Chunky Move*, choreographers Gideon Obarzanek, Paul Selwyn Norton; performers Fiona Cameron, Brett Daffy, Lisa Griffiths, Kirstie McCracken, Byron Perry, Luke Smiles, David Tyndall; Seymour Theatre Centre, Sydney, September 12 - 26; Melbourne Festival, C.U.B. Malthouse, Melbourne, October 21 - 31

Solon Ulbrich and Gilli O'Connell, *Bodies*

Andrew Fisher

Produced and presented by Mark Cleary, director of the Newtown Theatre, with artistic director Norman Hall, the annual *Bodies* season showcases a range of contemporary dance from independent choreographers around Australia. The event has become a firm part of the Sydney dance calendar offering the opportunity to see the work of a distinctive group of practitioners. This year's *Bodies* include Paulina Quinteros (winner of an Australian Institute of Classical Dance [AICD] Dance Creation choreographic award this year in Melbourne), James Taylor, Jan Pinkerton, Virginia Ferris, Solon Ulbrich, Ichiro Harada, Deborah Mills, Cathryn Magill, Jacqui Simmonds, Jamie Jewel, Norman Hall, Veronica Gillmer, Derek Porter, Sydney Salter, Kate Denborough, Kenny Feather, Elizabeth Lea and Peter Cook. The supplementary Youthworks program features student choreographers and dance works every Saturday during the *Bodies* season. RT

RT

*Bodies, Newtown Theatre, Wed - Sat 8pm, Sun 5pm,
October 21 - November 8 tel 9519 5081*



Angeline Lai, *Territory, One Extra*

Heidrun Löhr

In an unusual combination of talents for dance, or rather dance-theatre, the usual role of choreographer as director becomes two roles, Janet Robertson directing and Sue Healey choreographing. They're collaborating with designers Eamon D'Arcy (space), Damien Cooper (light) and Julia Christie (costume) in One Extra's *Territory*, a dance-theatre work devised by Robertson. Jad Macadam designs the sound environment, Sarah Hopkins has created a series of evocative compositions for cello and voice. Performed by One Extra affiliate artist Lisa Ffrench and newcomer Angeline Lai with a guest appearance by Marilyn Miller (Bangarra Dance Theatre), *Territory* traces time lines and patterns of migration. At its centre are the journeys of an English bride of the 1890s and an Asian bride of the 1970s both travelling through an unfamiliar landscape. As their ground is mapped and divided they cross paths with an Aboriginal woman whose land lies locked behind cattle guards. Explore *Territory* at the York Theatre, the Seymour Theatre Centre, Sydney October 8 - 9, 14 - 25. Tel 02 9364 9400

Story spaces

Dean Kiley's critical guide to the shapes of hyperfiction

The pneumatic conjunction of hypertext and fiction should have by now spawned a whole happy brood of bastard mongrels. Apart from the inevitable neologism (hyperfiction), however, there's not been much hybridity. Some prefab plug-in-addicted multimedia extravaganzas, yes, a few shrink-wrapped join-the-dots novellas, lots of frustratingly static and linear word-processing (put text on template, add pictures, upload, watch users get scroll-bar-RSI) and much hopscotching (recipe: chop text into ungraceful and/or illogical small chunks, string a few links or loops between them, add colour and backgrounds, season lightly with gif animations and stew; do not stir; do not cook; do not improvise). Tristram Shandy did it all better, faster, funnier, 200 years ago.

Having got that small rant out of the way, let's look at some of the modes, genre and shapes of hyperfiction currently available, starting with the most compact and least scary. Stand-alone hypertexts (which aren't online and often aren't html in format: anyone remember HyperCard?), despite their generally precarious positioning as intermediate technology, are still produced at a steady Big Mac rate.

In America especially, programs such as Storyspace are enduringly popular, perhaps specifically because they don't rely on the extras to go online. Storyspace has also gained ground in schools and universities here (eg RMIT) as an authoring environment, a concept-mapping or storyboarding medium, or a pre-structuring device for websites, but in the US it's absurdly successful in Composition classes and for hypertexted novels (see <http://www.eastgate.com/> for fiction samples and program details). This hermetically sealed version of hyperfiction runs on scaled-down or simplified components of its web-based counterpart and, since it's not networked out into the vertigo of the www, it's somewhat easier to manage: you can see the horizons of the text and juggle between precise, comprehensive overviews in ways that aren't possible on the web.

That means a stand-alone hyperfiction (and don't forget the steady dribble of Big Name Authors like Carmel Bird who are now releasing novels on CD-ROM) can be domesticated and authorised, processed back into the paper-pulp mainstream. Witness the Norton Anthology of hypertext fiction. Or the new academic journal (sponsored by Eastgate), *Modern Fiction Studies*, devoted entirely to Storyspace-based hypertextual fiction. Sad.

Meanwhile, the web venues you'd expect to be most amenable to hyperfiction—web journals or ezines—largely perpetuate the inertia caused by still thinking of The Page as the basic design unit, and print analogues as default settings. The seductive properties (and opportunities) of hypertext thus get truncated or overstructured, bad-metaphor-stretched or literalised. The sense of a projective imagination responsively immersed in a fictional environment (with all its gaming potential), the experience of being a semi-free agent inhabiting a narrative sequence, the 3D solicitation to co-construct the story...they all lose out to the legitimisation of either The Anthology, The Short Story Collection or The Literary Magazine. Which nearly always means cut-up-n-pasted-n-mounted Text + Graphics = Onscreen hyperfiction.

Read Janet H Murray's *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), bypassing the hype as you go, to get a feel for what's being passed up when hyperfiction becomes hypedfiction (inert at one extreme and overbusy with whizzbang whatsits at the other). Have a look at the TextBase site (<http://www.skynet.apana.org.au/~samiam/te>



xtbase/textbase.htm) to see what can be done when the word 'hypertextual' can be unembarrassedly applied to all dimensions of the writing.

There is no reason, given that hypertext allows a synthesis and synaesthesia between text and graphics, for traditional genre borders to remain impermeable either. *House '97*, for instance (<http://house.curtin.edu.au/>), based at Curtin University, had elements it called 'comics' that were nonetheless effective narratives looping through other live-radio and webcast events, stage performances later reworked for the web, and 'ordinary' short-story-type fiction. Haiku theatre and other forms of dramaturgy (like soap opera) become meshed or framed or reworked by hyperfiction in the *Venew* site (<http://www.aftrs.edu.au/venew/>). *GRAFFITO*, a political satire journal, manages to be hypertextual despite being in the form of plain-text emailing list: though it's posted without graphics or formatting, the poems and rants and stories build on each other, sequel each other, refer allusively and hilariously to each other and current events, and reflect the juxtapositional, jumpy logic of hypertext in the reading experience.

More fundamentally, the text versus graphics 'illustrative' relationship so beloved of almost-print designers is satisfyingly sent-up and subverted (as per theorist Gregory Ulmer's influence) in the *Parallel* sites (<http://www.va.com.au/parallel/x1/index.html>) with their artificial and unsustainable separation between 'gallery' and 'journal' while engaging multidisciplinary and multimedia artists to produce pieces that interact or correlate beyond And Here's A Gif Of That Too. Moreover, I think we're

seeing a slow generic version of continental shift, as fiction writers become their own designers of elements usually relegated to the practice of poetry (line-length, scansion, extended rhythmic patterns etc) and graphic artists (typeface, colour, texture, framing, pictures, etc). All of this, of course, is irrelevant where the venue for the hyperfiction is either a web journal with a standardised 'house style' or a kind of onscreen/online brochure appendage to the 'real' print version.

At the level of narrative, the text-vs-graphics relationship between plot and story, and between structure and genre, can be inventively played with rather than imported wholesale from print. So the 'narrative logics' of hyperfictions can productively be experienced (to reduce them to metaphors for the sake of categorising): as a series of nested funnels; as branching sequences of choices and nodes; as counterpoint or fugue; as mirrored or paralleled characters and/or stories; as spliced montages or found-object film; as multiple layers or collages; as bricolage, with your active involvement in 3D construction; as Tinkerbells (from the old Disney story-reading records where Tinkerbelle would tell you when it was time to turn the page) read left-right-top-bottom with a button to read further; as loops or cycles; as boardgames (sets of steps or 'moves', some chance rolls of the dice, then back to some starting point again); as an automated public-transport ticket dispenser (lotsa buttons taking you nowhere); as braided river-deltas (Kirsten Krauth noted this in an earlier piece); as concordances (with links and other material working like references); as weeds or 'rhizomes', spreading across surfaces without clear beginnings or ends or structures.

And when more than one author is involved, or more than one version of a given piece of writing, or enough overlap among pieces to function as an cumulative hypertext, then it becomes even more interesting and complex, with all kinds of interleaving, turn-taking, switchboard, chorus, and other narratorial or narrating possibilities. Ditto for multiple or competing timeframes or characters' versions of events. Ditto for multiplying techniques of reader-orientation (whose voice is this? is that a site-map? will this button do the same thing each time?), pacing (the sequencing of lines of narrative), web-effects (animation, dynamic html, movies, sounds) and resolution (The End? no ending? several options? ambiguity levels?).

Expectations of this 'new' medium and mode for storytelling are perhaps unfairly high, resulting in exaggerated irritability if the message isn't massaged for the media, but it means many of the old rules of

conventional and convention-driven narrative can be bent, broken, ignored, renovated or reinvented.

Even better, since there are no set conventions for onscreen rendering of fiction, every design vector can be extrapolated or modelled from the story itself (I'd say 'organically' but that'd be too romantic and optimistic). At the risk of vested-interest, look at the ways a story can be enacted (rather than literalised), a piece about an increasingly psychotic wife who (jealous of her husband's love for his grandfather's house) dismantles the house while pretending to renovate it, in the new *Extra!* journal: <http://members.xoom.com/olandel/callaban2/index.html> (temporary site).

Why do we have to wait till someone starts up a competition (like the now-annual *stuff-art* contest run by Triple J, ABC Online and the Australian Film Commission) before onscreen and online writing appears that exploits the medium, mode and emergent genres? Why are so many print and magazine conventions being hauled over hypertexts like an alien diagnostic apparatus? Why are the very design and material components of paper publishing still being translated, literally and often crudely, to the monitor? Why aren't there more Oz web journals willing to broker, sponsor, solicit, commission and house hyperfiction that earns and enacts its prefix? And if it's out there, or you've been doing it, why aren't you writing about it for this series on hyperfiction in *RealTime*?

For Dean Kiley's guide to examples of hyperfiction types, visit the links page of the RealTime website

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

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Write sites

Kirsten Krauth looks at words on the net

<http://www.wollongong.starway.net.au/~mezandwalt/>

A chaotic landscape of new language. Words crossed out become strong enough to explode. A challenge, this cybernetic form like Shakespeare, inventive and striking. *Fleshis.tics*, an erotic mo[ve]ment, a roll of the code. I am getting overtaken by square brackets. The question at the bottom of the scroll bar *r u cur[e].i.ous?* and yes, I am, I am in a hurry to control and master these strokes, these unconvensions. Some of the links won't work. Is this part of the design *r u paranoid?*

I want to break her coded terms and become unhinged. *With Man*, bi[y]tes of dating pain and seduction, *SHOT*, a pulsing target of

pump-started action jam-packed with wor[d]ks to explore. *A disgruntled book of wizzdums* is, like *gashgirl*, infused with blood and anger where women become "frisking corpses that will leave plastic fragments in the ground", voluptuous words of spite and pleasure:

*If I am lucky I will be empty, void;
and get a job - from 9 to
5, get married, screw
barmaids and abuse my
children like everyone*

<http://www.feline.to/>

Feline. Click on her animal eyes, exotically tattooed in leopard markings and enter the

grrrls own zone, signposted by primitive drawings and spiritual messages and z's instead of s's. Wordz and wit (mmm...) with some nice techy stuff; as you pass your mouse over the poet, the name appears, hovering, insubstantial. Poetry includes Holly Day's *frigid*, words over chiaroscuro light through fractured window, streams into stereotype, and Susan Jenvey's *On the Shortest Day*, realaudio and sound effects about pain and isolation. There's not much text online yet; only 3 prose pieces, 2 by the same writer Karen Boulay. *Too Late*, her affectionate hymn to the anally retentive, has an effective blocked rhythm, the splash of routine. My mouse starts to get twitchy around any section called *Mind, Body and Spirit*. That new-agey, chakra-healing, re-birthing, go-with-the-flowing means content as dull as a hippie kid's lunchbox. And believe me, I know.

<http://www.thetherapist.com/index.html>

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can't wait the week to visit Dr Katz, or if your own therapist charges a hundred bucks an hour, check yourself in for a daily dose of psychobabble. (Not suitable for hypochondriacs or avoidance personality disorders.) Daily transcripts, weekly updates of filing cabinet contents, patient files—that delicious feeling you are spying, ransacking the sock drawer for clues, evidence, even medication. Will Alex continue to be stalked by Regina? Will Katherine find her father in Alaska? Will Herb ever get over his drug addiction? Will the identity of The Anonymous Faxer finally be revealed?

I'm sorry, your time is up for today...

If you've come across any websites featuring interesting hyperfiction/ experimental writing, please email URL to Kirsten: opencity@timearts.com

500 words

The Jason Sweeney feedback to Doppio-Parallelo's *On Contested Ground*

At an intersection of ideas, theories, words, predictions. I'm in observation of, like surveillance of, a public conversation, travelling, omloop (circular), *On Contested Ground*, a site of unfinished sentences. Researching/questioning my own personal histories, digging into memory, physical dis/ability, confronting race/racism. Doppio-Parallelo, in "an open cross-cultural platfo:m", gathers 6 voices on a panel, facilitated by Teresa Crea, live and online via a bulletin board discussion, I must respond in 500 (English) words. There's a clash of signals. I note down the frequencies.

01: Unbroken lines. Wesley Enoch shows photographs, trails of recollection, stories to be told, as yet untold, memory shelved, packed away. Language created by physical space, lines upon lines, finding a context in which to say things.

02: Making noise, unfiltered, unsettling the 'normalisation' desired by mainstream, confronting the 'other' when the 'other' is always tested, made outcast, into the realm of possible erasure. Sally Chance, embracing

difference with her Restless Dance Company collaborators, investigating dance as language, bodies with which to speak, driven by a culture of disability, layerings of diversity, moving in parallel.

03: Shocked noises, frightened by the lists of John Howard's insidious and subversive killing off/dismantling of 'multicultural industry.' It's there. Surfacing. I know. Prof. Mary Kalantzis guided us through the overhead projections, the horrible facts. She tells us she's miserable.

04: Adaptions, adoptions, appropriations. Methods of (new) understandings. Origins of hip hop, global/local interchange, sonic forms traversing borders and nations, a rap discourse. Tony Mitchell investigates networks of musical forms such as turntablism, MCing, DJing as transcending geographical constraint, maintaining its memory, its roots.

05: Massimo Ranieri, speaking of an "anthropology of theatre", explorations of the (individual) body of the actor, about



Mary Kalantzis, *On Contested Ground*

Peter Heydrich

stories forgotten, a knowledge of acceptance, of difference, coursing through the body, body memory, body language. Not content to disappear. A collective body, connected, that speaks. Challenging invented realities, revisiting systems of values, possible meetings. Questions of missing links.

06: And then I'm humming the words to a Stereolab song: "You go in this team, I go on that team, divide everything, a flag or a number." I've written it down so it must be important. Ramesh Rangarajan (Operations Manager, Motorola Australia Software

Centre, Adelaide) introduces the concept of "managing a culturally diverse workforce." Team work. A workforce built from a "global resource pool", skilled professionals providing 'transnational mobility.' A globalised business. Product designed and developed by these teams, individuals making up a (w)hole, striving for Motorola's aspirations of "basic commonality." I'm seeing double. Business product/Arts product. With an emphasis on speed, technology, a high 6-month turn-over, built to last. Motorola 'attuned' to the needs and value systems of individual workers. A business 'culture', a machine operating on its self-devised dynamic working environment. What of the erasure of personal identity? Of losing memory of the self in order to achieve the goals of a high-powered industry? Calming the noise. Who said that?

And at 495 words, what more can I say?

On Contested Ground, presented by Doppio-Parallelo, Ngapartji Multimedia Centre, Adelaide, August 28. Visit <http://www.orca.on.net/frame.html> and go to General CCD discussion for online responses.

Jason Sweeney is a writer and sound artist/musician. He is currently working on a novel, *Family Reunion*, investigating family histories, technology and memory.

The truth of our past

Greg Gardiner and Peter Eckersall report on the Reconciliation & The Performance Arts forum

The forum discussed issues central to the debate on Reconciliation in the context of the performing arts. This unique event gave arts practitioners, performing artists and members of the Indigenous and non-indigenous communities the opportunity to discuss these matters for the first time in such a forum. The Reverend Tim Costello chaired the afternoon event attended by over 150 people.

Joy Murphy, an elder of the Wurundjeri community, traditional owners of the lands of Melbourne, opened the forum. She was followed by Helen Curzon-Siggers, former Director of the Koorie Research Centre, who gave an intense and emotional account of the various meanings the term reconciliation held for her as an Indigenous person, combining reflections that were both personal and political. Her message was essentially about the need for honesty, truth and integrity in dealings between white and black Australia—and the importance of dealing with the past.

In a survey of the moments in our history when reconciliation seemed possible, Professor Henry Reynolds noted how in the 1990s such an opportunity had once again been let slip by

the pastoral industry. As he pointed out, the pastoral industry simply would not have been sustainable were it not for the historical involvement of Indigenous people. But Reynolds was also at pains to point out that reconciliation was taking place, regardless of what conservative governments did, and he was particularly upbeat about the way young people understood the necessity and the meaning of reconciliation.

In the second half of the program, actor Glenn Shea spoke about the importance of achieving some reality in the representation of Indigenous people: it's still the case that in so much theatre, film and TV, Indigenous people are generally shown stereotypically. There is an apparent aversion in the performing arts, in their broadest definition, to confront the truth of Australia's colonial experience, and what had actually happened to Indigenous people. So for Glenn the issue is as much about content as form, and he also stressed how centrally placed the performing arts are to give expression to the truth of our past. He suggested that Indigenous people be included in casting sessions as a matter of course so that they might play diverse roles

and thereby naturalise the presence of Indigenous people in Australian society.

Director and performer Susie Dee gave an account of the collaborative projects she had worked on involving Indigenous people. As a white director working with Indigenous texts, writers and performers she was now aware of the importance of negotiation through the creative process; of the need to take the process step by step, and not make assumptions beforehand; of the importance of not denying one's own feelings of guilt or apprehension as a white Australian, and working through such feelings in the context of performance making.

Actor Tony Briggs spoke eloquently about his family, his childhood, and the historical and contemporary misrepresentation of Indigenous people. Echoing the sentiments expressed by Glenn, Tony also raised the question of who could legitimately represent Indigenous people and their history. He emphasised the critical role that consultation now had to play in works about or involving Indigenous people: that it was vital that Indigenous people be consulted before projects were embarked on, before the storylines were completed. Pre-project stage consultation could

ensure that the problems of misrepresentation, so commonly experienced by both whole communities and individuals, could be avoided, and real and viable partnerships created.

Angela Chaplin, Artistic Director of Deck Chair Theatre, also took up the issues of representation and collaboration, speaking about her experiences working with Indigenous people, how rewarding it was, and how important it was to be straightforward and honest for reconciliation to work. This meant not romanticising Indigenous people, but showing respect, listening and learning—for Angela the issue of collaboration was partly about the opportunity it presents for non-indigenous people like herself to get to know Indigenous perspectives, and forge creative partnerships with Indigenous artists. This is the process that actually brings reconciliation into being.

The forum was also considered a good starting point for future discussion and creative activity. Publication of the forum's proceedings will be undertaken with support from the Koorie Research Centre, Monash University.

The Forum: Reconciliation & The Performance Arts, organisers Paul Monaghan, Greg Gardiner; an initiative of NYID performance group, co-hosted by Theatreworks & the Koorie Research Centre, Monash University, August 16

OnScreen

film, media and techno-arts

Feature

Black holes

Adrian Martin rescues recent Abel Ferrara films from video shop oblivion

Kathleen's Way

In Abel Ferrara's *The Addiction* (1994) a woman undergoes constant transformation. From scene to scene, she is a progressively different creature. There is a simple, generic explanation for this: Kathleen, the character, has been bitten by a vampire in the opening moments of the story. But this ceaseless mutation is far more profoundly a matter of the performance of the actor, Lili Taylor. Her look, her voice, her postural manner alter radically in the course of her descent into her ferocious embrace of 'the hunger.'

At some moments, Taylor appears to be playing a 3 dimensional, naturalistic, psychological character enrolled in a philosophy course at NYU. At other moments, she is more like a ghost or apparition, whispering frantically, staring off in a trance while others attempt to read her. For a stretch—judging from the dark shades and vocal drawl—she may well be mimicking Ferrara himself ("a film is everything I am", he has said). In a superb quickening of the film mid-way, she approaches a man on the street who immediately says what she says to each of her victims—"tell me to go away and say it like you mean it"—and in that moment Lili Taylor passes into Christopher Walken, and vice versa. Eventually, Kathleen as a character will even cryptically split into 2 distinct incarnations.

The films of Abel Ferrara always build themselves upon such metamorphoses and exchanges of character, whatever the genre or pretext, whether it's a horror movie like *Bodysnatchers* (1994) or a street drama like *Bad Lieutenant* (1992). His is an X-ray cinema: either his characters turn themselves inside out, plunging into a fiery underworld that renders them transparent (*King of New York*, 1990), or we come to see, by the end of the lesson, the complex networks of money, bone, blood and impulse behind everyday people, facades and gestures—like the banal opening shot of a guy walking out of his suburban front door (*Dangerous Game*, 1993).

There is a religious-didactic element to many Ferrara films (especially those scripted by Nicholas St John—"the bottom line is, he's a believer", says Ferrara), a narrative structure more akin to the stations of the cross than Hollywood's generic templates. His films are a jerky, disconcerting succession of tableaux vivants

("coolly sustained, dilated and de-dramatised", as Edward Colless describes Ferrara's style in the September *Australian Book Review*)—pockets of story or pieces of worlds, cast adrift as islands between large lakes of plot ellipsis (a practice taken to an extreme in *The Funeral*, 1996). His characters cross these black holes only with the greatest and most violent difficulty, as if tearing themselves on glass with each fraught step—and each mutilation comes to mark a mutation of their internal being and external frame.

At least thrice in *The Addiction* Lili Taylor, alone in the shot, is allowed to produce her performing 'self' in a way that reaches beyond the conventional language of gesture and psychological character. Early in the film, she sees for the first time (we have to deduce this) her non-reflection in her apartment mirror. She steps back and suddenly flings her arms up as if to inaugurate a bacchanalian dance; then a cut, rather than taking us closer into the action or continuing it, whisks the apparition away—but it picks up the energy of her movement, its current, and hurls it into the next scene. In another tableau, Kathleen is experiencing the first pain of her vampiric metamorphosis: Taylor lies on her back, emitting sounds, waving her bent legs lazily—in some indistinct realm mingling birth, orgasm and terminal illness. In another astonishing interlude (preceding the cathartic vampire orgy during post-graduation drinks), Kathleen retires to a small room and struggles with herself—literally, gripping and clawing at her own body as if to subdue a demon or extract a preferred, more civilised double.

The same dame

Ferrara is among the most sophisticated of contemporary American directors—his films become more experimental with every outing—but he is also one of the least self-conscious, at least in that hip, playfully knowing, postmodern way enshrined in movies since the 80s. *The Addiction* (unlike Michael Almereyda's contemporaneous *Nadja*) is a genuine throwback to such stylish, minimal, black and white horror movies of the early 60s as *Carnival of Souls* (1962). Like that memorable film, *The Addiction* assumes its fantastique premise (vampires prowling the streets) almost as an



Abel Ferrara

everyday mundanity—all the better to immerse itself in the mysterious, fluctuating moods and intensities of an unspecific 'post trauma' state. Many Ferrara films begin soon after a 'big bang' has occurred—some apocalypse, breakdown or stealthy contamination of the normal world by its all-purpose 'others' (bodysnatchers, vampires, gangsters). His fictions record the fall-out of these traumas—and the doomed attempts of anti-heroes to scramble back to imagined, gothic moments of origin.

The Blackout (1997)—one of the director's richest and most remarkable films—is an all-out excavation of one man's post-trauma crisis. Again, seeming hip and original is scarcely Ferrara's concern: the story places one of his typically shambling, angst-ridden, obsessive-addictive dudes (here played by Matthew Modine) inside a bizarre art-movie conceit. Dennis Hopper incarnates a grandiose 'conceptualist', a man with a video camera, an empty, labyrinthine club and an endless supply of willing real-life victims. He is nominally embarking on an adaptation of Zola's *Nana*, but his project instantly fragments into a decadent 'happening.' And inside this 60s-style, trippy psychodrama is where Modine will experience and eventually try to recover his very own black hole—his original sin.

The film is fairly drenched in masculine guilt. In a monumentally scrambled montage—whose rhythms, surges and undertows are expertly hooked up to a superb soundtrack collage—Modine hangs, lost and deluded, between 2 women who represent the divided parts of his life. With Beatrice Dalle, he 'threw it all away' in a haze of booze, drugs and frazzled recriminations—and she is now mysteriously absent, maybe dead. With Claudia Schiffer, he lives a nurturing, healing, settled family life. It's the famous John Cassavetes crucible: night life and day life in a dizzy,

unreconcilable interchange, neither life securing rest or pleasure once and for all.

When Modine eventually encounters an 'Annie 2'—the voice of Dalle spookily emitting from the mouth of a girl in a diner, à la *Lost Highway* or *Naked Lunch*—we enter an uncanny vortex of phantasmic duplications and repetitions, with all preceding plot suppositions becoming even more scrambled. Something terrible has happened in the blackout—and, in true Ferrara style, the hero can only pierce that darkness by hopping off the wagon and recreating the psychic conditions of his last and worst binge. And so the whole hurdy-gurdy of film and video images, hellish superimpositions, and Hopper's never-to-be-completed magnum opus starts grinding through again—except, this time, with a stunning, out-of-body pay-off, a sublime and disconcerting ending on par with that of Rossellini's *Paisà* (1946).

Cinephiles will be having their own uncanny flashbacks throughout *The Blackout*—mainly to all those films in the wake of Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (including *L'Immortelle*, *The Legend of Lylah Clare* and *Lost Highway*) which play out the tortuous drama of one woman 'reincarnated' by another for the sake of a (usually) sick, driven man in the grip of his own lethally projective narcissism. This peculiar and haunting tradition has its prize comedy, too: Preston Sturges' *The Lady Eve* (1941), in which the savvy, card-sharp heroine (Barbara Stanwyck) plays precisely on her ex-lover's distracted, easily deluded mindset by recreating herself as someone else. Sturges' profound tale of revenge and comeuppance between the sexes anticipates many of the themes and undercurrents of Hitchcockian drama (such as the stiffly unforgiving man of *Notorious*), as well as the dizzy games of identity and misrecognition that stalk *The Blackout*. Only a secondary character actor in *The Lady Eve*—William Demarest spying through windows and skulking through doors—sees the obscene truth of these double dealings, muttering to himself wherever he goes: "It's positively the same dame."

The Blackout has recently been released locally on video by Roadshow; *The Addiction* is available from shops that import Pathe titles from the UK.

Technologies of memory

Adrian Miles traces the movement and presence of Chris Marker

Chris Marker may have been born Christian François Bouche-Villeneuve on July 29 1921 to an American father and Russian mother. He may have fought during the Second World War, he may have been a US Paratrooper during this war, he may have been a member of the French Resistance. He is, or has been, a close friend of all those people he has filmed, recorded, or assisted; for instance Alexander Medvedkin, Alain Resnais, Agnes Varda, Yves Montand, Simone Signoret, Joris Ivens

and Akira Kurosawa. Indeed with Marker one of the few things that we can be sure of is who his friends are—that we are less sure of who he is (a rather odd situation if you think about yourself for a moment) is because the only Marker that we know, that we get, is from his work.

There are perhaps 3 extant images of Marker (the most recent a shop window reflection in Wender's *Tokyo-Ga* 1985), the few interviews available playful and elliptical, so the only documentary evidence



Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil* (Sunless)

available that there is someone called Chris Marker is the testimony of peers and the objects bearing his name. That we may only 'know' Marker through his work is a banal truism in our poststructural age, but it remains equally true that it is a rarity to meet a figure so unobtrusively intent on not "being" known so that their work provides the only trace of their movement and presence (though Maurice Blanchot and J.D. Salinger come to mind).

This means that we must turn to the texts to describe Marker's enigmatic and singular contribution to cinema, though this would be to misread his oeuvre. Marker is not a cineaste. At various times a poet, essayist, photographer, filmmaker, video maker, video artist, installation artist, and most recently a multimedia designer, Marker's work is marked less by his record as a filmmaker than a willingness to adopt and adapt technologies of record to his poetic and essayist ends.

Much of this work is about what could be described as the technologies of memory, of record, of the processes and activities of joining or combining memory with the quotidian to find how the individual or singular is lost within the general (this is precisely the case in Marker's most quoted—and misunderstood—example of documentary 'style', the three buses of *Letter From Siberia* 1958). The distance we think exists between anthropology, in its most general sense, and politics is erased by Marker as he produces specific meditations around very particular events, for example Medvedkin's cows in *The Last Bolshevik* (1993), or the time traveller of *La Jetée* (1962/4) who haunts a museum of anthropology. This produces a universe that is populated by images and events that are the meeting of the everyday and its remembering, eventually maturing into an essayist style that combines an anthropologist's gaze with an idiosyncratic political humanism, and it is this style that Marker translates across technologies.

But even this would be to misread his oeuvre. Marker is not an adopter and adapter of technologies of record or memory, rather he has been adopted and adapted by the 20th century's principal technologies of record (perhaps this is why Alain Resnais suspects he might be from another planet). They have inhabited him, and it is this quality in his work that actually produces its

most impressive complexities. A Marker object is not just a performance of lyrical writing, shifting narrative voice and address, with sometimes violent, associative, but often elegiac montage, but always becomes a fascination with particular memories (some might call this history) and its institutional apparatuses. Marker's use of words and pictures is to prise these open, making them flat and impossibly dense, all at the same time. This is a method that uses direct testimony, found footage, historical record, personal account, fiction, and appropriated media, combining them into a concrete meditation and poetry where the objects used (ideas are always objects for Marker) have an equivalence that is separated from their valency. These idea-objects have their own histories, their own memories, and Marker traces where and how they may intersect ours.

Thus it is the recognition of the flux of the world that informs Marker's mode of address, and while it eludes description, it also appears increasingly relevant that Marker offers an ethics of memory where to remember is always cast into the future. This is a particular hermeneutics where the meanings that are prised from the already-having-been are never placed at the service of a revised history but inform an ongoing engagement. Indeed, if analogue cinema does turn out to be a transitional medium on the way to something else, then Marker is the only figure who has identified, and possibly understood, this trajectory (indeed it is the works' openness to the future that also accounts for Marker's use of new technologies). He is a figure whose first memory of films is situated in a genuinely silent cinema and who authored his first interactive multimedia CD-ROM (*Immemory* 1997) at 75 years of age.

Marker's relevance is not a result of a pragmatic sliding across this century's technologies of reproduction. His is a manner that is easily misunderstood for being only 'style' when in fact it is a methodology of performance that combines documentation, argument and an intellectual élan that contemporary theories of discourse describe, but generally can't demonstrate. Marker has not only invented a genre, he is also trying to invent a language adequate to it.

Film and video work from the peripatetic journals of Chris Marker, AFI and the National Cinematheque, Chauvel, Sydney, September 12 - 14; State Film Theatre, Melbourne, September 16 - 23; Metway Theatre, Brisbane, September 21 - 25; Palace, Adelaide, September 27 - 30; Cinema Paradiso, Perth, October 3; AFI State, Hobart, October 12

Adrian Miles lectures in cinema and new media at RMIT University. He first published the Chris Marker WWW site (<http://cs.art.rmit.edu.au/marker>) in 1993, and is currently researching the relationship between cinema and hypertext.



CONVERGENCE
CULTURE AND POLICY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

CONFERENCE

BRISBANE

18-20 NOVEMBER 1998

WHAT THE CONFERENCE IS ABOUT

The *Convergence* conference is about taking seriously the realities and implications of digital convergence in the cultural field.

It is a conference about the convergence of technologies, communications systems and content, of broadcasting and collecting institutions, of temporal and interactive media, of practices and art forms, of industry and culture and of policy domains—culture, industry, information, communications.

The major themes of the conference will include:

- Broadcasting and content in and beyond national regulation
- Intellectual property—managing cultural rights in the digital age
- Collections and digitisation (museums, galleries, libraries)
- Arts beyond genres: practising and understanding hybridity
- The local in the global (local practices, identities and government)
- Information infrastructures and creative infrastructures
- From temporal to interactive media

INVITED SPEAKERS INCLUDE

- | | |
|--|---|
| • Henrikas Yushkevichus , Assistant Director-General of UNESCO for Communication, Information and Informatics | • Tom O'Regan , Communication Studies, Murdoch University |
| • Richard Collins , British Film Institute | • Terri Janke , Indigenous Intellectual Property Solicitor |
| • Stuart Cunningham , Media and Journalism, Queensland University of Technology | • Mark Latham MP , Shadow Minister for Education and Youth Affairs |
| • Ian Delaney , ATSIAC Commissioner for Arts, Broadcasting and the Environment | • John Rimmer , Chair, New Media Arts Fund, Australia Council for the Arts |
| • Louise Denoon , Director, Ipswich Global Arts Link | • Cathy Robinson , Chief Executive, Australian Film Commission |
| • Patricia Gillard , Roy Morgan Research | • Christina Spurgeon , Southern Cross University |
| • Jock Given , Director, Communications Law Centre | • Sally Stockbridge , Senior Classification Officer, Network Ten |
| • Gareth Grainger , Deputy Chairman, Australian Broadcasting Authority | • Eric Wainwright , Pro-Vice-Chancellor, James Cook University |
| • Geoff Heriot , General Manager, Corporate Strategy, ABC | • Roger Wallis , Multimedia Research Group, City University, London |
| • Colin Mercer , Comedia UK | • Robin Wright , Online Manager, Cinemedia |
| | • Janet Wasko , University of Oregon |

WHAT FORM WILL THE CONFERENCE TAKE?

The conference will be a single-strand event comprising keynotes and 'focus sessions' held over three days. The draft program and speaker abstracts can be found on the conference website.

The conference co-organisers are Colin Mercer, Julian Thomas, Terry Flew and Ben Goldsmith for the Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy.

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CMP

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



Voicing documentaries

Ann Penhallurick talks with Gillian Leahy and Belinda Mason about their new films

I'm not sorry to see the filmmaker's voice return in a way that is not totally spurious—that's why we make films, to change things.
Gillian Leahy

In the end it is Anne's story and she told it so well...it's not my story.
Belinda Mason

I've long had a fascination with voice in film. In other contexts I've argued that its power is immense, the more so for being largely unacknowledged. While sound (music) tracks have recently become fashionable, and we have deconstructed the image until it's like Lego on the living room floor, it is still all too readily assumed that voices and the positions they occupy in film are unmediated, both overtly and covertly natural.

The voice track in documentary, particularly in its reliance on non lipsynched voice—the voiceover—has generally been less naturalistic than narrative film (which apart from the odd arthouse/ political/ New Wave exception is still characterised by voices firmly attached to bodies). Unlike narrative film where the camera seems to tell the story, the voiceover in documentary often doubles as the narrator, observing, explaining and even seeming to control the image. That the voiceover—usually male, melodious and disembodied—is rarely part of the 'action' fits with the scientific project of early documentary, acting as a sort of vocal stand-in for the scientist (the voice of objectivity), or even for God (the omniscient voice). In the attempt to break away from this untruthful objectivity, New Wave, direct cinema and more recent work which engages with the construction of individual and cultural subjectivity, have usually preferred a personalised voiceover—where the narrational voice engages with the subject, often is the subject.

In this context Belinda Mason's *Little Brother, Little Sister* seems—at a first listening—to owe its allegiances to the observational tradition (there's a voiceover which gives us information but whose body is never seen), while Gillian Leahy's *Our Park* appears to be more radical in its use of voiceover—brazenly speaking in the 'I' narration favoured by 'post verité' cinema. However, what is at stake is more than a stylistic device linked to an historically established genre or tradition; instead we are talking about the role and status of documentary. Documentary has the power to do more than reflect established truths, it seeks to invigorate and incite new cultural meanings (in Leahy's words, we make it "to change things"). Does first person narration really affect—and effect—this? Is the

omniscient narrator—the unseen voice-on-high—an impossible speaking position if documentary is going to admit to being more than just objective recording? I asked these kinds of questions of both directors, asked about their choices and how they felt they effected the potential readings of their films.

Our Park shows a year in the life of a park and the small community which lives around it; a community which includes Leahy, the filmmaker. There is conflict—human and environmental—there's some historical



The Low family in *Little Brother, Little Sister*

situating and there are meditative moments. Leahy is present in many of the moments—sometimes filming, sometimes participating. Thus the first person narration would seem a natural outgrowth of the relationship of filmmaker to filmic subject; but this, like most things, is not as simple as it seems.

Firstly Leahy revealed that the choice of herself as the narrating voice was not a natural one—they had, in fact, budgeted for an actor. When it came to the point, though, Leahy was satisfied with her own rendition and her voice was retained. Why? Because, she said, "it does at least make it obvious...it's admitting that you're a character in there as well." Simple enough, but does the fact that the filmmaker speaks for both herself and the people she films mean that there is a certain appropriation going on here? Possibly. She is certainly the privileged participant, able to select the image, able to address herself to off screen space—and audience.

In our extended conversation, Leahy and I both came to the conclusion that the use of a first person narration actually lent the image

track an authenticity that it may well not have had, had the narrator not spoken as 'I'. This goes against the conventional wisdom that the first person narrator, like the literary fiction equivalent, does not have the all-knowing, truth-telling status, and is instead open to question as a single and therefore unreliable point of view. Yet, in a society where the individual is privileged over the community, a society in which—as Hugh MacKay has pointed out (in one of his better articles)—any opinion is as valuable as any other (hence the rise of Hansonism); the first person narrator is suddenly an authoritative position.

As Leahy herself put it: "I've always assumed [first person narration] makes it apparent that it is one point of view, but I suspect it's a bit like '...I'm a real life interviewee, I was there, this is the truth.' I think when I made [*Our Park*] this is what I

waiting to be told.

Little Brother, Little Sister has very different concerns from *Our Park*. It is the story of the Lows, a middle class Sydney family who adopt an orphaned Ethiopian brother and sister. There is a genetic disorder in the family and this has motivated Anne and Steve to adopt after they had their first child. Their second child, Japhet, is from Papua New Guinea; they have contact with his biological family and, we are given to believe, to some extent with his cultural heritage. The film traces the arrival of Sisay and Eleni into this family and the ensuing 2 years.

Although the final film doesn't let on, Mason is a long term friend of the Lows and the initial script had Mason telling the story, speaking in the first person, admitting her involvement. This script, which she describes as "soppy", was scrapped in favour of a layered structure of voice; an occasionally present voiceover (the producer's) which relates facts that link the pictured events, voiceover from the protagonists Anne and Steve over non-synched image, direct voice in interview and the voices of all the family in the filmed events. This tight structure of voice was, according to Mason, part of an engineering that allowed Anne Low to be the pivot of the film; "...in the end it's Anne's story and she told it so well." The tone of the voiceover is without emotion, says Mason, "we made a decision that we would not, at any point in the voiceover, say how people felt...we didn't want to impose on them."

The question I would raise is whether Mason's choice to not put her own voice in the film and to not use the 'I' narration has, in fact, allowed the separation of filmmaker opinion and film that the exponents of objective documentary would claim does occur. And has this separation allowed the audience to make up their own minds? My answer to the first question is 'yes'; the narrational voice(s) enable the audience to hear the voice of the subject (Anne Low) rather than that of the filmmaker. To the second question I would answer 'possibly': the film enables identification with the subject—I feel Anne Low's emotions—but I'm not sure how much the tight voice structure of the film permits me—or anyone else—to make up my own mind about her story. In order to make up yours, perhaps you should see and hear this film—and *Our Park*—yourself.

Our Park, director-writer Gillian Leahy, cinematography Erika Addis; Sydney Film Festival, Valhalla, Sydney, SBS television release late this year. *Little Brother, Little Sister*, director-writer-cinematographer Belinda Mason; screened on ABC's Inside Story, finalist in ATOM and Dendy awards, available through Film Australia.

Ann Penhallurick is a Sydney based consultant, researcher and writer with a background and interest in voice and language.

Cinemedia presents an Experimenta Media Arts Event

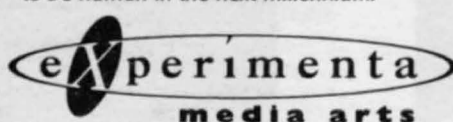
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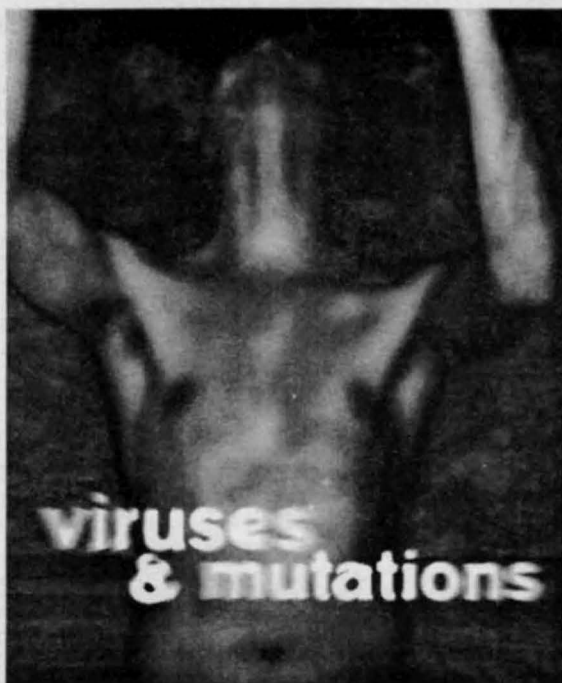
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Report

A wealth of masculine hells

Caroline Farmer at the inaugural South Australian Screen Showcase

After a number of years of running New Adelaide Films and Videos, the Media Resource Centre this year presented the inaugural South Australian Screen Showcase (SASS). Born out of a desire to recognise and celebrate excellence in contemporary short film, video and new media works produced in South Australia, it is also intended to provide an event through which the wider industry can reward the cream of the local talent. Ten finalist films were selected from 40 entries and 6 prizes for a mixture of genre and craft categories were awarded.

The overwhelming success of Andrew Porter's film *Nobody I Know* on the international festival circuit, where it has been enthusiastically embraced by the Gay and Lesbian communities, speaks for itself, and it deservedly won the awards for most outstanding film and best drama. The film deals with a young gay man's frustrations as he explores his sexuality within the confines of his suburban family home. His attempts to seduce his new lover are thwarted by the unwanted vigilance of his mother and younger sister. Its success is in its simplicity, but also in the finely drawn characters and performances.

Best experimental film went to Michael Blanche's quirky documentary, *Laika Come Home*—dogs in space and dog fences, sheep, dingoes, and Russian immigrants who see dogs on the moon. Blanche continues to develop a decidedly individual and eccentric comic voice with this satirical glimpse of the colonisation of land and space and was one of the few filmmakers to explore the short film as a genre in any reflexive way.

Adelaide audiences have been entertained by a series of award winning animations from the Anifex Production House and this year *The Rocket*, Michael



Michael Cusak's *The Rocket*

Cusak's engaging claymation, is no exception. With delightful attention to detail, Cusak takes his 2 sleazy antiheroes—and his audience—for a ride on the roller-coaster from Hell.

There were 3 Special Jury Awards. The first for Direction and Performance went to Tom Abbott's *Male Order*. This film about the plight of a Filipino bride at the mercy of her brutal Australian husband loses some plausibility in its relentless

grimness. There is something in Beckett's assertion that without a little light, the darkness loses its shape and form. However the excellent performances by Dana Diaz and Khail Juredini in the lead roles were well deserving of the award and Abbott is one of an increasing number of accomplished young filmmakers to emerge from the Media course offered at the Hamilton Adult Secondary School.

There were 4 other films selected as finalists. Sue Brown's *Grunt* is the story of a peace loving hippy who is propelled on a journey of self discovery when he collides with his antagonist at a suburban roundabout. Written by John Martin the film is pacy, the characters are engaging and Ashley Klose and Tom Martin's raunchy, rhythm and blues music keeps your feet tapping until the last credit has rolled. Alex Frayne's second privately funded short, *Doctor By Day*, offers another dark, disturbing glimpse at the male psyche. While very accomplished technically, his storytelling lacks sensitivity to the subject matter and consequently his characters are cold and disconnected. Scott Venner's innovative title design for the film deserves a mention and is contributing to his growing reputation for this developing artform.

Steven Savvas' animation *Night Of The Machines* and Sunday Hopkins' illustrated film poem *Theatre Of Love* were 2 other films that explored the short film form. Savvas uses stop frame animation in his character's paranoid dream encounter with a group of vengeful white-goods.

Two years ago, Shane McNeil described what he saw as a preoccupation amongst South Australian short filmmakers with "the horrors, existential and otherwise, of the suburban experience", where "Hell [was] indeed other people" (*RealTime* 12, 1996). For South Australian filmmakers in 1998, however, Hell would indeed appear to be inherent in being male. For if I was to identify any connecting thread amongst the films it would be a concern with masculinity—the good, the bad and the ugly of the late 20th century male.

South Australian Screen Showcase, Media Resource Centre, Mercury Cinema, Adelaide, July 29 - 30.

Caroline Farmer is a video artist, writer and sometimes lecturer in media studies.

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Unstuffed

The AFC's <stuff-art> program compels Kevin Murray to consider the future of art on the net

"We no longer have galleries, we have art portals." Mmm, it doesn't quite have the elegance of McKenzie Wark's aphorism "we no longer have roots, we have aeriels," but it does point to a future for art in the era of the internet.

The term 'portal' is used today to refer to information nodes—such as Yahoo, Netscape, and Wired—which provide 'on-ramps' to the internet. On a less grand scale, the art world has begun to accommodate itself within this new architecture. A number of these art portals have opened in Australia, such as Screenarts (<http://www.screenarts.net.au>), Screen Network (<http://www.sna.net.au/>) and the Australian Film Commission's 'exhibition' of net art, *stuff-art* (<http://www.stuff-art.net.au>). Criticism is new to this medium, so we need to do some ground work.

These domain names provide the online equivalent of traditional physical spaces such as galleries. Where does the gallery model stop? Curators, catalogues, openings, reviews, sales, even exhibitions—how many of these fit through a modem? While it is more efficient to minimise infrastructure, do we forgo aesthetics in the process? Do we end up with just a 'bunch of stuff'?

There are 2 obstacles in casting a critical eye over net art. First, the fixed medium of print is by its very nature alien to the fluid medium of the internet. Today, the liveliest response to net art comes not from magazines, but mailing lists such as *net-time*, *rhizome* or locally *recode*. In these lists we find an abundance of artist interviews and theoretical arguments in the new mode of 'net criticism', which is political rather than aesthetic in concern.

To abide by email, though, is to limit criticism to a live event—without durable record. Without the inertia of print, there is less opportunity for the medium to acquire a history. Without a history, there is little chance for the evolution of an argument, and greater stress on work of immediate sensation.

The second obstacle to criticism is more pervasive. In a 'post-critical' environment, it is difficult to locate oneself in the neutral position required by conventional criticism. Today, most of what passes for criticism is mere advocacy. Artists and their friends form the core voice for promoting sites and articulating their meaning. This arrangement suits work with a political edge, though it often fails to locate itself within a broader field of practice. Newspapers with their indentured critics provide some guarantee of independence, though the specialised role of the critic is increasingly challenged by client-friendly editors.

Let's see what can be done. One reasonably neutral act of criticism is classification. Provisionally, we can identify three genres of net art: boxes, windows and hives. Box-sites offer stand-alone electronic versions of readymade art forms, with combinations of image, text and sound. Though the classic WaxWeb (<http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/wax/>) was partly developed in moo-space, its final version is readily packaged as a stand-alone CD-ROM. Window-sites attempt to work within a medium that is specific to the internet. Sites by Heath Bunting (http://www.irational.org/_readme.html) and jodi (<http://www.jodi.org>) champion transparency as a means of undermining the commodification of information. And finally, hive-sites make art from contributions by visitors—artists are the beekeepers and visitors are their bees. *Persistent Data Interface* (<http://www-cra.ucs.d.edu/~pdc/>) demonstrates what a rich mixture can be creamed off visitor confessions.

These 3 genres represent different horizons for web art. Box-sites use the web as a means of delivering ready-made material. The critical strategy of window-sites is to expose the medium by which the information is conveyed. And hive-sites attempt to dissolve the role of individual artist-creator for the collective consciousness of web users. With this provisional classification, we have the basis for some kind of critical judgment. How well do these genres realise the possibilities of net art?

The 8 works for *stuff-art* are mostly box-sites. Like watercolour for painting, web for CD-ROM enforces limits on multimedia and rewards elegant economies. How does this reduction affect content? The 6 stand-alone pieces in *stuff-art* range from comic to epic. John and Mark Lycette's *Illustrated Alphabet* is a line-drawing animation of whimsical violence. A more complex interactive is Leisl Hilhouse and Simon Klæbe's *Harrowing Hell*, which takes visitors on several journeys to hell. In content, it could be compared to *Cosmology of Kyoto*, but leans towards cheesy in character types. Mindflux's enigmatically titled *EN_T* presents a fly whose leg can be twitched to scroll randomly through testimonies of paranoia. *Wordstuffs* by Hazel Smith, Greg While and Roger Dean contains abstract hypertext about 'body' and 'city', but also includes a java-based cluster of works that can be jerked and rattled. And a tromp l'oeil window-site is provided by Alex Davies' *Subcutaneous*: one element invites registration for a chat session that turns out to be pre-scripted, regardless of visitor input. This deviousness makes up for the otherwise predictable content. Though mostly deft uses of Shockwave, these 5 pieces seem slight in content.

Against the comic trend is Andrew Garton's *Ausländer Micro*, which tells an epic tale of a refugee who finds himself as much without sanctuary in the afterlife as he did in war-torn Europe. The depth of this tale stretches the bandwidth of *stuff-art*, though Garton develops some clever tricks for keeping our attention. Animated graphics in the top frame offer opportunities for manipulation and roll-over icons move text focus between libretto and story.

Though *Ausländer Micro* deserves praise for effort, the small screen seems too slight a medium for its operatic themes of war and death. Unlike the proscenium arch that frames stage and big screen, the monitor is still wedded to the everyday concerns of the desk. In the end, a tragic theme may be more convincingly developed through a mundane path, such as one of the many mortality indexes online (eg <http://www.austunity.com.au/cgi-bin/morcalc.cgi>).

The 2 remaining sites draw outside themselves for content. The screen for Gary Zebington's *Repossessed* is crowded with quasi-scientific graphics that suggest 'deep programming.' The visitor submits a word for 'sacrifice', which is then recast into a dialogue. For example, 'Bone' becomes 'What does bone-ly? Under antiquity.' External sites can be drawn into this information feed. The coding skills used in this construction are quite impressive, but the results suggest a clumsy machine intelligence, rather than the omnipotent digital consciousness promised by the opening graphics.

Finally, Mark Simpson's *Ephemera Engine* provides a window of search terms, web cams and real audio grabs from unnamed locations. Transmission is



Alex Davies' *Subcutaneous*

occasionally interrupted by questions such as "Do you sometimes feel you are somewhere else?" As suggested by its title, *Ephemera Engine* dissolves eventually into a kind of mindless traffic-watching.

The works in *stuff-art* demonstrate technical creativity, but struggle to find a content that is both meaningful and

appropriate to the online environment. What can be done? From the artists, opportunities for genuine visitor participation might be helpful. From the Australian Film Commission, it's worth considering to what extent its mock title 'stuff-art' helped form the kinds of works it harvested. Though perhaps prompted by the *Stuffit* Mac program used to compress files, broader connotations of the title have a bearing on how the site is approached.

At first glance, the use of the word 'stuff' seems to cater for the neo-Neanderthal consumer—the kind appealed to by companies like Iomega ('Because it's your stuff') and Pepsi ('Get stuff'). This reduction of the world to mere substance seems hardly a promising framework for a new artform.

Yet there may be a more serious aesthetic embedded in this vernacular term. Implicit in 'stuff' is a modernist attitude to meaning as material, in the way that Jackson Pollock used paint not as a language but as mud. This accords with the modernist quest to strip the world of its pre-existing forms and confront things in their raw state—'get stuff'. Is modernism a good starting point for net art? Yes, the modernist quest is a useful rite of initiation for any new art form, helping to define it separately from others. But then it needs to move to expressive possibilities which extend beyond self-definition. The ability of hive-sites to tap collective experience provides one way ahead.

Like much Australian net art, *stuff-art* shows great promise, but we might hope that something with more conceptual bite evolves out of the primordial stuff online. The emerging hybrid artist-curator-apidarist may eventually lead the way. Get honey!

<stuff-art>, Australian Film Commission, online at <http://www.stuff-art.com.au>. See <http://www.kitezh.com/diglex> for full list of links.

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Cutting the new media umbilicus

Melbourne Film Festival's *Mousetrap* prompts Darren Tofts to revise the language of the new media arts

Why do we still talk of "new media"? Are we in the grip of a persistent cultural logic of digital neoteny? In a refreshing riposte to this desire to keep new media forever young, *Mousetrap* curators Martine Corompt and Ian Haig inform us that "in 1998 digital media is no longer a big deal." While not overtly polemical, *Mousetrap* was as much an exhibition about digital screen culture, to be remembered for cutting the new media umbilicus. Any new medium is quickly absorbed into a culture (this is straight McLuhan 101), tarnishes with ubiquity, and ossifies into style. The laws of media are

unforgiving. At a recent forum on visual design at Swinburne University, Christopher Waller (21C, *Diagram*) noted how the style of glossy, hyperreal power-imaging we associate with the 90s has already dated, and that nostalgia will eventually mentor its revival. *Mousetrap* demonstrated that la mode retro is a creative force to be reckoned with in contemporary screen culture, though not for anything of so recent a vintage. The diverse range of local and international work garnered for this exhibition declared a "longing for potentially obsolete analogue materials, such as over-

exposed film-stock, yellowed paper and photographic grain." Forget the future, digitally-created art looks like it has re-emerged from the past, "secondhand, tactile, decayed and disordered." Pace Bruce Sterling, there's no such thing as a dead medium. The experimental arts will always find a use for such things.

That out of the way we have another problem. Despite the diacritical impetus behind the exhibition, *Mousetrap* could not avoid falling foul of the regulation pigeon-holing as "multimedia" any artistic practice that in some way uses computers. The film festival organisers may have been trying to

signifying textures into a screen space, and the ability to recombine them in surprising, even unprecedented ways. As Ian Haig noted of the *Mousetrap* screening program, many of the works "employ digital tools to fuse together cell animation, live action, comics, stop motion animation and found imagery, often producing new hybrid forms of animation, which would not have been possible previously."

The interactive exhibition offered a range of work that displayed the changing architectures of interface design and principles of interactivity. Presided over by one of the acknowledged masterpieces of

intermedia, The Residents' *Bad Day on the Midway*, it suggested a sharpened understanding of intermedia as being concerned with spatial relationships and immersive environments, rather than game-playing or puzzle-solving. This poetic was persuasively supported by Jim Ludtke, who emphasised in his artist's talk the continued importance of exploration and narrative in intermedia



Rodney Ascher, *Somebody Goofed*, 2D computer animation and print ephemera

capitalise on the popular belief that the term multimedia is sexy. Or perhaps they simply didn't know what else to call it. Either way, the work is partitioned off as being in some way different, and not necessarily integral to the screen scene created by the festival. To be fair, though, it is more important for this work to be included in such festivals than not. But the continued use of a term that has outlived its usefulness worries me. Multimedia was invented with a technical meaning in mind, referring to the incorporation of multiple signifying modes within the same apparatus. Inflections to do with new modes of creativity or sensibility made possible by this apparatus have never been part of its meaning. These days anything on a CD-ROM or the World Wide Web, or produced using Director, is automatically labelled as multimedia, often with little attention to what is actually going on from a representational or formal point of view. There is no question that discrete forms of screen-based arts, such as video, cinema and digital animation, will continue to thrive, and sustain their own forms of critical discourse. But at a time of energetic experimentation in the screen arts, as we are experiencing now, the continued use of narrow and historically specific terms such as multimedia is like the proverbial can tied to a dog's tail.

It's time we stopped using multimedia as a generic term to describe the very specialised and often idiosyncratic work being done by artists who happen to use computers. I propose the use of an alternative term which already has currency in the digital world (we'll have to do something about that "digital" soon). The word is intermedia. Intermedia, with its suggestions of hybridity (a fusion or cross-fertilisation of different media forms) and intransitivity (between commencement and closure), recommends itself as a more apposite descriptor for the cultural production of the experimental screen arts.

The urge to graft and appropriate diverse media into a synthetic, intermedia environment has been around for some time (why multi rather than mixed media in the first place?). Digital techniques, while offering decisive enhancements, are best understood as enabling technologies that facilitate the importation of different

("the story's the thing"). But the screening program was really the nodal point for *Mousetrap*'s intimations of intermedia. In bringing together national and international work that determinedly explores the poetics of hybridity, Corompt and Haig have charted more than trends and developments. Their astute sense of what is happening with the screen arts scene suggests that if there is such a thing as a digital body politic, it is being mutated from within by the recombinant force of bricolage. This process can be seen in the collagic, appropriationist style of Rodney Ascher's punkish grapple with ultra-fundamentalism, *Somebody Goofed* (1997), which cleverly fuses 2D computer animation and print ephemera (comics, kids' books, album covers) into a highly distinctive, estranging allegory of betrayal. It is also evident in Laurence Arcadias' *Donar Party* (1993), a coloured steel-point etching twitched to grotesque life, which exploits the suggestiveness of a VRML walkthrough to document the pitfalls of a pre-electric surgical scene from the 19th century. As well, Adam Gravois' atmospheric and decidedly low-fi *Golden Shoes* (1996) captured the dual intermedia aesthetic of recombination (it looks like a film, but it isn't) and bricolage, the fine art of making do with whatever is at hand (such as low cost computers and software).

Mousetrap demonstrates that intermedia practice is more concerned with a type of sensibility or attitude preoccupied with all available media, than with the potential of digital technologies per se. Indeed, as Haig advances, the "works shown in *Mousetrap* expose the possibilities of what can happen when you fuse computer hardware and software, together with...an attitude which embraces the culture of underground comics, contemporary anime, and weirdo cartoons." New media is dead, long live the re-animators.

Mousetrap, curated by Martine Corompt and Ian Haig, Melbourne International Film Festival; screenings State Film Theatre, interactives Melbourne Town Hall, July 23 - August 9

Darren Tofts is the author (with artist Murray McKeich) of *Memory Trade, A Prehistory of Cyberculture*, 21C/Interface, 1998.

Cinema and the Senses

visual culture and spectatorship

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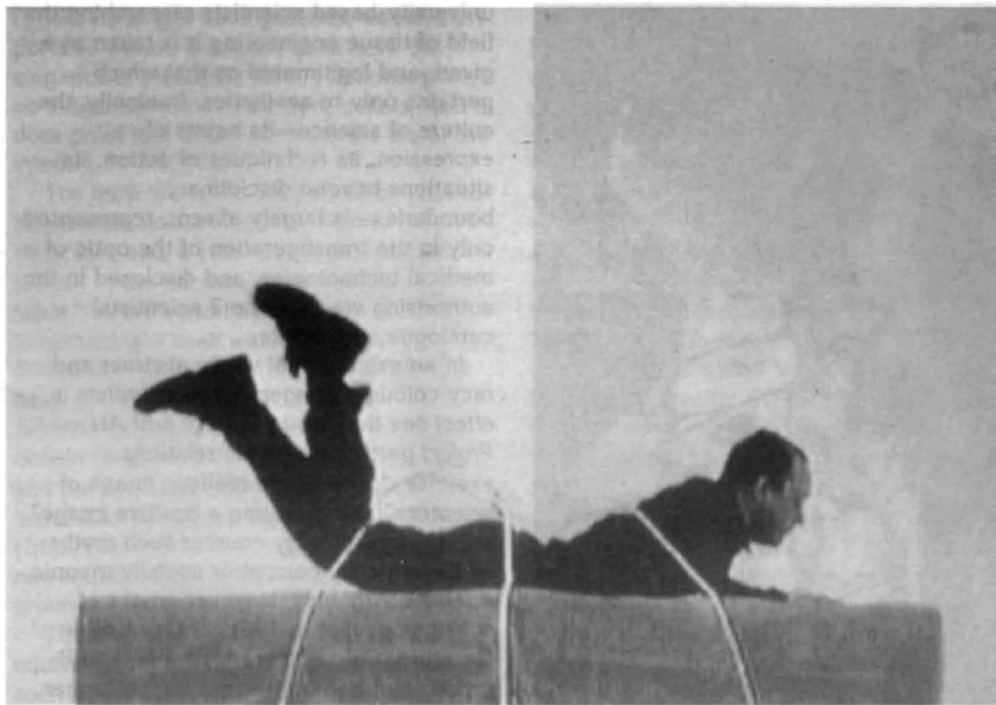
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Blimey!

Steven Ball negotiates the rules of the game in *British Bulldogs*



John Wood and Paul Harrison, *Device*, UK, *British Bulldogs*

British Bulldogs screened as part of the *Game Theory* series of events presented by Experimenta Media Arts. The program title however is misleading, perhaps deliberately so.

On the whole *Game Theory* had an inconsistent relationship with the usual Pavlovian stimulus-response-reward scenario clichés that dog many forms of interactive gameplay. The *Click Click, You're Dead* component addressed these scenarios fairly exhaustively via mainly commercially produced games; the *Game Play* exhibition featured playful game related local artists work and the speaking program discussed related topics.

Any behavioural analysis of the artist-viewer relationship would consider the shifting parameters of the 'rules' of 'the game.' Crucial to modernism, such considerations also can apply to a viewer's approach to post-postmodernist exhibition: one does not have to decode so much as negotiate the packaging of curatorial conceit.

Through its title (a traditional British playground game) and vague allusions to "playing games" in the program notes, *British Bulldogs* strategically forged an oblique relationship to the theme, but the videos bore little relationship to games or gaming. By all but ignoring its obligatory thematic context, *British Bulldogs* became programming by stealth.

It was actually a solid program of recent British video works. Drawn from the catalogue of London Electronic Arts it mercifully avoided the self-conscious carryings on of the Young British Artists and their recent discovery of the camcorder, concentrating largely on a body of work tracing a number of interleaving, parallel concerns and experimental approaches.

In *A.Z.O.I.C* by St. John Walker, eerie morphed faces twisted into foetal shape-

shifted animal forms accompanied by childlike rhymes ("...we had a dream last night, we had the same dream"). Blake's *Tyger, Tyger* and floaty ambient music evokes some quasi-mystical synaesthetic cyberspace. George Saxon and Gina Czarnecki perform electronic prosthetics to create a mutant legless centaur with four torsos able to conceal and produce video cassettes, headphones and video monitors from within its person(s) in *Homo-Cyte*. Clio Barnard's *Headcase* is a glorious mix and match; a self-referential, hammed up, mock-documentary, camp horror home movie about the benefits, thrills and dangers of all things connected with drilling into, removing and secreting heads from their bodies. While *The Persistence of Memory* by Anthony Atanasio is a far more conventionally stylish montage of associational image consciousness with advertising/music video aesthetics, images of extreme close-up faces, religious gesticulations, crucifix lamps in constant flash-back faux noir collision.

While these works explored the technological transformation of psychocorporeality, their cross-genre quotation is a reminder that much of the experimental work produced in Britain is commissioned for broadcast funded by a combination of Arts Council and television. In spite of the predictable consignment of the works to the arts-end of programming this has meant that broadcast television has consistently been an important exhibition site and perhaps facilitated a certain degree of hybridisation. It also means that television isn't necessarily perceived as some sort of low-cultural form ripe only for political interventionism or ironic appropriation.

Other works in this program reflected on the relationship between 'human' time and perception and a deeper, geological time span. John Smith's *Blight* consists of a montage of largely static 'still life' images of a community of houses in the East End of London being demolished to make way for a new motorway. Smith selected fragments of former residents' reminiscences about the houses and their lives there, "don't really remember...don't really remember much..." Set to music by Jocelyn Pook, it is elegantly edited to construct a sort of documentary song from a patchwork of voices, a contemporary folklore protest piece.

Withdrawal by George Barber presents a family walking across a field with a backdrop of hills, mountains and clouds, digitally manipulated so that 'generations' of family members disappear and landscape features recede at each repeat of the sequence. Fragments of dialogue about death and

religion and trippy ethereal atmospherics suggest a cyberspace of deep time. This and *Laws of Nature* by Tony Hill evoke a less objective relationship with notions of time and 'nature', than might be suggested by the apparently romantic themes and subjects. Starting out looking dangerously like a new age tree hugging adventure *Laws of Nature* becomes a 25 minute visual poem. Through 360°, elegantly paced swooping camera movements across landscape features, rolling hills and English woodlands, with subtle time-lapse and double exposure, the film is an exploration of mechanically mediated perspectives without humanist 'subjectivity' in favour of extended geological space-time. In this sense it is, formally and conceptually, closely related to Michael Snow's *La Region Centrale* in eschewing the human viewpoint (literally and perceptually) and the romantic gaze. Yet it has an

aesthetic quality far less landscape-formalist covering a number of aesthetic techniques and hundreds of miles of England.

The transitions between millennia, while arbitrary, will it seems always have an impact on the political, cultural and social life of a country. In Britain this is happening in tandem with the devolution of Scotland and Wales which will lead perhaps to an examination of English ethnicity. The works in *British Bulldogs* suggest that this examination can be coupled with a reflective, but also adventurous, decentring of perspectives and perceptions. Blimey!

Game Theory, *British Bulldogs*, *dLux media arts and experimenta*, curated by Keely Macarow, Kaleide Cinema RMIT, Melbourne, July 16; Chauvel Cinemas, Sydney, Sept 29

Steven Ball is a Melbourne based screen artist.

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Two cultures divided

Ned Rossiter queries the *Tissue Culture & Art Project, Stage One*

With the advent of new biomedical technologies and collateral reconfigurations of human and non-human forms and practices, interdisciplinary endeavours by cultural producers have consistently questioned the often mutually antagonistic spheres of 'art' and 'science.' Stage one of Oron Catts and Ionat Zurr's *Tissue Culture and Art Project* contributes to such endeavours by lending 'artistic expression' to tissue engineering experiments in cell and molecular biology.

Catts and Zurr have taken care to avoid the viewer tedium that often comes with pictures hanging on a wall, choosing instead a variety of display techniques for their microscopic enlargements of lurid skin tissues and cellular forms. Light boxes protruding from walls, digiprints on canvas, images behind perspex situated alongside miniature glass figurines suspended in candy coloured solutions, and an image fastened to the surface of a makeshift table are some of the novel arrangements in this display.

One of Catts and Zurr's strategies to make accessible this abstract science, to render its strangeness familiar, occurs in the 'Monster' series of images. Akin to a high-tech rendition of Rorschach inkblots, we can recognise such things as digitally enhanced eyes, accentuated teeth, a hint of lipstick, flared nostrils, a mouth gorging its own distended webfeet.

Elsewhere, a slide-show installation accompanied by a trip-hop, techno-pop soundtrack ensures a certain appeal for 'youth' audiences. The soundtrack includes a lame refrain—"What about the future?"—

as the exhibition's single ambivalent gesture toward the ocularcentricism of biomaterial digitisation. A pile of laboratory paraphernalia is placed inane as debris at the base of projected images. A similar indication of concept formation on the run can be seen in one of the perspex boxes: behind a tissue culture image and resting atop more lab plastic is a taxidermied rabbit—the sort you can hire for a couple of bucks from the WA Museum—and crammed inside its mangy ears are 2 pipettes. This works, I guess, as a crude juxtaposition of the late 19th century scientific art of taxidermy and a late 20th century obsession with gene cloning (remember 'Dolly'?). In different ways, both refer to a cultural refusal of the expiry date of life. In the corners of this same exhibition space are arrangements of basketball-sized sponge spheres, also spiked full of pipettes.

Exception to this kind of haste can be found in what I consider the most developed component of the exhibition—the non-interactive website. Along with clicking through an image gallery, we read excerpts from the catalogue, an interesting dialogue between Catts and a typically candid Stelarc, an interview with tissue engineer Fiona Wood, and, most engagingly, Catts and Zurr's Honours theses.

In addition to attracting an exceptionally large contingent of sponsors from public and corporate sectors, Catts and Zurr have gone to some effort in acquiring the necessary laboratory skills in cultivating skin tissue and cells onto non-organic materials (glass and plastic figurines) in preparation for microscopic enlargement and digital manipulation. Coupled with their previous studies in eco-design, digital imaging and photomedia, these artists have a disciplinary versatility that in future might result in artworks that more astutely negotiate the signs and conventions distinguishing art from science, as well as the traversability between and beyond these 2 zones of inquiry and expression.

Indeed, Catts and Zurr would seem to concur, writing in their rather confused catalogue introduction on the cultural and social urgency for art to engage critically with its arbitrary other—science—and advocating an "art that can be seen as the optimal medium to generate a discussion and a debate dealing with the contradictions between what we know about the world, and society's values which are still based on old and traditional perceptions of the world." Implicit in this statement is the suggestion that worldly and progressive 'knowledge' is synonymous with science, which is fettered



Ionat Zurr, *Spiral*, digiprint

by reactionary social values manifest in established modes of perception vis-à-vis art. The technotopian logic here is that with new technologies of perception comes a potential equivalence between knowledge and society.

The thing is, art and science in this exhibition are overwhelmingly fixed in their respective modern traditions: art deals in and dares not transgress aesthetics, while science concerns itself with the identification and analysis of veritable data for utilitarian and commercial purposes. Strangely, then, the exhibition operates as an exemplar of artistically and critically overdetermined paradigms whereby the "artistic documentation" of tissue engineering is somehow justification in itself of the "artistic merits" of the artworks. The very notion of "artistic merit" is never problematised, its particulars never identified; in catalogue statements by 2

university-based scientists researching the field of tissue engineering it is taken as a given, and legitimated as that which pertains only to aesthetics. Ironically, the culture of science—its habits of expression, its techniques of action, its situations beyond disciplinary boundaries—is largely absent, represented only in the transfiguration of the optic of medical technologies, and disclosed in the authorising views of the 2 scientists' catalogue statements.

In an exhibition of wildly abstract and racy coloured images, these scientists in effect see the *Tissue Culture and Art Project* partly as a public relations exercise, "providing a realistic image of scientists" and "creating a positive image" so as to presumably counter such myths as the ethically corrupt or socially myopic scientist. Arguably, however, myths of science peculiar to 19th century Gothic literature, Cold War era paranoia, and B-grade sci-fi and horror movies, no longer prevail if R&D funding levels for science are any guide. Indeed, one need only tune in to the many medico-dramas and human body specials on TV, or catch Hollywood megablitzes like *Jurassic Park*, to recognise that the cultural-economy of 'science' fares pretty well in popular consciousness. Yet, as historian of science Donna Haraway, and cultural critic Catherine Waldby have argued, there are valid reasons for ethical and political concern about ethnocentric and commercially motivated ideologies underpinning scientific research that incorporates biomaterial imaging technologies, such as the Human Genome Project and the Visible Human Project.

As an interdisciplinary project, this exhibition's *nowness*—its 'currency' as both fashionable vocation and high exchange value within the techno-cultural marketplace of arts funding—is contradicted in its fatigued representation of art as primarily a spectacular rather than critical aesthetic enterprise. (This exhibition's aesthetic is without *crisis*: the social and political import of tissue engineering is left waiting; its *ontology* is elsewhere, its territory belongs not to this situation, and it needs to.) Such traditional views on art from large sections of the scientific community (to say nothing of those in the humanities) can be taken without too much surprise; the worry is more the seeming acceptance of such precepts by these artists, as is made apparent in the exhibition's display techniques.

My frustration with this project's otherwise exciting interdisciplinary encounter turns on its lack of self-reflexivity. Disciplinary limits and presuppositions are neither made apparent nor critiqued, thus restricting any proliferation of alternative narratives. Rather, the exhibition paradoxically celebrates an unsurmounted divide between art and science, shoring up the disciplinary boundaries which separate the two cultures. Comfort zones remain intact. To be fair, my reservations have left aside the genuine goodwill of the exchange between these spheres of inquiry, and it's this kind of basis from which critically innovative artworks may hopefully begin to emerge in later stages of the *Tissue Culture and Art Project*.

Tissue Culture & Art Project, Stage One, Oron Catts and Ionat Zurr, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), August 5 - September 6, <http://www.imago.com.au/tca>

Ned Rossiter teaches photomedia at Edith Cowan University. He is co-editor (with Allen Chun and Brian Shoemith) of *Pop Music in Asia: Cultural Values and Cultural Capital*, Curzon/Hawaii University Press, 1999



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Riding the Hurricane

Needeya Islam catches *No Wave Cinema*



Sandy McLeod in Bette Gordon's *Variety*

If hair can be considered a gauge of the progressiveness or otherwise of cinema audiences these days, as much of the criticism levelled at the Sydney Film Festival would suggest (eg "oh the audience was a sea of grey hair"), then I was intrigued, if not exactly pleased, to find my view of Lydia Lunch on stage at the Chauvel Cinema obscured by a head of carefully arranged spikes. What did this augur for the *No Wave Cinema* screenings? Judging by the relative youth of the owner, his hair would probably have been a reference to 1986 (*Sid & Nancy*, Alex Cox) rather than 1976 (*Sid* himself). As such, this moment seemed to somehow encapsulate the particular preoccupations of this event: nostalgia mixed with artful inauthenticity.

Advertised as a visual performance event, the opening session was an introduction of sorts to *No Wave Cinema*, with the performance aspect being left entirely to the phenomenon that is Lydia Lunch. Matthew Yakobosky, who researched and curated *No Wave Cinema* for the Whitney Museum, offered a somewhat monotonous reading of the historical context of these disparate moments of DIY cinema, as Lunch interjected. Her anecdotes were not only entertaining reflections on a time for which there seems to be continuing fascination, but they provided some crucial insight into the point of it all. That is, the particular kinds of political and social urgency felt by these artists and filmmakers, as well as its local context. Unfortunately and perhaps inevitably, the clips that were screened, while a tidy and accessible introduction, didn't quite capture what one assumes is the very reason such a retrospective should exist; namely the extreme and groundbreaking nature of *No Wave Cinema*. The clips seemed strangely

unrepresentative of what Lunch had to say about the shock that films such as *fingered* (Richard Kern 1986) created and the battle against censorship which motivated much of this cinema. Nevertheless, the very retrospectivity and historical placement of this formerly underground cinema raised some interesting points. If a cinema engaging with and representing taboos becomes legitimate and is now found in art museums, what takes its place?

Extreme Visions, the selection of short films, was effective in representing the diversity of work under the *No Wave* rubric. While sex and violence were thematically prevalent, the treatment ranged from Franco Marinai's Super 8 *Blue Pleasure* (1981), featuring porn clips and peep shows, to Kathryn Bigelow's 16mm *set-up* (1978), an austere, theoretical study of violence, complete with voiceovers by Sylvere Lotringer and Marshall Blonsky. This early work of the director of such mainstream Hollywood films as *Blue Steel* and *Strange Days* offered a particularly interesting context from which to read the spectacular violence apparent in her Hollywood films, and revealed a certain continuity of or progression in her engagement with this subject. Of the more successful filmmakers to emerge from the period (along with Abel Ferrara and Jim Jarmusch), Bigelow was also the only one to make a notable shift in form, from experimental to conventional narrative film. Tom Rubnitz's *Made for TV* (1984) evinced the playful/critical relation to popular forms that characterised the period, by using Ann Magnuson's comic performance to highlight the stupidity and pleasures of television. It seemed to underscore the way in which, in a general sense, the *No Wave* movement was informed by satire. For various reasons, each of these short films offered some sort of commentary on the relation of

marginal forms to the mainstream, by operating as historical antecedents to mainstream work, or as experimental critiques of mass media (as in the case of the customisation of porn clips).

Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger Than Paradise* (1984) was the highlight of the retrospective. Unavailable on video in Australia and rarely screened, it marked for many a cinematic event. In the very crowded foyer, people spoke enthusiastically about their reasons for being there: to either see it again over 10 years after its release, or to see it for the first time having missed it more than a decade ago. Personally, my general nostalgia for the period was compounded by a specific nostalgia for a film I last saw on my final day of high school. Interestingly then for a film that was so of its time, little about it seemed dated or tired; the black and white cinematography was starkly evocative, while the understated performances were as witty and nuanced as I remembered them. And though it was easily the film that illustrated most strongly the deadpan humour that was integral to the movement, Bette Gordon's otherwise sombre, Nan Goldin-influenced *Variety* (1983) provided perhaps the retrospective's funniest line: "He's the kind of guy that would take his grandmother to Coney Island and leave her on the Hurricane for three days."

Given the putative general pessimism about the state of cinema today, *No Wave's* acknowledgment of a diversity of film cultures, histories and audiences, and its revival and reconstruction of the cinematic past (in turn generating debate about current cinema) made the program a significant and timely event.

No Wave Cinema - Films from New York 1978-1987, presented by AFI & Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, screened Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide & Brisbane, July 16 - August 23



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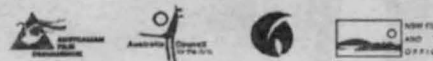
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Sounding cinema's depths

Anna Dzenis experiences the heady mix of *Cinesonic*, the 1st international conference on film scores + sound design.

As the deep oceans of the planet remain unexplored, so does the World of Sound in Film exist as a deep, moist terrain, submerged by the weight of literary and visual discourse. And just as film theory shudders in crisis as to what to say about the acceleration of cinematic effects over the past 20 years, the soundtrack lies quivering—awaiting our critical exploration of its neglected depths.

Philip Brophy

For 3 heady days the Media Arts course area at RMIT hosted the first international conference on film scores and sound design. Philip Brophy, the director of this visionary conference, set his sights high. He sought out a number of the world's most creative experimental practitioners and internationally respected academics who had either written a major book or key articles on aspects of sound in film. This conjunction of theorists and practitioners enabled a dialogue which illuminated the field of audiovisual analysis, as well as building upon the historical investigation of the role of sound in the cinema.

From the very beginning it was evident that this was not going to be just any ordinary conference. *Cinesonic* opened with an awesome event—Howard Shore conducting a live performance of the score to *Crash*. The film was not screened; instead we were surrounded by the soundtrack as an aesthetic entity and experience in itself. While the edgy harps and the soaring electric guitars evoked memories of Cronenberg's masterpiece, here it was Howard Shore and his musicians who held everyone enthralled. Shore also proved to be a remarkable storyteller with countless anecdotes and insights into his collaboration with Cronenberg, as well as his other creative and eclectic works. When questioned about *Ed Wood*, Shore recounted a memorable story about his global search for a theremin, and its truly unique Eastern bloc owner and virtuoso performer.

There were many richly overlapping layers and threads to this conference. During the day academics presented their latest research in lengthy papers with equally generous blocks of discussion time. Each evening, practitioners showcased spectacular audiovisual presentations of their work. The discussion then continued late into the evening at various city locations with the accompaniment of live musical performances. Each day offered its own theoretical focus and the inspired blending of practice and scholarship.

On the first day the presentations examined the relationship between voice and dialogue. Philip Brophy's paper "I Scream in Silence: Cinema, Sex and the Sound of Women Dying" provocatively investigated the paradoxes and the

ambiguities of the sound of the woman's scream in a number of films, with particular attention to the currently banned *I Spit On Your Grave*. The scream of the woman in the cinema, Brophy suggests is the "aural nexus between sex and violence, delight and terror,

variety of voices in cinema, and on the way words are spoken, produced, recorded and mixed." He included 3 case studies—on dialogue, on modern thrillers, and on voiceovers and sound mixing. In an impressive and detailed analysis of the boat

animated and energised the works of the new German cinema, with particular attention to Fassbinder. Royal S Brown focused on "Sound Music in the Films of Alain Robbe-Grillet" and through tantalising textual examples revealed how Robbe-Grillet's films "have more in common with the blending, in music, of serial and tonal techniques that one finds in composers such as Alban Berg than with classical narrative structures."

That evening the quietly spoken and surprisingly modest Carter Burwell spoke about his work as a composer and the impossibly perfect collaboration he has with Joel and Ethan Coen—"their first film was my first film." Describing his induction into the world of film scores, he related a wonderful story about studying Hitchcock's *The Birds*. Its score was constructed on tape entirely from synthesised bird sounds, by a couple of musique concrète artists under Bernard Hermann's supervision. It served as a perfect introduction to the possibilities of film music for him because there was no music at all. Burwell discussed most of the Coen Brothers' films, focussing on the way intellect, intuition and the desire to experiment guided him through the maze of scenes and characters and their possible interpretations. Using a scene from *Fargo* he illustrated how different sonic choices can lead to significantly different readings. Referencing a wide net of musical styles including folk models, Burwell discussed the Scandinavian music, instruments and forms for *Fargo*, his experience of composing a lush orchestral Hollywood score for *Miller's Crossing*, the way the Dude scores his own life in *The Big Lebowski*, and the compromised experience of working on a large commercial film like *Picture Perfect*.

The papers on the final day addressed specific historical assumptions about 'the coming of sound.' Will Straw's "Ornament, Entrance and the Theme Song" took everyone back to the late 1950s and early 1960s with a sensational sample of Hollywood credit sequences. Straw focused on the different illustrative strategies and the ways in which these works were marked as popular art. Alan Williams' "The Raw and the Coded: Sound Conventions and the Transition of the Talkies" spoke about the films he calls the "part-talkies"—from that transitional silent to sound period—and the need to recognise the significant variety and difference in these works. Rick Altman's "The Living Nickelodeon" was a joyous audiovisual presentation which successfully converted RMIT's pristine Storey Hall into a noisy, argumentative, raucous and jovial nickelodeon, complete with original slides, Altman as the piano player, vocal accompaniment and projected short films. Conference participants were invited to sing along with the illustrated slides, converse and dispute with others and generally engage in outrageous behaviour. Altman's aim was both historical, in his recreation of an early picture palace, and also contemporary in his desire to focus attention on film music and fixed-form songs. As in the previous sessions, the desire was for this to continue all night long.

Cinesonic was a truly remarkable event. In celebrating the critical exploration of the soundtrack, it brought practitioners and scholars together, its distinguished guests inspired and enthralled fortunate participants, and it comprehensively transcended traditional conference boundaries. Be sure to look out for the next 'not to be missed' *Cinesonic* experience coming to a venue near you.

Cinesonic, 1st International Conference on film scores + sound design, curated by Philip Brophy, RMIT Storey Hall Melbourne, July 29 - August 1



Composer/conductor Howard Shore

Anne-Sophie Barrant

life and death"—an uncertain, unnerving sound which resists any simple reductive reading. In her paper "Narrative Functions of the Ecouter" Elizabeth Weis developed a taxonomy of the 'eavesdropper' in cinema, ranging from the character who overhears narrative information to the 'acousmophiles' who derive perverse pleasures from listening—the aural twin of the 'voyeur.' Sarah Kozloff's "Genre Talk" proposed a taxonomy of character speech and speech acts in the genres of the Western, the Screwball Comedy, the Melodrama and the Gangster film. She illustrated her argument with classic film clips, supporting her claim that dialogue is one of the central defining elements of these genres.

Adrian Martin's paper, "Calling Rosa Moline: Threads of Voice", focused on "the

scene in *Lady from Shanghai*, Martin highlighted the "multiple, rapid-fire voices", "the overlapping between voices" and "the spatial ping-pong of voices back and forth across extreme points of the set", thereby illuminating the sonic/aural complexity of the Welles' oeuvre, and adding to the sonic lexicon in ways reminiscent of Michel Chion. In the evening, Yasunori Honda, a major Japanese animation sound designer for 32 years, screened 3 of his works—*Macross*, *Ninja Scroll* and *Tenchi Muyo in Love*—and discussed the changing conceptions of sound design in his own work, particularly in the transition of Japanese anime from analogue to digital sound processing. The audience was immersed in the most amazing 3D surround sound effects; a soundscape darting from behind, floating from above, swirling and flowing magically through the space. Even through an interpreter, the oceanic experience of Honda's conceptions were brilliantly presented.

On the second day the presentations focused on the multiple musical elements of the soundtrack. Dave Sanjek's paper, "Reeling in the Years: American Vernacular Music & Documentary Film", examined gospel, blues and bluegrass documentaries, arguing that historical narratives constructed by films frequently idealised ordinary heroes and places, while failing to intuit and interpret the music and its individual, emotional effects—a situation redressed in the documentaries by Les Blank. Caryl Flinn's "The Legacy of Modernism: Film Music, Fassbinder, Kluge and Political (After) Shock" took the observations of composer (and Fassbinder collaborator) Peer Raben that "film music should function as a series of shocks" and showed how this



Guitarists Jochen Schubert, Peter Petrucci, Ken Murray, Anthony King, Sam Lemann and James Sherlock

Anne-Sophie Barrant

Telediction

Sue Best on the lawyer phenomenon in *Sea Change*, *This Life* and *Ally McBeal*

Why are there so many television programs about doctors and lawyers? Is it just that they have healthier bank balances than the rest of us, or do their lives make particularly compelling viewing? Doctors, of course, have the ready drama of life and death to call upon, but lawyers? Are lawyers' lives really so amenable to dramatisation? Leaving aside the obvious interest of crime and punishment, as indeed the latest batch of lawyer-themed programs do—our ABC's *Sea Changes*, Britain's *This Life*, and the latest American offering *Ally McBeal*—what remains of the legal life that is worth watching?

It could be that the new twist of the legal tale, the 'female lawyer' angle, is the motor behind the latest dramas. *This Life*, you might object, has male lawyers too; but from the starting field of 3 at the series' outset only one male lawyer remains at the end. Egg, you will recall, goes to work in a kitchen (a destination that perhaps his name always prefigured), and Warren heads off downunder when a particularly unfortunate encounter in a public toilet leads to his dismissal. That leaves Miles, who becomes progressively less likeable as his emotional dishonesty becomes more and more evident. It is to the women, then, that our

attention is turned: the very feisty Anna and the very silly Milly.

Milly, despite her earnest and capable demeanour, falls for the oldest trick in the book: the boss whose wife doesn't understand him. And then there's really only Anna left to take up the role of strong identificatory model. She has fulfilled this role with considerable panache, becoming a TV favourite, while showing a depth and complexity of character rare in recent programming. She is clever and yet vulnerable; reasonably sane and yet clearly very damaged; cynical but kind; ethical but not moralistic; at times seriously out of control but also an insightful, focused, ambitious professional; the list could continue. Significantly, despite being an educated professional, the writers have not thought it necessary to make her the slightest bit ditz. Which brings me to the other 2 women lawyers...

In *Sea Change*, Laura is a parody of 'the career woman gone horribly wrong': she's the high-flying corporate lawyer who never sees her children; her husband is so neglected he has to bonk her sister to regain her attention; she can't cook, clean or relax; she's nervous, high-strung and over-earnest. You get the picture. Then she opts for a sea change and becomes a magistrate in the country. Over the course of the series Laura slowly defrosts as the particular homegrown justice of a small country town slowly but surely overtakes her uptight, cold and impersonal rule of law.

Given this scenario, naturally enough most of the humour is at Laura's expense. She is the silly city person whose abstract principles blind her to the particularity of individual human

concerns, problems, and dilemmas. Her intelligence, when it is evident at all, resides primarily in her capacity to change: to see the sense that the town makes of life and to learn to abide by it. Which is to say she may have had a fancy tertiary education but, guess what, she doesn't have much common sense.

I'm probably overstating the case here, because I keep thinking of the very funny, very smart, very sexy Anna and wondering why they're aren't more characters like her. To be sure, *Sea Changes*, viewed in its own terms, represents a supremely gentle form of ridicule of the female legal eagle of the 90s and her getting of 'real' wisdom, and I really don't want to sound like I don't appreciate that point or the ironic way in which Laura's simmering romance with Diver Dan is slowly brought to the boil, but...Laura just ain't Anna.

Moving still further down my imaginary feminist's evolutionary ladder we have *Ally McBeal*. So far, and I admit it is early days, she's a long way behind Laura (at least *Sea Changes* is critical of the effects of corporate culture) and miles and miles and miles behind Anna. I know, I know it's a comedy



Amita Dhira and Natasha Little in *This Life*

again, and yes the surreal thought bubble sequences are really very good, but she is really, really ditz. Where are the signs we are dealing with an intelligent, educated, professional woman? That she has lots of nice suits and a very fine haircut? Is that all there is? Would it be too much to ask for just one more dimension? I suppose one more Anna is out of the question?

Sea Change, ABC, Sunday nights at 7.30pm; repeats of *This Life*, ABC, Monday nights at 10.30pm; *Ally McBeal*, Channel 7, Monday nights at 8.30pm

Sue Best teaches in the Architecture program at the University of Technology, Sydney.

Cinesonic

Philip Brophy blasts into *Armageddon*

Think globally...A child in a Nepalese village looks up to the sky. A mother half-hidden by rich, green leaves in a Brazilian rainforest looks into the camera. A wide angle shot tracks by 500 Muslim devotees bowing to Mecca. A family on a farm in Southern Italy laugh as they prepare lunch. Two boys chase each other down a thin, cobble-stoned street somewhere in Hungary. A young boy looks up at his grandfather as they sit in front of huge whisky barrels in Tennessee. Think slow motion. Think beautiful cinematography.

Act locally...Those images could be the new Nescafe ad. Or the earlier McDonald's ad. Or an ad from Microsoft. SBS-TV. Telstra. Saab. Benetton. The Body Shop. Cadbury. The Age. It could be a video clip from Enigma. Deep Forest. Enya. Jean Michel Jarre. Dead Can Dance. Peter Gabriel. It could be *Koyaanisqatsi*. *Latcho Drom*. *Congo*. *Baraka*. Actually, they're from a Bruce Willis movie: *Armageddon* (1998). Hollywood starts to think globally—just like all the aforementioned corporations and individuals—and comes up with the same retro *National Geographic* photo spreads. Exotic locations. Noble savages. Gorgeous waifs. Proud people. Innocent children. Beautiful, graven images. In the late 50s, Roland Barthes wrote a simple and effective dismissal of the vain humanism of the international touring exhibition from America called *The Family of Man*. His critique of the aching morality which runs rife through what we could term 'ethnographology'—the beautification of the ethnic through encoding processes such as photo and song—has had little impact on a world that has since become obsessed with a narcissistic, 'feel-good' image of globalism.

In this era of Anne Geddes' scrumptious naked babies-fruit-and-vegies calendars, the idealistic sloganeering of "Think Globally—Act Locally" means something entirely opposite to its original intention. It means making calendars, ads, coffee mugs, video clips, films—and now, a big budget sci-fi movie full of irony, cocks and digital effects—wherein corny images of world awareness and global concern break incongruously into the narrative like some chic-radical broadcast-jamming. *Armageddon* (and others) continually halt to

give us Norman Rockwell style tableaux of 'dirty foreign people' who most Westerners wouldn't sit next to if they were on their train going to work. Thank heaven for the distance beautiful imagery grants us. Thank heaven for the angelic muzak which wafts over these tableaux, and which you can play on your Walkman while you tune out those people on the train.

But most of this is self evident—given the degree to which irreconciled humanism, emotional universalism and a kind of psychosomatic spiritualism infects movies by everyone from Jan De Bont to Alexandr Sokorov. (They aren't as far apart as most people would presume.) What is noticeable is the way in which the audiovisual arena of the cinema operates as a sucking plug-hole for conflating the notions of 'thinking globally' and 'acting locally.' Today, that means entertaining global issues in fear of eco-spiritual retribution, and using the localisation of an audience for the purposes of expressing such concerns. It's not all that different from being scared to blaspheme out loud in case you're struck down by a lightning bolt. The cinema has always displayed the capacity to be a vulgar sonorum of blasphemy: humans can be played with and manipulated in any way imaginable; cities can be destroyed and rebuilt at whim; bodies can be re-invented and inhabit new technological and psychological dimensions—all without bowing to some invisible omnipotence. Today, you're lucky if you can see a decent on-screen death. An engaging naked body. A gratuitous explosion.

Armageddon—aptly titled to reflect this spineless fear of the future which paralyses the breeders of today—is not simply another instalment in the long lingering crisis the cinema is suffering through its inability to conjure sounds and images from the greater potentiality of life in all its fucked-up magnificence. *Armageddon* is a gutless, flip-flopping attempt to atone for cinema's sins in being reckless and irresponsible. Like, as if the cinema needs redeeming. As if it was answerable to god, humanity, society, the planet. No doubt many a concerned person frowns and frets over the cinema that way—wishing it could be a magical machine projecting utopian images which could have the power to change the world. As if it ever had that kind of power. Left and Right join hands and collectively hope for such a moralistic cinema. Fortunately it will never happen. *Armageddon* and so many other faux-apocalyptic films may try and spook us into straightening up the cinema, but their

digital fire and humanist brimstone is but the smoke of a blur filter overlaid on a fire particle trajectory in their animation software. Their audiovisual engineering will always declare their unearthly, a-planetary, non-global artifice which no amount of quotes from the Old Testament will naturalise.

But the cinema persists with this delusion of positive societal convergence. To wit, most blockbuster sci-fi movies of the late 90s reterritorialise the cinema's social space and exploit the localised gathering of an audience for these kind of ulterior means. Watching *Independence Day* is like being forced to vote. Watching *Lost in Space* is like being forced to go on a Sunday drive with your parents. Watching *Deep Impact* is like being forced to sit through a mass. Watching *Armageddon* is like being forced to be Best Man at a wedding. (An aside: watching the only good sci-fi movie of the 90s—*Starship Troopers*—is like wanting to go to war.) The socio-spatial dynamics of, respectively, the town hall, the family car, the local church, the function room are imported into the cinema. This device—not merely an effect but a major modus operandi of textual construction which narration follows—works to convene an audience: to overlay their presence with purpose. To those of us (well, at least me) who accept the chaotic swamp of popular mythologies and audiovisual rhizomes which swirl around us as we dive deep into the mire—such social-spatial navigation is repulsive.

In a strained and strange way, the auditorium of the cinema—that energised space of the gathered group in the one time and place—is becoming a metaphorical diagrammatic realisation of the drummers' circle. A phenomenon beloved of many an ethnomusicologist, the drummer's circle—ie a group drumming together for pleasure, therapy, healing, sex, whatever—has undoubted power in its conjoining of group dynamics with percussive execution and rhythmic entrainment. From Mickey Hart's "Planet Drum" to R. Murray Schafer's "The Tuning Of The World", from audio/radio artists theorising the landscape to techno hippies throwing didgeridoo samples into Cubase, the notion of the world as one big drum is a popular conceit of the 90s. It suggests self-subsistence, individual expression and communal exchange. It limply gesticulates a stance against things like industrialisation, capitalism, consumerism, drum machines. Just as the unconfined power of music, sound and rhythm in the drummers' circle is naturalised and limited by so many do-gooder

global moralists, so too is the power of music, sound and image in the cinema auditorium by an equivalent horde of do-gooder social idealists.

Choosing to escape the planet rather than save it, Edward G Robinson signs up to be terminated in the bleak eco-sci-fi *Soylent Green* (1972). Its future Manhattan is a metropolis over-populated and under-nourished—symptomatic of the Hollywood 70s cultural fear that fine American cities would become like Bombay and Calcutta. Edward G enters a circular clinical room and sits in a reclining chair. Once he is given a lethal injection, a set of screens opens to show projected moving images of what he always believed had previously existed, but which the totalitarian government had refuted: trees, flowers, insects, mammals—an overwhelming abundance of flora and fauna blooming in glorious weather. Classical music blares in the room as he experiences the audiovisual finality of his own funeral. His pulse quickens, the images fire rapidly, the music deafens. Tears stream down his face as he ODs on images of nature; he dies while the hills live with the sound of music.

Today, one can simulate a *Soylent Green* death trip in IMAX theatres: mainlining semi-spherical projections of globalism and overdosing on surround sound nature. But whereas the persuasive effectualism of IMAX's sono-optical mechanics foregrounds a psycho-material experience—light, colour, movement, sound, form, object and being are gratuitously heightened and emptied of narrative manipulation—the cinema revs up its myth-making engine to humanise every facet of life. Feeling, spirit, emotion, soul ooze out of every frame, justifying every film's existence, thrusting emotional pornography down our throats and making us swallow beauty by the bucket load.

Armageddon's neutralisation of the cinema's auditorium is not a peak of progressively desperate measures to humanise social discourse and action. It is more likely the start of a slow incline where things will get worse. Expect more naked baby calendars. More presidential pulpit speeches. More blaring orchestras. More ads for NASA. And more sci-fi movies that end with weddings.

Armageddon, director Michael Bay, producers Jerry Bruckheimer, Gale Anne Hurd, Michael Bay, script Jonathan Hensleigh, Australian distributor Roadshow, release date August 20.

Reviews

Welcome to WOOP WOOP
director Stephan Elliott
writer Michael Thomas, based on the novel
The Dead Heart by Douglas Kennedy
distributor Roadshow
Australian release August 13

Rule 1: No one leaves Woop Woop without Daddy's permission
Rule 2: That permission is never granted.

In a predictable plot, Teddy, a fast talking American (Jonathan Schaech) escaping from his past selling cockatoos in New York, is kidnapped and forced into connubial bliss by Angie (Susie Porter), a horny young member of the Woop Woop community. Unable to conform to the insanity of the town, he falls in love with Crystal (Dee Smart) the local school teacher and in a *Mad Max* pastiche attempts escape. Thanks to Big Red, the 25 foot kangaroo of Aboriginal legend, they all live happily ever after.

Oops, did I give away the ending? Though conventionally linear, it's not the narrative that makes this film special. Like *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, it shines in its superb design, and the buy-me buy-me soundtrack.

Imagine a St Vincent de Paul in Broken Hill. Now imagine it so full it explodes and the clothes and toys and doll parts fly through the air and stick on who and whatever passes by. Mix with this both original and dance mix versions of Rodgers & Hammerstein and an anthropological stream of Australian colloquialisms and you have the kind of home grown magic realism for which Stephan Elliott is renowned. Highlights include Daddy's jump-started tap dancing routine, and cremation on the pyre of Golden Circle pineapple cans to a moving rendition of *You'll never walk alone*.

Stephan Elliott describes it as a "silly silly movie" (which is definitely the case); however this statement underestimates the power of darker elements that give the film a cult classic feel, ensuring its longevity (like Elliott's favourite Bruce Beresford film, *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* perhaps?). Final tips—make sure you stay till the very end of the credits for the sitcom style denouement and watch out for cameos by Barry Humphries (originally intended to be Bob Hawke) and the 'dole bludging' Paxtons.

Gail Priest



Christina Ricci in *Buffalo '66*

Buffalo '66
director Vincent Gallo
writers Vincent Gallo, Alison Bagnall
distributor Columbia Tri-Star/Maverick Films
October release

While more familiar to audiences as an actor in films such as *Palookaville* and *The Funeral*, Vincent Gallo's multifarious career has cut across the downtown New York art, music and fashion worlds, leaving him open to labelling as everything from renaissance man to mere scenester. His famously vitriolic persona (see *Grand Royal* Issue 4 for an interview with Vincent Gallo by Vincent Gallo) does not particularly encourage a generous response to his work. With *Buffalo '66* however, Gallo has deftly managed to transform personal myth into an artistically brave and affecting directorial debut.

Set in Buffalo NY, the film begins as Billy Brown (Gallo) is released from prison. En route to visit his self-absorbed and abusive parents (Anjelica Huston and Ben Gazzara), he kidnaps a young girl, Layla (Christina Ricci) at a dance class to pose as his wife. What unfolds is an acutely realised character study of a profoundly psychologically damaged human being.

Beginning with filmic 'inset boxes' to indicate Billy Brown's memories and future imaginings, *Buffalo '66* is highly stylised and makes self-conscious use of mise-en-scene. Rather than detracting from the emotional extremes that the film explores, this device places the film within the heightened context of family melodrama, or, as Gallo himself suggests, fable. That the family home to which Billy returns with his fake wife is in fact the house that the director grew up in underscores the way in which artifice operates in this film; as an index of complex psychological terrain. The film's style mimics the prickly and sentimental character of Billy Brown.

Buffalo '66 is unequivocally concerned with Billy's perspective and narrative. And while it is frustrating that the character of Layla remains largely enigmatic, Ricci nevertheless performs with as much assurance as her director, and manages to transform a character with few words into something more than just spectacle. While both actors have faces that are hard to forget, it is Ricci's twitches and almost-smiles, conveying a wealth of hidden stories, that remain the most intriguing and resonant aspect of the film.

Needeeya Islam



Joey Kennedy and Heather Rose in *Dance Me to My Song*

Dance Me to My Song
director Rolf de Heer
writers Heather Rose, Frederick Stahl and Rolf de Heer
distributor Palace Films
October release

What do you do when a man turns up and you fancy him except your carer does too the bitch and she steals him from under your nose 'cause she's not a fucking spastic?

In Rolf de Heer's latest exploration of life on the margins, we get into the head of Julia (Heather Rose) and her carer-from-hell Madeline (Joey Kennedy). A film about the nature of dependence rather than disability, the audience is forced to watch in Julia's real time, an uncompromising montage of slow edits, empty frames and takes held a fraction too long. Julia uses technology to speak and manipulate wor(l)ds, making her point in repetition. Lines from her voicemail—hello yes yes yes yes—and her guttural noises form an intimate voiceover.

Slicing into and exposing the psychological violence of neglect and labelling, *Dance Me to My Song* becomes a witty analysis of what makes the body beautiful. Madeline's narcissism and despairing glances into the mirror (when she puts on makeup it becomes the "chance to start [her] life over again for the better") and reliance on men to reflect what it is that makes her (feel) valuable, contrast with Julia's ability to seize opportunities, to overcome her bodily restraints, to use humour and a crafty intelligence to survive, to not be consumed by

bitterness. As Madeline tries to smother the independence in Julia, gladwrapping her in verbal taunts, Eddie (John Brumpton) arrives as lust object, pummelled about between the dodgem car desires of the 2 women.

Rolf de Heer's skill is in gradually revealing the imperfections of the other characters while Julia becomes steeled, strong within her disability: Madeline is blind to the good in herself or others, blinkered by self loathing; Eddie is passive (and tender), unable to assert his desires. (At first John Brumpton's performance seems empty as a windsack on a still day, but then you realise this is how people initially react to people with disabilities; a mixture of artifice and discomfort with their own physicality.) The exception is Rix (an outstanding performance by Rena Owen), vital, brutal in her vision of the world as it is and courageous in her refusal to be manipulated by anyone, including Julia. While Madeline feeds off Julia, Rix nourishes her.

When lying in bed (reliant on someone to get her up), Julia is framed next to the Big Red Emergency Button, the direct line to outside help. It is a clever cinematic trick setting up notions of helplessness—when will she press it?—and audience expectation. By defying stereotype and narrative cliché, *Dance Me to My Song* becomes Julia's resistance to an audience who wants to see her rescued.

Kirsten Krauth

Preview

Small worlds

Virginia Baxter surveys the Brisbane Animation Festival, its national tour and workshops

Range and reach look to be high on the agenda for the Queensland Animators Group in their choice of works for the second biennial Brisbane Animation Festival (BAF)—Australia's only international festival dedicated solely to animation. Over 100 works will screen October 22 - 25 at Brisbane's Dendy Cinema. The international program includes 1998's Oscar-winning *Geri's Game* from US computer animation company Pixar, of *Toy Story* fame, Iouri Tcherenkov's *La Grande Migration*,



Priit Parn's *Night of the Carrots*

Alexander Petrov's hand-painted *The Mermaid*, Tyrone Montgomery's 1997 Academy Award winner *Quest, The Monk and the Fish* by Michael Dudok de Wit and *Balance*, by all accounts a remarkable example of stop-motion technique by W and C H Lauenstein.

I Married A Strange Person, the 1997 animated feature by independent US animator Bill Plympton, screens suitably late night. "Sexually and politically charged, this film has something that will offend just about anyone and I say that as a compliment," says G Michael Dobbs (*Animation Planet*). "Bill Plympton is God," says Matt Groening. "Is God human and just one of the boys?" asks BAF. See for yourself. *From Naughty to Nasty*, an X-rated program of risqué US studio animation from the 30s and 40s compiled by arcane US film archivist Dennis Nyback is keenly awaited—Nyback's



Priit Parn

compilations include *Fuck Mickey Mouse and Bad Bugs Bunny*, the latter screening nationally last year practically everywhere *but* Brisbane.

The opening night International Animation Award program will include a range of Australian works from the "cameraless" *Linear Dreams* to Blood Oath Productions' outback parody *Macca Stewth* and Dennis Tupicoff's emotionally powerful *His Mother's Voice*.

International guest of the festival is Estonian master animator Priit Parn who will introduce a retrospective of his work including his "mockumentary" on the centenary of cinema, *1895*, the political satire *Hotel E*, made in the wake of Estonia's separation from the former Soviet Union, and the Australian premiere of his new film *Night*

Preview



Geri's Game

of the *Carrots*. Since the mid 70s, Priit Parn has been experimenting with radical forms of story structure. In Australia he will conduct workshops focusing on story and concept which should interest animators and filmmakers, in fact all manner of storytellers.

The SBS *Eat Carpet* program of innovative animation from Australia and around the world features works between 3 and 35 minutes including Mercedes Gaspar's erotic *The parts of me that love you are empty beings*; computer animation in Beriou's *Cloison* from France and *Hey Man! What You Want* by Chan Ka Hing from Hong Kong; live film and animation in Andrée Greenwell's *Medusahead: Confessions of a Decapitated Soprano*; Anthony Hodgson's *Hilary*, Georges Schwizgebel's *Zig Zag*, inspired by the drawings of Rudolphe Topffer, and Koji Yamamura's *Hyakkazukan—Japanese English Pictionary*. As well, on the local front, there's *Buried in our Backyard*, a special program of Brisbane animation screening at the Metway Theatre in the State Library.

This year BAF reaches beyond state borders with BAF on Tour, a program of festival highlights along with the Priit Parn retrospective introduced by the filmmaker touring capital cities *plus* the workshop series. This is a generous and timely festival showcasing a form which is as diverse in style and content as the world it animates.

BAF on Tour: *Valhalla Cinema, Sydney October 28 - 29; Cinema Europa, Melbourne with special presentation by Adam Elliot, October 31 - November 1; Mercury Cinema, Adelaide, November 5; Northern Territory Museum Theatre, Darwin Nov 9 - 10, enquiries: Darwin Film Society: 08 8981 0700*

Priit Parn workshops: *Museum Of Contemporary Art, Sydney, October 28, Lisa Byleveld 02 9252 4033; Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, November 2, Robert Stephenson/Paul Fletcher 03 9685 9020; Mercury Cinema Adelaide, November 4, Adele Hann 08 8410 0979; Northern Territory Museum Theatre, Darwin, November 10, Col Thompson 08 8981 0700*

Information on the Brisbane International Animation Festival: *Peter Moyes or Jen Fineran, tel-fax 07 32160808 or baf@visualeyes.net.au or http://www.visualeyes.net.au/qa*

Newsreel

A million a piece

The third feature film to be produced under the AFC/SBS Independent Million \$ Movie Initiative is *Bored Olives*. Directed by innovative filmmaker Belinda Chayko (her first feature), produced by Bruce Redman and written by Stephen Redman, it is one of 5 feature films to be produced, each with a budget of \$1 million. The other films announced so far are *Fresh Air*, currently in post-production and *A Wreck, A Tangle* in pre-production.

Watch those guidelines

The AFC adopted a revised set of guidelines for use in approving official international co-productions. These were circulated for industry comment in Australia and to overseas organisations in the countries with which Australia has official co-production arrangements. Due to the current ABA process and the broad range of views regarding Australian content standard, the AFC resolved to withdraw the draft guidelines and continue the use of the July 1997 guidelines, now dated March 1998 due to two minor amendments to the earlier text. The guidelines will be revisited when the ABA draft content standard is available.

Gold, gold, gold

Australian winners in the US: Chicago International Film Festival, USA, Golden Plaque documentary section, *Bougainville—Our Island Our Fight*, Wayne Coles-Jones; Hollywood Film Festival, USA: best film, *The Sugar Factory*, Robert Carter; Windy City International Documentary Film Festival, USA: Eastman Kodak Award, *Mao's New Suit*, Sally Ingleton.

New on the fringe

The Melbourne Fringe Festival for new and experimental works runs to October 18. For more information contact Virginia Hyam tel 03 9534 0722 fax 03 9534 0733.

SciFiles short film competition

Foxtel's TV1 is running a short film competition. They are looking for sci-fi themed or experimental computer or other animation work to be screened once only as part of the competition, which will be shown on the new sci-fi program, *The SciFiles*. Prizes and other information to be finalised soon. There is no restriction in terms of when the film was made. Specs: less than 10 minutes in duration (ideally less than 7 mins). Broadcast quality (a bit flexible on this one). If you are interested, please send VHS preview tapes to David Varga, TV1, Level 3, 55 Pyrmont Bridge Rd, Pyrmont 2009 tel 02 9776 2747.

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University of South Australia



Cherub with a cattle prod

Barbara Karpinski and photographer Heidrun Löhr meet the legendary Lydia Lunch

Lydia Lunch is the person your mother used to warn you about. With pitch-black spiky hair, trademark red lips and fuck-me stare, Lunch's 80s claim to fame was her post-punk No Wave band, Teenage Jesus and the Jerks. But meeting her in the foyer of a Potts Point Hotel I am struck by her baby doll looks, flawless skin and ever-so-innocent cherubic face. She is pushing 40 and still has the looks of a 20-something chick. She attributes this to her vice of choice being sex. Her artistic peers who wasted themselves on hard drugs and cheap alcohol have not fared so well. Lunch is a walking contradiction. Fierce but gentle. Guarded but generous. Bad but good. She epitomises the American psyche, the dream gone awry.

Lunch confesses to name dropping, having worked with Nick Cave, Henry Rollins and B-grade filmmaker Richard Kern. She's an actor, writer, producer and has appeared in *fingered*, an arty flick directed by Kern. Sex and violence are all totally gratuitous. Lydia was doing blaxploitation B-grade when Tarantino was still in high school. A line from *The Gun is Loaded* goes something like this: "It's all about getting fucked, that's what it's all about—getting fucked up, fucked over, fucked around or just good old fashioned fucked."

Lunch describes herself as a "confrontationalist hyper-realist, which may appear pornographic by virtue of the passion and aggression by which I voice my opinion...I'm always dealing with real life issues whether it's in a political or a sexual tirade. This is an American point of view. I mean we have the most violent, sexist, sexually obsessed war-mongering country in the world. I'm a product of my environment. I don't think I exaggerate what's going on. I think every one else underestimates because they are so cosy and middle class and spoilt. Therefore I must be the town-crier, the stick in the eye, the cattle prod. I'm dealing with real things. I'm not making anything up." She concludes emphatically: "Therefore, realist."

Lunch is also a nihilist. The flicks she made with Kern bear the label "Deathtrap." I ask her, "What's a nihilist to you?" She retorts sharply: "No, what's a nihilist to you?" I reply: "Kind of like an obsession with death." Lunch responds: "We Americans are death-obsessed. We are celebrity-obsessed. In death, you will always be more famous, better respected. You will make more money when you die. This is very American."

On the relationship between feminism and pornography, Lunch comments: "There are so many feminists in America, it is a meaningless term. There are many pro-sex pro-porn feminists like Annie Sprinkle and Karen Finley. There is so much porn in America and not enough of it is any good." Of women in literature, she comments, "Women haven't been able to present our evil natures in literature. Where are the equivalents of Miller, Bataille, Genet and de Sade? It's a void I'm trying to fill by being brutally honest and blunt about my real life experience." In 1997, Lunch completed a novel, *Paradoxia, A Predator's Diary*, a self-described "travelogue of sexual horror and the psychic repercussions."

Lunch believes there is a gap in women's literature. "Female erotica is never hard enough or realistic enough. I always find it too soft, too romantic. I want to read hardcore, reality-based, sexually explicit material. Even Genet and

Miller don't completely satisfy that void. But if you combine Miller, Genet, Foucault—the philosophy, the poetry, the insanity, the realism—somewhere within that mix there is a very satisfying delve into male literature but I can't find the feminine equivalent." ... "I think the sexual repression of women has been completely responsible for the lack of female

target. I would zoom in. I would devour and I would spit out." Lunch embraces the term 'macho': "I like being able to identify my masculine tendencies—ruthlessness, independence, aggressiveness, embracing my testosterone and my adrenalin. Allow passion to flow forth. I feel passionate about all power struggles—interpersonally and globally.

The process of recovery from her compulsive sex addiction is part of the subject of *Paradoxia*. Lunch speaks about her unique process of recovery. "I dived headlong into my obsessions. I never stopped, prevented myself or denied myself. As women you reach a point that you are so sickened by your gluttony or so sated that you can step back. Some



Lydia Lunch

Heidrun Löhr

hardcore erotic or pornographic literature." ... "We need to embrace women's sexuality and the pleasure of sex. Create porn that speaks to them personally. There is still a fear of women embracing their sexuality but the real horror is on CNN every night, day in day out. Sex is the last remaining taboo. We have serial killers blaming pornography but the problem is still the family structure. Any normal person who views pornography would probably find it so ridiculous or redundant, they'd just burst out laughing."

I ask her the meaning of the title *Paradoxia, A Predator's Diary*. "A 'predator's diary' is pretty obvious. 'Paradoxia' is about a need for sexuality that has nothing to do with procreation. I always pursued the relationships I was in whether they lasted for 5 minutes or 5 months or 5 years. Men never approached me. I wanted to stalk the prey. I would

We're still suffering because money is in octogenarian white men's hands."

Despite her very American rants, Lydia Lunch is more candid and more intelligent in her public confessions than any episode of 'real life' TV. She was sexually abused by her father and wrote a poem on the subject facetiously called *Daddy Dearest*. Lunch reveals: "My sexual obsessions are intrinsically rooted in my father's behaviour." Do you have anything to do with your father? "He's dead. He's dead. Wonderful. He died at 57 of a brain aneurism. I confronted him, which few victims ever have the courage to, or maybe they realise that no matter how you approach the confrontation the guilty never admit their guilt. They won't admit it. I approached him by saying 'do you realise the hatred and bitterness and selfishness and horror that fills my life is a direct reflection of you?' 'I know', he said. 'I know' is not an excuse."

women who have been abused deal with it through drugs. They deal with it by swallowing, suppressing, anorexia, bulimia, self-mutilation. I always feel one step outside a situation, like a doctor or a scientist, which I thought I'd be. I thought I'd get into psychoanalysis. Well in a way I did. How I've avoided therapy is because I'm doing it every time I take to the stage. Most people I know who are in recovery are in therapy or AA or NA or Gasoline Anonymous or Cocaine Anonymous or Marijuana Anonymous."

Lydia Lunch was in Australia as part of the touring No Wave film festival. (see Needeya Islam, "Riding the Hurricane", page 25)

Captivated by kidnapping

Aleks Sierz on recent London performance by Blast Theory, Improbable Theatre and Station House Opera

On the television, a handcuffed and hooded woman begs her kidnapper for mercy. No, it's not a film, it's an official police reconstruction of a real event. As the British media debates the ethics of using dramatised life stories as entertainment, one performance group has investigated our fascination with random acts of terror by staging a consensual kidnap. Judging by the media coverage, *Kidnap* by Blast Theory has been one of the most talked about performance events of the year. During the summer, the group used a short cinema film and newspaper arts pages to advertise their project. Volunteers were invited to fill in a form to qualify for abduction.

Along with legal immunity and questions about allergies and next of kin, people were asked to specify what kind of kidnap they desired: "leftist revolutionary kidnapped by secret services"; "kept in underwear"; "verbal abuse"; plus more cuddly options such as "bedtime story" and "jam doughnut." To be on the hitlist, about 200 people paid the £10 registration fee—on June 12, 10 were selected at random and put under surveillance. At this point, says Blast Theory's Matt Adams, things got spooky. "The stress of spying on people meant we barely slept. It was very weird. I found the whole experience very affecting and emotionally draining." Those under surveillance were unaware of being watched until they received a photograph of themselves.

Next, 2 names were picked at random from the shortlist. On July 15/16, Debra Burgess, 27, and Russell Ward, 19, were seized and bundled off "to a completely secret location." "To this day," says Adams, "they don't know where they were held. The next three days were a slightly psychotic episode in which we had to play this double act: on the one hand, we had to fulfil a fantasy image of firm and harsh kidnappers, on

the other, we were incredibly careful about their well-being."

Both cruel and caring, Blast Theory kept Burgess and Ward under constant video surveillance. "We had a psychologist on hand and we worried all the time about how they were coping." The Kidnap Project website kept the wider world informed about the event. After 72 hours, the two dazed but healthy hostages were released at London's ICA. What was it like? Debra Burgess, who lived in Melbourne before coming to temp in London, says: "It was very emotional. The room was really small and I paced up and down a lot. Much nervous energy. I was alone for the first day and had so much time to think about my life. When I was allowed to see the kidnappers at the end it was bizarre—they were the only people I could share this experience with. At the end, the press conference was nerve-racking."

After hours alone or imprisoned with her fellow hostage, she suddenly found herself "in a room full of journalists who completely misunderstood the event—they were looking for psycho-sexual motives and missed the element of audience participation. It felt so surreal—then when I was free and walked down the road I just wanted to tell people: 'You have no idea what sort of experience I have just had.'"

For Blast Theory, *Kidnap* "evolved from a conventional theatre piece called *Succumbing*, which explored the impulse to give up control to other people," says Adams. A heavy emotional content has always been part of the group's activity. In *Gummen Kill Three*, their first show in 1991, audience members were given the chance to fire a gun point blank at nude cast members. "The audience is a key figure," says Adams. "Kidnap is a daily presence in our society—but it's always experienced at a distance. In the project, we tried to break down

that distance." Publicity was easy because "it was a very media-friendly idea—in fact both Burgess and Ward heard about it through the press. They were ordinary punters—not arty types." Blast Theory attracted some adverse publicity from victim-support groups, who criticised their "light-hearted approach", but stress that "there are many different kinds of kidnap: people kidnap each other for their birthdays, even *101 Dalmatians* is a kidnap story." While the group learned a lot about the logistics of kidnapping, they also gained a lot from the event being playful. In September, the video of the Kidnap Project is showing at Manchester's Green Room.

If Blast Theory have moved away from venues, Improbable Theatre have found that people are more important than locations. The group—which was formed in 1996 by Phelim McDermott, Lee Simpson and Julian Crouch—toured *Lifegame*, in which different invited guests are interviewed about their life and scenes from it are recreated on stage. While some guests were big names—actress Joanna Lumley and West Yorkshire Playhouse director Jude Kelly—others were not. When I saw *Lifegame* at London's Purcell Room, the guest was Phil Clarke, who works in the media. At the start, he summed up his experience: "Life is unfair." By the end of the evening, the truth that emerged was that "life is fair enough." Based on an idea by impro-guru Keith Johnstone, *Lifegame* is a memory-fest: embarrassments at school, teenage love, and parental conflicts all emerge despite the cosy talkshow format. Simpson says: "We decided to do a totally spontaneous show where what happens is completely in the hands of the guest—it's a leap of faith."

Watching Improbable Theatre's mix of naff impro and highly emotional recall—when Clarke's life suddenly reminded you of your

own—feels like group therapy. But live theatre has its surprises. At one point, an audience member ran out, vomited profusely at the exit, and left. As the rest of us edged away from the stink, the actors kept a grip on the situation, enacting an emotional scene from Clarke's life and proving that every person's story is special.

Site specific work can also turn the humdrum into magic. Using the balconies of Bow's Old Fire Station in East London, Station House Opera performed *Snakes and Ladders*, a "three-dimensional sculpture with performers, lights, video images and ladders." Formed in 1980, the group produce highly visual and evocative work in locations such as Brooklyn Bridge, Dresden's Frauenkirche and Salisbury Cathedral.

In *Snakes and Ladders*, the everyday acts of individuals are played out, parodied, repeated on video. Incidents become increasingly ridiculous as doubles of the actors mimic their every action. But while the doppelgangers can easily transport themselves around the building, even moving into space, the actors are impeded by gravity and vertigo. As director Julian Maynard says: "This is a celebration of a building (which has just been converted into artists' studios). It is also about the way we identify with particular spaces—any place can be both deeply personal and full of ghosts. How many people have lived in your house, woken up in your bedroom and washed in your bathroom?"

In different ways, all 3 productions illustrate the sheer diversity of groups in Britain (especially those set up in the 1990s). But problems remain. Blast Theory found that the Arts Council rejected its bid for *Kidnap* funding. Instead, Firetrap, a hip clothing company, gave them £12,000 for the project. With sponsors, who says that crime doesn't pay?

Kidnap, Blast Theory, unknown location, July 15 - 16, website: www.newmediacentre.com; *Lifegame*, Improbable Theatre, directed by Phelim McDermott and Lee Simpson, Lyric Hammersmith, London, June 23 - 27 (plus tour); *Snakes and Ladders*, directed by Julian Maynard Smith, Station House Opera, Bow's Old Fire Station, May 27 - 31

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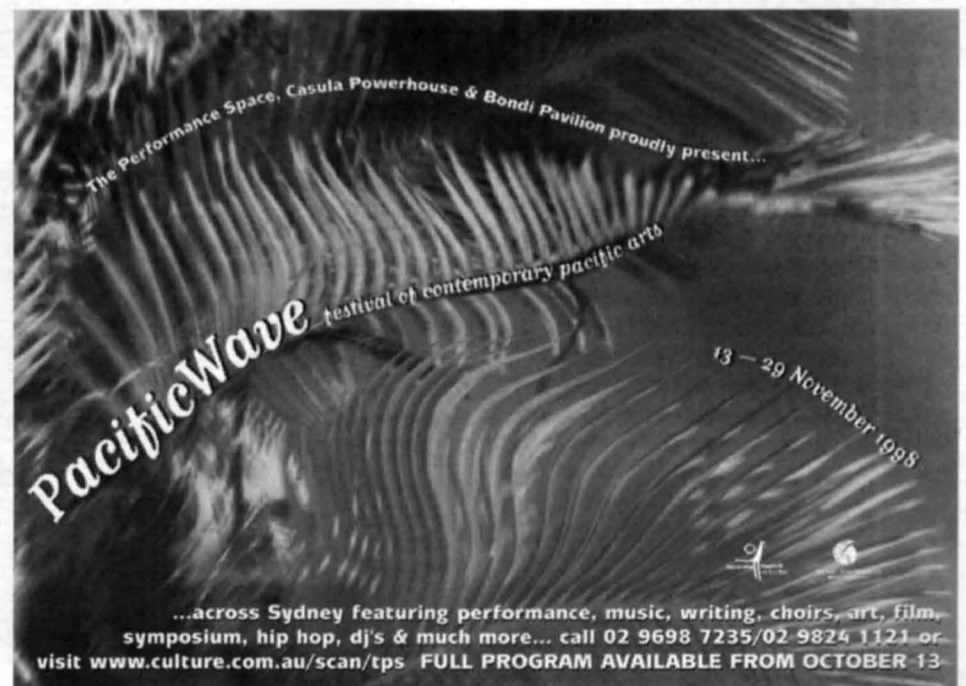
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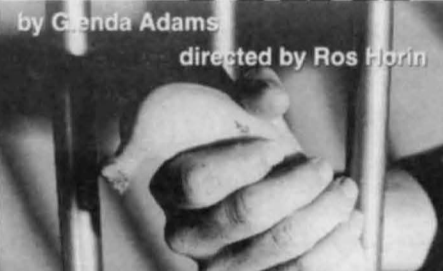
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The benchmark for accessibility

Anne Thompson interviews Ollie Black about Indigenous art developments at Port Youth

This interview is my response to attending the March meeting of the Theatre Fund of the Australia Council, as a peer advisor. In that meeting the new funding program Ollie describes, was mentioned and I became acutely aware of the very real challenge to ongoing arts organisations to address their relationship to Indigenous artists. Port Youth Theatre Workshop was established in 1985, International Youth Year, under the direction of Susan Ditter. It was originally set up for young unemployed people in the Port area of Adelaide, a multicultural community. The company has always been committed to access, equity and culturally appropriate processes. It now runs programs to include 5 to 26 year olds across the western suburbs of Adelaide in all areas of the performing arts. It was selected to assist with the administration of the new fund because of the relationship it has established with the Adelaide Nunga community. Ollie Black is now artistic director of the company.

AT *I am interested in how you work with the Nunga community.*

OB Firstly, the model of work we have developed has come from discussions with the community. Next, we employ Aboriginal workers and we believe it is important that there is more than the token one. We find if you employ Aboriginal workers, other Aboriginal people feel more comfortable coming in. They'll drop in to visit those workers but while they're here they'll hear what projects are happening at Port Youth. The spread of information happens in a different way in the Nunga community. We find we need to be open to the social networking which is a crucial part of life in that community. What we might call gossip works as a survival strategy.



Natasha and her crocodile

This networking and their kinship system are the traditional things that are extraordinarily strong, even in an urban Aboriginal community which may not have had much traditional experience. Auntie Josie (Josie Agius), our Aboriginal Community Networker, works here three afternoons a week, but a vital part of her job is going for a walk in the mall at lunch time so she can hear what's happening.

We also want to develop the skills of young Aboriginal people so they can have ownership of their work, so we are employing a young Aboriginal Community Networker to work alongside Auntie Josie who can also draw in the young kids. This worker can do more of the street stuff and hopefully access the 15-20 age group. Last year Rebekah Ken was our trainee. She ran the Just Us Plus group (the

Aboriginal workshop group), and did a lot of the networking. She worked on an event during the *Takeover Festival* with another trainee from Carclew, Nikki Ashby. They organised *Blak Nite*, an Indigenous night, at Blink, the *Takeover Festival* nightclub, which was a huge success. From that came the Sing It Up Big Choir and a dance group, Urban Sista. I can see that in the future Port Youth will have an Aboriginal stream and I would like to train an artistic director who could take over the direction of that program.

AT *How do you see your role then? Are you a facilitator?*

OB I see Port Youth as being able to provide support, resources and opportunities for participation. We've just been approached by the Theatre Fund of the Australia Council to help administer a fund of about \$50,000. This fund is to be made available for Aboriginal artists' skills development. This was the recommendation of a national panel of Indigenous theatre workers who met recently. It is to be an Indigenous community driven project but it will be based here. We're talking with an Aboriginal woman who will co-ordinate the grant round. We'll help her set up an advisory group and then they'll select a panel who will select the projects and we'll distribute the money and manage it financially. She'll also create a database to assist the trafficking of information and communication between Indigenous artists.

AT *Talking about ownership, do only Aboriginal tutors teach the Nunga kids?*

OB The non-Aboriginal and the Aboriginal groups do come together for our show-and-tell sessions and in the Port Parade but they haven't worked together. We are now looking to have

projects which combine groups. We want each to have a sense of their own identity but we also don't want individuals to be intimidated when in mixed cultural social situations. We do think exchanging tutors is a good way to start this process. For example, with the 5 - 10 Aboriginal group, a non-Aboriginal puppet maker runs the workshop with 5 Aboriginal back-up workers. It's the second time we've run the workshop which deals with conflict resolution. It's called *Warratti* which is a Koori word for 'Stop!' The Aboriginal back-up workers are counsellors and role models for the kids. They come from Nunkuwarrin Yunti, the Aboriginal medical centre in the city and have all done Family Well-being training, a style of counselling which uses storytelling and has been developed with the Aboriginal community.

AT *Who came up with the theme?*

OB We have an Aboriginal advisory group of approximately 8. They are the mothers and grandmothers of some of the participants. Auntie Josie is also on that committee. They wanted the workshop to deal with domestic violence, kids who are in a situation of family violence, and provide them with some conflict resolution skills.

This workshop has been run twice. In the first workshop we separated the children into gender groups and produced a series of books which looked at different emotions. This year we brought the boys and girls together. They are making puppets and then the puppets will explore relating in different situations. The advisory group felt that boys and girls had to now learn to get on with each other in the family, whereas at first they wanted the girls to be separate and safe. I always take my direction from that advisory group.

It's also important to say that we provide transport to and from workshops as many members of that community don't have cars and coming to drama is not necessarily the priority of the day. We pick the kids up from school. We also work closely with the Aboriginal Education Workers who wait with the kids. Sometimes these workers come to the workshops. They talk to the kids' parents and get permission for them to come. This is very important, though most parents now know and trust the organisation. We also drop the kids home after the workshop. Auntie Josie goes on the bus when we do this because she will have found out during the day where the kids will be sleeping that night.

It must be said that Port Youth now sees our work with the Aboriginal community as our benchmark for accessibility, rather than being "the exception."

AT *So back to "art"? Is that community interested in any art form or aesthetic as long as there is Aboriginal involvement in the ways you've outlined?*

OB They want to see themselves out there more in every field...in film, in TV...using what they know they do well.

Anne Thompson is a freelance director, choreographer and writer.

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A U S T R A L I A C O U N C I L


NATIONAL INDIGENOUS THEATRE INITIATIVE

The Theatre Fund of the Australia Council, in collaboration with Indigenous artists and Port Youth Theatre Workshop (SA), has established a pilot professional development program for experienced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre workers in any State or Territory. A limited number of proposals will be supported at up to \$5,000 each for work secondments and periods of professional development.

Proposals will be due 2 November 1998.

For guidelines contact:
Tina Flanagan, Initiative Coordinator, Port Youth Theatre Workshop:
(08) 8341-0221 or fax (08) 8240-3450.

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A chamber of mourning From stage to cage

Linda Marie Walker at Vitalstatistix' recent work, *My Vicious Angel*

Once, when I was young, I yearned to fly, to take my body to its limits (or to imagine what I'd never, ever, know) to stretch it into strange shapes. Especially to make it other than it was, or how it thought it was. Then it crashed, invaded by multiple forces, of which language was the worst, the first, then remembering, or what came to be both the possibility and the impossibility of memory. Then came obligations, and so on...deliveries of sorts. And as these bundles of unresolved events landed—like sleeping, dreaming, waking, and as if one actually wasn't 'there'—life became their playground.

This is the time, in abeyance, through (or maybe 'at', as if an occasion, rather than a place) which one enters the space of the play *My Vicious Angel*. An angel that won't, can't, let up, and which comes out in (projects) both characters, Pearl and Merle, as the past pervades (projects) them. Each scene, then, is isolating and summoning, invigorating and destroying.

Over a drink, I ask a friend the dumb question: "Well, what did you think." And she says, "I know the mother." And then she goes on about *our* mothers. It's horror-talk



Caroline Mignone, Lucia Mastrantone, *My Vicious Angel*

And earlier:

Pearl There's a catch...

Merle I'll catch you—cross my heart and hope to die.

And this is the point (at which these two promises seal fate: "cross my heart / hope to die"), or the internal momentum, of the play: the dying, the death, the sparing. The being-left of the living—and the dying that goes on in the living—as one starts to mourn one's own death. This mourning, as it's played out in *My Vicious Angel*, must rake over, must focus close, all the words—answers, demands, warnings, lies—of those who have shaped one's life. This, this angel, is the vicious one, the one who sticks her claws in. And he/she/it's a scaffolding that one constructs clandestine (bit by bit; and here the major component of the fine set by Imogen Thomas). Its composition—even though, finally, an acknowledgment of the fragility and pain of those one might have grown to hate—is within one's own echo-chamber (memory), a thing, an individual texture, ambience (hard, cold) with which one lives out the everyday.

The taut, lyrical form of Christine Evans' play holds together lightly, making one aware of careful control, and at the same time making the complex arena of repetitive, relentless, rememberings both terrifyingly and poetically potent. As, it becomes clear (on one level) that the desire to fly is driven by departures which are real and unreal, mapped by sound (actual voicings) and silence (actual feelings). Now, flying makes me nervous...and I've barely touched the surface. Still I went searching for something, and found again

Gillian Rose's last book (*Love's Work*) before she died of cancer (it was referred to as a 'love song'), and the section in it about how she came to terms with 'shit': "Suppose we awoke one day with four faces, each one going straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they go; and they turn not when they go. It makes all the difference: it makes no difference at all. It becomes routine; my routine is unselfconscious about the rituals and private character of your routines. Thus, I handle my shit. I no longer employ the word as an expletive, discharging intense, momentary irritation into its void of meaning."

My Vicious Angel respects what it is that the body comes to do/be, in terms of the unexpected circumstances it encounters. That is, something is already over before it (the play) begins, and this gives it its energy, something equivalent to: "and they turn not when they go."

I'm flying again. Back from Melbourne to Adelaide. Held up here by a cushion of white fluffy clouds, still thrilled by the group The Necks at the Corner Hotel, Richmond. Having been made acutely aware, again, of the risks performers take, on the stage. In *My Vicious Angel* each of the characters—the 2 actors (who played all roles), the 2 musicians—were especially 'present', their rhythm, their timing, spot on. The set was minimal and practical, and provoked a sense of imminent falling, that at any moment 'a slip' might occur. That is, the play walks a fine-line, a trapezoidal-work, between tension and release, between life and death—between this limit and that limit.

My Vicious Angel, a play by Christine Evans, produced by Vitalstatistix National Women's Theatre, Adelaide, assisted by Playworks, The National Organization for Women Performance Writers, director Rosalbe Clemente, actors Caroline Mignone, Lucia Mastrantone, musicians Boyd, Guy Freer, dramaturgy Keith Gallasch, designer Imogen Thomas, lighting Geoff Cobham, Waterside Hall, Adelaide, July 8 - August 1

Merle A hard way back...

Pearl Back up there soon. No big deal. I'm on the mend. Mind over matter. Fall off a horse, you get straight back on. After it's bolted. If I could just move everything would...

Merle & Pearl ...fall into place...

Novelist Glenda Adams talks to Keri Glastonbury about the process of writing *The Monkey Trap* for Griffin Theatre Company

The Monkey Trap takes its name from a sadistic animal experiment from the illustrious canon of behavioural psychology, the famed school of psychologists who give electric shocks to little kids who wet the bed and expose rats to heavy metal music then measure their adrenal glands. In the monkey trap experiment, food is placed in a cage in front of a monkey though when the monkey reaches for the food the bars are not wide enough to allow its clenched fist back through. The monkey stays grasping the food until it dies of starvation.

Teddy Why do they let things like that happen?

Bill That's the finding of the experiment. The monkey'll hold on to its behaviour, even when it's not in its interest to do so. Even when it means it'll be destroyed.

The Monkey Trap is a story of an average dysfunctional family on a winter's night in suburban Sydney. The increasing wind-chill builds up, as in Ang Lee's film of Rick Moody's novel The Ice Storm, though Glenda Adams' play offers much more of a light-hearted and comedic exposition of family secrets.

KG The title, *The Monkey Trap*, is that a metaphor for the nuclear family?

GA It's a metaphor for how we all get trapped in behaviour that is lethal to us and we can't let go. It's a play about people who are trapped in the way they behave with one another and, perhaps for a moment, this night they let go. The living room is the cage itself. Each door bell ringing is like a Pavlovian bell which was the earliest conditioning experiment. The door bell ringing heralds the entry of a new person—once they come in they are in the cage and there is no escape.

KG There is that tension between the scientific behaviourist school in psychology that says we are all completely conditioned by our behaviour and the more unconscious school that says the repressed will come to the surface.

GA Certainly there is a tension in psychology between those two areas but this play is not anti-behaviourist at all because behaviourists do some very interesting work. I have seized upon experiments that excite my imagination and I feel I can use. A lot of their work is a metaphor for human behaviour.

KG The play also looks at this tension in writing. The characters are engaged in writing memoirs, mapping, academic studies...

GA Each character is trying to pin things down or control their lives or how they perceive their lives. This night, with this family together it comes apart. It's about memory, trying to fix memories.

KG That's what I meant about the unconscious—a repository of all these memories that will return. You've come to play-writing from writing fiction and managed to write an incredibly pared back dramatic structure where the dialogue all takes place in a single room. I imagine you are used to writing with much more scope in time and space.

GA The night gives the structure—it's a security—this is where I have to stay. It gives a unity of time and concentration of people. What has happened over the development of the play is the dramatic structure of that night. This is the great nature of collaboration with Ros Horin as director and dramaturg. I have been able to develop the story for each character—the journey that each of them has to make that night.

The play started from a short-story I'd written, which was the beginning for the play. And there's hardly anything left of that story now. A little reference to Observatory Hill and the Cahill Expressway. The transition for a



Glenda Adams

Nancy Crampton

fiction writer is in the theatricality—not so much in a sense of reduced scope, but in writing for a visual medium.

I also see it as quite balletic. I see the characters choreographed and engaged in the dance together. They cross-cut a choreography of words as they speak across one another. Making their patterns. That idea of a choreography of words was with me all the time. Plus I see the actors as being quite agile on stage—although there's not much action I see them moving through their speeches.

KG Acting out their neuroses.

GA Kind of elegant and quick. The transformation to the stage is going to be amazing to see.

KG From reading the script I felt a real sense of catharsis in the final scene, but then I thought hang on, will they all need to go into therapy themselves now?

GA I see the story having a life beyond this—though there is the sense of reconciliation. This is only the beginning and by no means the end—but there's hope. The grief and anger of others needs to be experienced. This is the first time they've been able to air anything. The living room is a relic that has stayed static—they haven't touched much before this. Teddy (the 22 year old daughter) is the hope—her insistence on telling blows this night apart.

KG In the opening of the play it is Teddy who is telling the operatic story.

GA Yes, the opera. Those grand themes are there in *Il Trovatore*, a story of a gypsy, brothers who don't know if they are really brothers, revenge that has lasted through generations from mother to daughter, babies being mixed up. And of course opera treats these themes very grandly, doesn't it.

KG So this is the domestic version, a suburban Sydney *Il Trovatore*.

GA With a sweet little old lady dressed in blue with a little dementia.

The Monkey Trap, writer Glenda Adams, director Ros Horin, designer Dan Potra; lighting designer Damien Cooper; sound designer Sarah de Jong, cast Valerie Bader, Kirstie Hutton, Lynne Murphy, David Webb & Bill Young, Stables Theatre, Sydney, October 1 - November 1.

Take a walk on the queer side

Catherine Fargher reports on issues raised at Manchester's *It's Queer Up North*

Dateline: May.98. The *cLUB bENT* forum at the Grolsch tent in the heart of Manchester's gay and lesbian 'Village'. The forum, *club work, club play*, brings together performers and organisers from the growing 'queer' festival and club circuit from the UK, US and Australia, a circuit giving rise to exciting new work from dance and physical performers, writers and performance poets, comic and variety artists.

Today's line up: Lois Weaver (ex split briches, WOW cafe) leading the forum, along with Annie and Lucy from New York's Dance Noise, Jeremy Robbins (UK/Australian physical performer of bathtub fame, directed by Gail Kelly), UK artists from club Duckie and Screemers Variety; Chris Green (aka Tina C, country and western superstar), Marisa Carr (Dragon Ladies) and Ursula Martinez (aka Rock Chick). From *cLUB bENT*, Australia, there's Steve Brown and George Filev (Groundwork), Benedict Leslie (Flagging and the Red Dress) and myself (Sugar Sugar). Tanya Farnham and Gavan from *It's Queer Up North* sit in as entrepreneurs.

The basic questions of the forum are laid on the table: how and where does queer work come into being? Why do so many artists 'cross the road' for queer performance? How did the notion of *cLUB bENT* develop? Does the sense of 'club' inform the work? Answering these took us into a variety of sites in a number of queer centres, specifically New York, Sydney, Manchester and London. Reports were anecdotal and sometimes conceptual.

Dateline: 1980s. Queer village site: New York. Annie: "We were in the vegetable shop buying some fruit and I saw Happy Phace (legendary NY drag artist) and said, 'Hey we're

doing an event, will you do it.' Happy just said 'yes' and we were so excited, to start to be able to ask artists from all over the place, from the drag clubs, from WOW cafe [NY women's/lesbian performance venue] from across the street as it were. Half the time we were doing performances in front of rock bands, because there just weren't the venues. There is no funding for this sort of work in the US, we had to find any way to do it."

Lois: "In New York a lot of the time artists get worn out, burnt out just trying to create spaces to perform this sort of work, because there isn't the climate of funding, say that there is in Australia or even Britain. People burn out and then new people come along and start doing exactly the same thing and don't even realise the history of what's gone before them."

Dateline: 1995. Queer Village site: Sydney. Catherine: "*cLUB bENT* started as an initiative from an art space, the Performance Space; Angharad Wynne Jones and Johnathon Parsons in conjunction with the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, creating a cutting edge, queer, grass roots cabaret venue. The first year there were drag workshops, run by Groovii Biscuit—the influence of drag was there from the beginning. There's some exciting forms emerging, like lesbians doing camp drag."

"This space has been fed from a range of performance sites: the strip clubs, theatre/performance venues, the drag bars, gay and lesbian dance clubbers having a dare. Performers get work in other venues during the year where entrepreneurs support performance, like Greg Clarke at Spicey Fridays, or Groovii and Trash Vaudeville at Club Kooki."

Benedict: "People have been there for long enough now to create work specifically for that space, and collaborate with artists in ways they might not do by themselves; there's been a cross fertilisation, a development because the site has continued for four years. When you work in some spaces, Kooki for instance, you know what you're going to be able to do, what the audience will take."

Dateline: 1990s. Queer village site: London. Marisa: "Clubs like club Duckie have developed policies to support queer performers as much as they can. It's a dance club, but before the DJs start the performance work comes on. The audiences are respectful—Amy Lane (MC) gets the audience to appreciate that it's artists working. They've specifically created an environment where artists can work. I also brought over a group of performers from New York for an event called *Smutfest* crossing over strip and performance art for a queer event."

"Emma Wilson created a promenade 'pleasure garden' at the Old Vauxhall Tavern [London's oldest Tranny bar, and home of club Duckie]. In Elizabethan times the site had been a genuine pleasure garden, with troubadours, ballooning, dancing bears. We created a queer pleasure garden, with drag troubadours; Marisa created a hysterical whore character under one of the arches, Chris Green was a minstrel leading the audiences around."

Chris Green: "We also started a queer comedy club called Screemers Variety, which has now been funded by the London Arts Board. There was no specifically gay and lesbian comedy space. Performers from Duckie crossed over."

Jeremy Robbins. "My work is often created for corporate markets, but can still have a queer flavour. I use the money to fund work which I can take back into queer venues."

The key theme arising from the discussion is that the climate of each 'site' in the global gay village determines what work will come about; the conditions and environment of the site generating particular forms. Comparisons between New York, London and Sydney venues, entrepreneurs and funding indicate their influence on particular styles of the clubs and the work. Ideas for venues were sometimes appropriated by visiting artists who would then 'take them home' (hence *cLUB bENT*, which emerged in Sydney, has made its way to Manchester via Tanya Farnham, and *SmutFest* in New York makes its way to London via Marisa Carr).

The drive to do the work is coming strongly from these 'communities of desire'—performance is emerging in some places as a form of activism/need/result of oppression and people will cross all sorts of roads to do it and where possible create sites, or use existing ones. The club context, while sometimes limiting the form of work (eg text and tech in some cases) was at least a starting point for emerging artists and for many a preferred site. The gay and lesbian community has traditionally focussed its identity and life around clubs, as a place where it can explore its visibility (in the shadows).

club work/club play, forum, Grolsch Tent, Manchester's Gay Village, May 17

Catherine Fargher is a performer, writer and activist in the lesbian and gay communities in Sydney and Brisbane since 1989. She has performed in every *cLUB bENT* since its inception in 1995. She also works as a freelance writer and editor.

Exhibit—open and shut

Caitlin Newton-Broad wraps up the last Performance Space *Open Week*

I confess that I am an *Open Week* veteran—a sometime participant and rapt spectator of this humble season of short works. This year was its last stand and despite some individually great pieces this wrap-up seemed timely.

Open Week, held every year for eight years by The Performance Space, began as a season to stimulate new contributions to the developing set of practices by artists of performance. *Open Week* also twinned as TPS's membership drive for new audiences. 'Performance' was historically the operative term in this season, distinguished from 'theatre' by an emphasis on elemental investigations into processes and approaches that extended beyond the theatre vocabulary or indeed arose from somewhere altogether different. It has been a testing site for established artists and small companies to try out new ideas and a breeding ground for new artists' work. Works are selected sight unseen from written proposals and the program is as stated "always unexpected and diverse."

In this last season of *Open Week*, *Open98*, it was obvious that things had drifted from this initial charter. In this instance the term 'performance' conjured no tighter definition than public exhibition. Overall I had the impression that *Open Week* had lost its way, no longer providing a germination pit for artists in a concentrated or esteemed environment. There was a serious lack of focus in programming which, coupled with a lack of TPS presence,

resulted in work catapulting out there unmediated by specific context or reception. Conceptual works sat uneasily alongside drawing room farce and jazz ballet eisteddfod pieces.

However, from the works presented there seemed to be two notable strains of interest—continuing "Trash" fever—characterised by the notorious girls of grub Frumpus and the prevalence of text used as primary material in some of the most interesting offerings.

Trash performance pieces echo absurd moments in consumer fever and take the spectator blindly down bizarre alleyways of association. This impoverished Pop attitude was showcased in Geoff Stein's curated series *B-Grade* held at TPS earlier this year. The *B-Grade* shows tapped into a devoted young audience of roaring interjectors, gigglers and haggles: a live marketplace for low and dirty tricks. When I say impoverished, I do not mean less-than-Pop, but that 90s trash is an unstable, exhausted version of Pop with none of the optimism for attracting value (ie funding or buyers).

Open Week has always had a touch of the B-Grade and this year was no exception—included was Rose Ertler's wild dance of the Twistie, Emma and Tasha's saucy tableaux of cinema seduction and Swizelstik's brilliant tamaguchi *Madame Butterfly*. Toy Death bleeped away in their playpen, amplifying the soundbytes of spurious children's toys and Frumpus provided the inevitable crescendo

and a closing ceremony of Olympic 2000 fervour. All these pieces included elements of sophisticated computer/video/sound technology and profiled some scarily multi-skilled DIY artists. The bad taste and fantasy factor in these works sends up the critical posturing of much ordained cultural product and provides a perverse kind of entertainment akin to the 19th century freak show. To risk a generalisation, these works were characterised by a

wilfully awkward and disarticulated presence that left this spectator aware of living in the shadow of Ganglands.

Lots of words, sophisticated, narrative and associative flowed in conjunction with some interesting performance strategies. Jade and Kira Carden's *D Words in Two Parts* was developed through a residency for emerging artists at TPS earlier this year. The same dialogue was played twice with very different consequences. The writing was evocative and the D words were disaster, damage, death etc. *The Mary Stuart Tapes* was a refinement of a previous short work by John Gillies and Clare Grant. As an elusive figure moves through various live surveillance frames she intones an extracted version of Schiller's text leading to the execution of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. This remarkable pixel and vocal presence is finally ruptured by the live appearance of the costumed actor confronting the audience. AJ Rochester's long night of the clit balanced a torrent of words, laughter and desire. *True Love and Can Openers* was an absurd evocation of a young woman's coming-to-independence—a kind of John Waters musical—and *Symphonic Set* by Alycia Fergusson and Marian Jardine was a morality tale of a large-breasted young woman with the First Testament feel of Strewelpeter. The vivid word was a welcome guest at this event and can always be counted on to create generative unease for performance makers and audience alike.

TPS Artistic Director Zane Trow hopes to rejuvenate the vital function of short works seasons next year by setting up some more curated evenings along the lines of the successful *B-Grade* shows. He hopes that by freeing up the resources of *Open Week*, The Performance Space can provide forums for developing audiences for new processes and that the programming shift will address the creative development of artists by providing focussed infrastructure for works-in-progress. He acknowledges that what is lost in watering down the selection process for a performance season is a sense of context and incubation for artists specifically interested in new forms of public exhibition.

What I noticed was that participants at this year's *Open Week* were only attending the night

they were on rather than supporting the whole program. I look forward next year to an intelligent and inclusive alternative to *Open Week* wherein performance can maintain participatory strategies which extend connections between practice, writing and the live audience.

Open98, *The Performance Space*, Sydney, July 21 - 25

Caitlin Newton-Broad is a Sydney-based writer and director, assistant director on *Belvoir St Company B's The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, and, with Nikki Heywood and Victoria Spence, a director in the PACT season, *The Dark Room*.

Vision and pragmatism

Once upon a time, individual talent and ambition, training and maybe a skerrick of vision, were enough to set you on a career in the performing arts. Or that's what tertiary arts education suggested by its inward looking nature. The shock, and the thrill, of the real came after graduation, though with ever more pain in recent years. University courses increasingly offer more advice and, occasionally, practice in how to create the world in which to perform rather than wait for it to come to you. Theatre Nepean at the University of Western Sydney is an admirable example of this mix of vision and pragmatism. Students have been instrumental in raising funds to present a graduation season of 2 plays at the Sydney Theatre Company's Wharf 2 Theatre. The continuing fundraising initiative has been formalised as *Centrestage*; it has a patron, Ruth Cracknell, and Theatre Nepean graduate David Wenham is its ambassador. An impressive \$40,000 in corporate sponsorship has been raised. For *ricochet*, Theatre Nepean's graduation season, Terence Crawford will direct Shakespeare's *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. Anna Volska will direct *Aftershocks*. This 'verbatim theatre' account of the social and psychological after-effects of the Newcastle earthquake was created by Paul Brown with survivors of the quake and the Newcastle Workers Cultural Action Committee and successfully produced, first by the Action Committee with the assistance of the Hunter Valley Theatre Company, and then by Belvoir's Company B. It'll be intriguing to see the work as it moves yet further away from the time of the earthquake and into a different set of bodies and performative strategies, and becomes a deserving part of Australian theatrical and social history. RT



Krysia Mansfield, *True Love and Can Openers*

Heidrun Löhr

Driving the developing text

Dominic Hogan on recent works by Brisbane's Backbone Youth Arts

For years Backbone Youth Arts, formerly La Bôte Youth Arts, has been providing the young people of Brisbane with a flexible creative outlet. Primarily focused on the development of group devised, multi-artform performances, Backbone aids young artists by introducing them to professional arts-workers who help structure their ideas into viable performance while maintaining the authenticity of the young people's vision. Having been involved with Backbone for some time, I have experienced a number of different creative processes. While group devised pieces are very satisfying to develop, they risk being too chaotic for an audience to keep up with. A helpful preventative for this is engaging a writer with the performers in the creative development of a piece. This integrates the structures of more conventional styles of performance building (ie scripting, dramaturgy and direction) with the collaborative style, embracing the array of ideas generated by a group creating an original piece.

Backbone has stepped off last year's experiments with this process and launched *Toxic*, *Trail* and *Blaze*. Employing writer Maryanne Lynch and dramaturg Louise Gough, these three multi-artform performances explore the qualities of text and its translation in performance while following three quite distinct paths. *Toxic*, performed and developed by Backbone's Parameter Pilots, was probably the most verbally oriented of the three. I was greeted at the entrance by two people with wigs and makeup, wearing laboratory coats proclaiming that something was wrong with the

plumbing inside. The walk up the narrow stairway of The Capitol brought me to the environment of *Toxic*, an ominous, dripping, whimpering soundscape by Brett Coltery combining with an equally intricate visual display by Prudence Cumes to complement the deep emotional journey that was the performance. The show itself concerned one character, Nancy Vandal, and his/her adventures through the Supermarket of Desire. Nancy was played by every one of the 15 performers at various points in the piece, and so became a girlboy representing not only all of the performers, but the audience as well.

The main driving force in developing *Toxic* was to explore how toxicity manifests itself in young people's lives. Rather than pull out tired ideas like drug abuse, the Parameter Pilots focused instead on aspects of our own personality that drag us into compulsive behaviour. The Supermarket of Desire became a range of products that Nancy could browse through, never forgetting the ominous message that she/he would never know the full implications of a purchase until the deal was done. The real beauty of *Toxic* lay in the evidence of group collaboration. This was the performers speaking, not just the writer. The process allowed for a writer to provide a structure for the group, but not without going through the workshop process, so that they all experienced the journey of the developing text.

Trail utilised a similar process, although this performance centred around text as

physical expression and gesture rather than verbal expression. The Hereford Sisters, 10 performers comprising a young women's physical theatre troupe, explored ideas of skin and what it hides/displays. It opened with one performer centre stage examining her face while a giant, live video projection showed us the details of this examination. It was quite disorienting to see this woman facing one direction yet at the same time staring at me through the projection behind her. But this was the gaze we give our own reflection. It effectively allowed the audience to see the way these artists look at themselves while also showing how they look and feel when other people are focused on them. Words and images projected onto the set guided the audience on the *Trail*, 'on my skin', 'inside my skin', and 'under my skin'. While I found a lot of *Trail* to consist of ideas that were not so gender specific, the work definitely gave strong insight into the way young women perceive themselves and the way they perceive others perceive them.

Last, and yet to be performed at the time of writing, is *Blaze*, devised by 11 members of Intravenous Cheese. It explores the last aspect of multi-artforms that Backbone has been working with, and is focused around the relationship between the text and lyrics in music by involving the Brisbane band Squelch. *Blaze* takes off from a piece done last year at the Stage X festival which also featured Squelch's "live, cheesy electropop", this time exploring the marketing of youth as



The Hereford Sisters in *Trail*

Melanie Gray

commodity. Precisely written portions are combined with structured improvisations to represent the way in which youth culture as perceived by the marketing world contrasts with the reality.

Toxic, devised and performed by the Parameter Pilots, director Judith McLean, dramaturg Louise Gough, written by Maryanne Lynch, July 31 - August 2; *Trail*, devised and performed by The Hereford Sisters, director Jo Wise, August 29 - 31; *Blaze*, devised and performed by Intravenous Cheese, director David Megarritty, September 17 - 19, The Capitol performance space, Brisbane

Dominic Hogan is an artist living in Brisbane.

Soap and not-soap

Filomena Coppola takes a *Reality Check* with the Salamanca Theatre Company

Salamanca Theatre Company's postmodern adult entertainment, *Reality Check*, offers insight into soap opera saturation, analysing the borders of fiction and reality as television cross-references itself, sitcoms reference soap operas, actors discuss their characters like friends, sitcom characters are used in advertising to promote 'real' products and current affairs programs are spiced up with stories like "Who is Ally McBeal?" followed by a review of the stock market crash. What is real, what is fiction?

Salamanca Theatre Company's immediate response to this question is to herd the audience behind and around a police line, two officers shouting directions over a squealing siren and the upbeat rhythm of regurgitated music sampled from various day/night time soaps. Immediately I was no longer viewer but participant; I had been employed to create and vicariously play a crucial role in this fictitious environment. I had crossed the border of individual and entered the stereotypical

environment of the soap. Lined up gawking over a police line, I watched the officers interview and select (from the entering audience) the 'actor' who would play the murdered victim for this scene.

Reality Check is a collection of fragmented storylines, interrupted glimpses of characters, commercial breaks, news headlines and channel surfing. It continues in this cyclical motion until the story is complete. Two actors convincingly portray up to 20 different characters. Beef is played by the actor Daniel Silverspoon, who is actually played by Salamanca's Martin Coutts, who also plays Officer Mastrocola, Kai—Beef's lover's son, an injured soldier—and a TV game show host. Confused? Well add to this a similar array of characters played by Salamanca's Marisa Mastrocola. There are no costume changes, just good acting and, mirroring the TV shows they critique, appropriately selected and sampled music to amplify the drama and to provide continuity.

Reality Check bombards us with characters



Martin Coutts and Marisa Mastrocola in *Reality Check*
Craig Blowfield

which intertwine and weave a perplexing story line in which dead relatives come back from the grave, mysterious and nasty identical twins appear, and the actors even refer to themselves within the piece. Martin and Marisa begin to question the audience about their performance, its credibility and their ability as actors. This confrontation creates an

unsettling nervousness. Martin asks the audience if he's a better actor than Marisa—so was that Martin, or was that Martin acting as Martin, the stereotypical competitive male? At this point *Reality Check* questions its own oscillation between fiction and reality. When portrayed in such a condensed manner as this it is easy to see the extensive implications of self referencing within the media as "it creates an ever-increasing, but less diverse, verbal and visual landscape." (McRobbie, *A Postmodernism and Popular Culture*, Routledge, New York, 1994)

Reality Check presents its audience with accessible stereotypical soap opera which then turns in on itself and analyses its own foundation. It takes advantage of the extensive influence of mass media and television by presenting an evening's television entertainment re-presented as interactive performance.

Salamanca Theatre Company, *Reality Check*, director Deborah Pollard, writer Sarah Brill, dramaturg John Baylis, choreographer Jerril Rechter, sound design and music Rose Ertler, design Anja Reinalda, Backspace Theatre, Hobart June 22 - August 28

Filomena Coppola is a visual artist based in Hobart.

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Feast

Whose Brecht?

Peter Wilkins at the CIA-Stopera production of *The Threepenny Opera*

When two innovative Canberra companies, the dynamic and acclaimed chamber opera company Stopera and the adventurous and experimental CIA (Culturally Innovative Arts), decide to combine talents, interest is immediately aroused. And when the production is *The Threepenny Opera*, the politically charged Brecht/Hauptmann/Weill collaboration on an adaptation of John Gay's *The Beggars' Opera*, then interest is charged with excitement.

Paradoxically, however, this production's greatest virtue contains the seeds of its striking weakness. Director David Branson's overt allegiance to Brecht's theatrical techniques of "epic theatre" has generally stifled the cast's ability to employ those techniques effectively enough in performance to engage the audience fully in the story. As Brecht said, "Everything hangs on the 'story'; it is the heart of the theatrical performance."

It is left to musical director Vivienne Winther, her musicians and the fine actor/singer talents of the company to boldly thrust the story's morality to the fore through superb renditions of Weill's sophisticated and difficult songs of doctrine. From the balladeer's opening rendition of *Mack the Knife*, sung in this production in German by a dapper MC of the cabaret tradition (Phil Roberts), to the stirring strains of survival in *What Keeps Mankind Alive*, to the highly satirical patter of the final announcement of the arrival of the Queen's Messenger, the wonderfully rendered songs and music of this faithful version reverberate with political protest and social satire. Here is the true tour de force of a production that faithfully strives to thrust Brecht's Marxist doctrine upon a contemporary audience.

The Threepenny Opera is no stranger to controversy. This reverent treatment by CIA and

Stopera lays itself open to the same attacks of "superficiality" and "old stand-by philosophy, fully exploded by Marx and Engels in the middle of the last century" that literary critic John Howard Lawson heaped upon the 1936 Broadway opening. The simple and largely implausible and borrowed plot, incorporating a Faginesque school for beggars, an underworld stable wedding, a corrupt and contrived jail escape, and a last minute royal reprieve from the noose, needs to be garnished with a rich serving of irony to satisfy the palate of an audience brought up on more sophisticated and less didactic dishes. It is a further irony that in this production Weill's score is able to transcend Brecht's heavy-handed text and offer a chorus of political and social protest that is more likely than the story to engage a contemporary audience.

What director David Branson does, unintentionally I believe, is fall into the trap of superficial reverence. An impeccable understanding of the elements of epic theatre are observed in Cathie Clelland's stark, demystified setting—all cold steel scaffolding, the original Caspar Neher design of the half-curtain strung across the stage, the projections of lyrics and place names on the screens and the placement of the excellent Stopera Threepenny Band in full view stage right. The actors observe the outward show of Brecht's Alienation Effect by presenting the emotionally uncluttered attitudes of his representational characters as functional disciples of the didactic intent. However, and most notably in Branson's work with the proletariat, the beggars, whores, police and cheering crowd, his actors are stifled by superficial motives. They lack the inventive stage business that would lend their characters the necessary depth on which to build a purposeful representation.

The notable exception is the strong performance



Chrissie Shaw in *The Threepenny Opera* 'pling

work of the women: Mrs. Peachum (Chrissie Shaw), daughter Polly (Jo Windred), police chief Tiger Brown's daughter, Lucy (Jane O'Donnell), and the whore Low Dive Jenny (Louise Morriss) engage and entertain our intellect in an otherwise bland production. On the battlefields of sexual, social and economic politics, it is Brecht's women who must struggle to survive the jealously guarded power-play of a male dominated society. The powerful, clear and direct performances of the women overshadow the less embellished characterisations of Jason Lehane's Macheath, Phil

Roberts' Tiger Brown and Lachlan Abraham's Mr Peachum. Though not entirely successful in engaging its audience in the dramatic action, Branson's interpretation of *The Threepenny Opera* does identify Brecht's blow for equality. Or is it the unsung Elisabeth Hauptmann, whose writing CIA's production has so clearly and justly acknowledged? In any event, it was the story of the women that captured my attention and jostled my intellect, and not the vain posturing of the grotesquely egocentric men. Macheath's betrayal at the hands of his Tunbridge whores, and his corrupt palm-crossed escape from his just sentence are but two sides of the same coin—the corrupting influence of power.

In the comfortable surrounds of the middle class Street Theatre, across the road from the Canberra's Worker's Club, this production lacked a rough, raw honesty. The union of two innovative companies resulted in a production that showcased considerable talent with intelligent respect for Brecht's political tract. But Brecht's theatre, spawned on the harsh satire of cabaret, etched with the craggy face of expressionist art and injected with irony's cruel sense of injustice, asks for more than reverence. It demands engagement and that is unfortunately something that for me this respectful production could not fully deliver.

CIA and Stopera, *The Threepenny Opera*, director David Branson, design Cathie Clelland, musical director Vivienne Winther, Street Theatre, Canberra, August 6 - 15

Peter Wilkins teaches Theatre Arts at Narrabundah College, Canberra, and is a theatre reviewer for The Canberra Times. He is also a freelance writer.

Writing through technology

Playworks announces another innovative writing workshop

Playworks, the National Centre for Women Performance Writers, offers a range of perspectives on writing for performance. Past workshops have included the kinaesthetics of writing with writer-director Jenny Kemp; writing the body with physical performance practitioners Gail Kelly, Celia White, Peta Tait and visiting US academic Peggy Phelan; visualising the text with Keith Gallasch. "We're also running a series of forums across the country—so far, NSW and WA, with one coming up next year in Darwin—called *Found in Translation*" says Playworks Director, Fiona Winning. In these, we celebrate the movement of ideas across all kinds of languages—verbal, physical, visual, conceptual. These forums bring together local practitioners who might not ordinarily share the same bill. "That's one of our advantages as a national organisation—we bring a different perspective to the local scene."

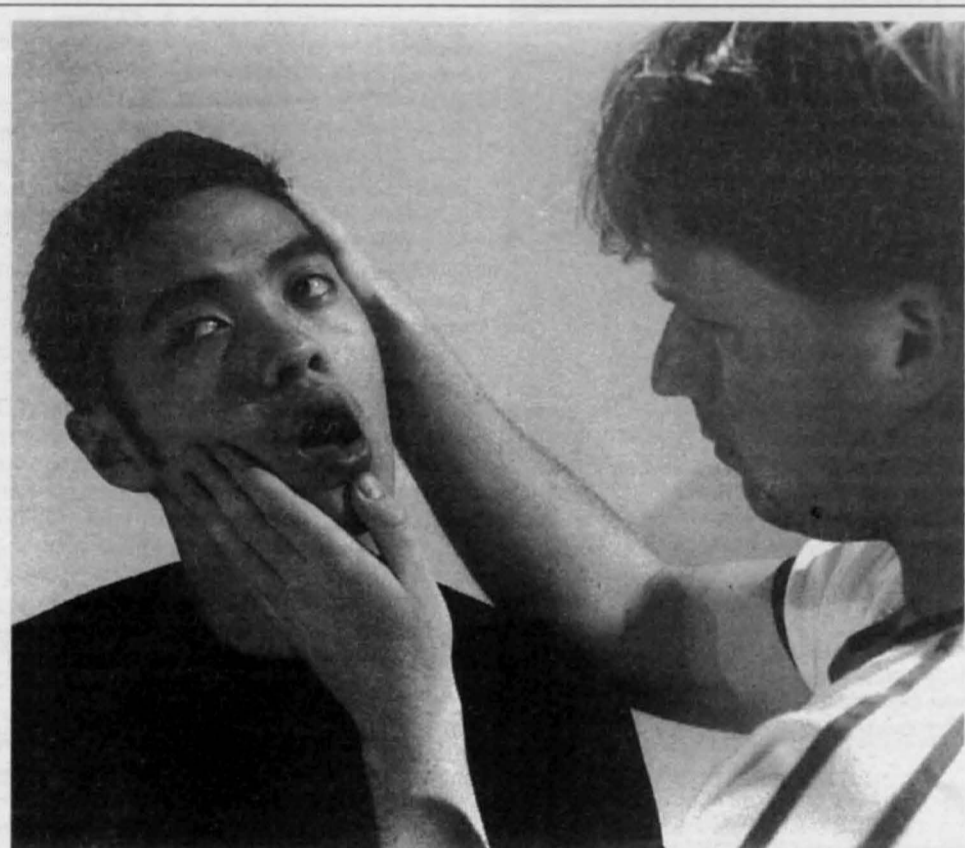
In mid-October Playworks hosts *Telling Moments*, a three-day workshop with writer and teacher Ross Gibson. Drawing on the experience of writing his CD-ROM work *Life After Wartime*, Gibson will introduce multimedia technology as a stimulus for generating and structuring narrative in performance writing. In *Life After Wartime* he used 400 achingly still photos from the NSW Police Department to create hundreds of modular texts which the user can shuffle and reconfigure to create a larger story engine. "The structuring of those moments into narrative systems is the challenging process," he says, "...how to use juxtapositions and absences to create a larger, compelling world of story."

Participants in the Playworks workshop will write from archives of material evidence. Presented with 10 second video grabs of people in the street, crossing roads, waiting, they will be asked to imagine out from these incidental actions. They'll write a series of telling moments and structure them into sequences that resonate into multiple narratives. On the final day, this process will be repeated when participants bring their own archive of material from which to write.

RT asks Fiona Winning just who Playworks is anticipating will benefit from such a workshop? "Our workshops attract a variety of practitioners from playwrights to contemporary performance writers and we'd also like people with a specific interest in multimedia to come along to this one," she says. "In all of our workshops, we encourage a mix because we believe that each has something to offer the other." Are the workshops open to men as well as women? "Playworks is an organisation of female practitioners and our ideas strongly reflect that. A Playworks workshop will always give priority to women. However, we believe that the organisation has a unique perspective to share with the wider performance community and on many of our projects, including the Ross Gibson workshop, we encourage them to join us."

RT

Playworks, *Telling Moments*, October 17, 18 and 24, The Centre for Performance Studies, Sydney University. Enquiries: tel Playworks 02 9264 8414 fax 02 9264 8449 playwks@ozemail.com.au



Karl Velasco and David Sheehan in *10 x 6*

Barry Gamba

The 6 short plays in the *10x6* season are so tied up in verbal interrogation (Milan Kundera wrote that love is an act of interrogation) that *Full Body Search* seems a curious title. However, director Regina Heilmann opens out the tiny Belvoir Downstairs space (with set designers Paschal and Roman Berry, the clever shadow plays of lighting designer David Ferguson and Nick Wishart's sounds) and lets the words breathe, as much as she can, with strong, often almost still physical images and bursts of simply choreographed and sparsely repeated movement. This is not only strong direction, but also an appropriate way of handling talkative, often under-edited short plays that overly relish wordplay and are only beginning to connect with bodies and space. The direction is an education in the sparseness that most of these writers should aspire to. It only falters in the overlong, overwritten *Navel Gazing* (Jade Garden), where thin material is boosted with a superfluity of images. That the Multicultural Theatre Alliance, as part of Carnivale, offers emerging writers such an opportunity, including dramaturgy and excellent performances from Valerie Berry and chameleon Karl Velasco, is admirable and some of the results are very good, as in the opening play, Gabriel Sterio's *Earthenware Head*. Two sisters await the return of a man who has changed their lives. The choral unanimity of the voices—nice rhythmic writing—is opposed by the spatial and subtle physical tension between the women, escalated by the sudden appearance of a machete. Majid Heath's direct address to the audience in his *Blood and Guts* presents a cocky persona "not cool enough to be white trash" but increasingly 'black' ("I got blacker, but no one else saw it"), forcing us into the uncomfortable gauging of "who is this, what race...?" It's not well written, but the idea is potent. Paschal Berry's *Ancestry of My Eyes* is the play closest to the season's title in its dialectic of the personal and the political, the interior and the physical. This is the third of the *10x6* seasons, they're excellent value for writers and audiences, and a model of their kind, though it is quite clear that more time needs to be devoted to pre-rehearsal dramaturgy.

KG

10x6, 1998, Multicultural Theatre Alliance, Carnivale, Belvoir St Theatre Downstairs, September 11 - 20



Kay Armstrong in *Customs*

"The privilege of displaying any emotion such as fear and anger is reserved for passengers only."

Rules for Air Hostesses.

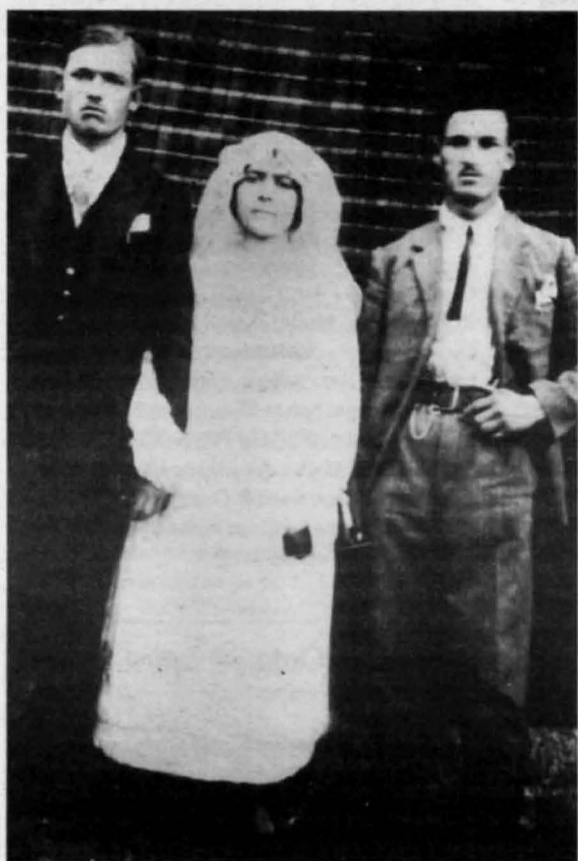
Trans Australian Airlines c.1940

Josephine Wilson is a Perth writer with a perceptive eye and ear for performative languages. She's the author, in collaboration with performer Erin Hefferon, of that wonderfully eerie journey through Australian history and its icons, *The Geography of Haunted Places*. With co-writer Linda Carroli she recently won first prize in the Salt Hill Journal's Hypertext Competition for their internet writing project *water always writes in "plural"*. Josephine has created a new performance work with Glenn McGillivray's Theatre of Desire, a Sydney

company whose work is inspired by popular performance forms such as circus, vaudeville and B movies. Their recent works include *Rites of Memory & Desire* (1993-96), *The Frankenstein Twist* (1995) and *The Glasses of Hector Margolez* (1997). Asked via email to describe her performance text for *Customs*, Wilson replied: "Three co-ordinates converge in a warped space where no-one is quite sure where they are, where they have been or where in the world they are headed. Trapped in a space of televised terminal deferral, The Consultant, The Explorer and The Air Hostess reluctantly act out their relationships to time and space in situations that teeter between the existential and the ridiculous. For The Consultant, the future has well and truly arrived, and the body is but the terminus of a radical maladaptation; for The Explorer, the fragility of the body is to be disarmed through stories of a Golden Past; for The Air Hostess, the promise of flight is confounded by the twin burdens of femininity and nostalgic excess."

RT

Theatre of Desire, *Customs*, Sidetrack Studio, 142 Addison Road, Marrickville. October 8- November 1. Tel 02-96987235



Wandering through *Five Rooms*, the faithful reproduction of rooms from Marrickville suburban homes by Sidetrack Performance Group as part of the *Sea Change* Cultural Olympiad festival, is an affecting and sometimes eerie experience. Arriving at a moment without the usual flow of visitors, I happened to find myself alone for a treasured little eternity in these sites of intense personal and familial history. Three distinctive loungerooms adjoin, and a kitchen and an artist's tiny home studio run off the third. In addition to furniture, floor coverings, curtains, porcelain, doilies, flowers, religious icons and, especially, family portraits, each room entails one or two other elements that give voice to these already eloquent spaces—slide projections (of Islamic religious text, more portraits and snaps, newspaper cuttings of Vietnamese boat people), home videos (a casual card game offers a glimpse out of the loungeroom onto a verandah) and sound recordings of recollections of arrival and settling. While intently perusing the details of each room, some very familiar, some startlingly discrete in their sense of privacy and ethnic specificity, here and there a cultural *punctum* (a large vase of dried Australian flora amidst Virgin Marys and family portraits), I was moved by the murmur of voices and languages spreading room to room. I wanted to settle into a lounge chair and be still, but the substantiality of the

rooms stopped me, a sense of respect for these curiously sacred sites of the everyday. That these rooms were not in a museum, and that they were not far from their actual selves in Marrickville, also lent them potency. Apparently some of the owners of the original rooms wept at seeing them reproduced. The loungerooms are Australian reflecting Portuguese, Turkish and Lebanese backgrounds, the kitchen Greek and the artist's studio Vietnamese. The olive green kitchen, its large slide projections (village, church, family, distant relatives and marriages, a slaughtered pig being scalded in preparations for a meal) and tiny foldout icons and photos of 'home' on the fridge, has a particular power (some of it coming from the portraits by *Five Rooms* photographer and coordinator of images, Efty Alexakis). The studio—a table, an easel, paints, a chair, an ancient exercise bike—is blessed with the artist's work, vivid, carefully crafted depictions of the Virgin (lean, Italianate and dressed in an oriental patterned material of gold and black), saints and Asian mythological tales. One slide shows the elderly artist at work, on the line between tiny studio and kitchen—and you see how meticulous the reproduction of this room has been. *Five Rooms* is an evocative, satisfying and unusual venture for Sidetrack. It would be fascinating to visit the rooms of a younger generation in years soon to come.

KG

Five Rooms, part of Marrickville Eyes, Sidetrack Performance Group, Sidetrack Studio, Marrickville, September 11 - October 4



Pacific Sisters, *Tribe Vibe*

Pacific culture will be vividly celebrated in Sydney from November 13 - 29 in this year's Pacific Wave Festival. At The Performance Space, 12-member Polynesian performance group Pacific Sisters mix live music, video graphics and flash street fashion ("We will never leave the frock!"); George Telek (PNG) performs with David Bridie and Ben Hakalits; leading New Zealand video and film artist Lisa Reihana presents video and textile pieces and Phillip Juster (Australia) curates *Oceania Moderne* a mixed media exhibition with the premise: "Modern taste is Oceanic and Cannibalistic."

From November 14 Casula Powerhouse hosts *Angels from the Heavens* a program of Pacific and Indigenous community church choirs; *Furious* a residency and exhibition with Samoan artist Andy Lelei and Aboriginal artist Gordon Hookey; *Weave* an exhibition of fibre art from Australia, PNG, Chile and Aotearoa; and *Inside Art/Out*, works by Indigenous inmates from correctional institutions. Bondi Pavilion exhibits marine art, *Surfing the Art Wave*, along with mixed media artworks from Cape York and Gulf Aboriginal artists. On November 22 there'll be a free festive day of traditional Pacific music, visual art, performance and food followed by *Fa'a Pasefika*—a night of hip hop and R & B and on November 29 *Ways of Seeing*, a program of films from Papua New Guinea presented by Flickerfest.

Oceans and Others at The Museum of Sydney November 14 is a symposium on identity, politics and the relationship between tradition and contemporary practice convened by Professor Nicholas Thomas from the Centre

for Cross-Cultural Research at ANU and features artists Lisa Reihana, Michel Tuffery and John Pule as well as discussions between leading local and international regional art commentators. Gadigal Information Services presents readings by Indigenous writers from Australia and the Pacific at the NSW Writers Centre November 29; The Australian Museum has an exhibition of performances and videos from the West Papuan community of Australia in *Images of Mambesak*. From November 13 Hyper Girls (NZ) re-enact the myth of Ina and Tuna in the foyer of the Australian Centre for Photography.

The visual arts program includes the Annual Members Show at Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative; drawings and mechanised sea creatures by Samoan sculptor, carver, performance artist and print-maker Michel Tuffery at Hogarth Galleries. At Walkabout Gallery, *Tauira*, a mixed media exhibition exploring Maori design by Arini Poutu; Mori Gallery hosts *Fisi—The Blossoming of the Waves* a dialogue between traditional and contemporary Pacific art curated by Fiona MacDonald and Luke Parker; Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre explores traditional weaving techniques and their use in *Weave: Tools for Survival*.

There's plenty more, including *San Muliaumaseali*—scenes with Polynesian influences from "the dark side of opera"; *Wkeng Aseng* (PNG), ink drawings by artists from Karionk Valley, Madang Province and visits by New Zealand musicians Token Village and DAM Native. Throughout the festival, features on Pacific culture and society will be broadcast on Radio Eye and Saturday Eye on ABC Radio National (576AM), Koori Radio (94.5FM) and 2SER (107.3FM). The full Pacific Wave program will be available from October 13 from The Performance Space, tel 02 9698 7235, or Casula Powerhouse, tel 02 9824 1121, or www.culture.au/scan/tps

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Bill Viola *The Messenger*



Bill Viola, *The Messenger*, 1996 (video/sound installation), Photo: Kira Perov

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Internationally acclaimed video artist Bill Viola represented the United States at the 1995 Venice Biennale and in 1997 was the subject of a 25 year retrospective organised by the Whitney Museum, New York which is currently touring Europe.

Viola's video installations offer a journey into the unexpected where sensory experience is heightened and the viewer is invited to explore the human condition, the nature of creativity, mortality and consciousness.

The Messenger is a component of the 1998 Melbourne Festival Visual Arts Program. Supported by the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the Sydney Festival. *The Messenger* was commissioned for Durham Cathedral by the Chaplaincy to the Arts and Recreation in North East England. The exhibition tour is being managed by THE FRUITMARKET GALLERY, Edinburgh and the AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART, Melbourne.

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Minimal imperatives

In Europe and Australia Jacqueline Millner notes the minimalism comeback

The wonder of it all is that what looked for all the world like a diminishing horizon—the art object's becoming so ephemeral as to threaten to disappear altogether—has, like some marvellous philosophical riddle, turned itself inside out to reveal its opposite. What appeared to be question of object/non-object has turned out to be question of seeing and not seeing, of how it is we actually perceive or fail to perceive 'things' in their real contexts.

Robert Irwin, 1986

What is it about minimalism that still speaks to us in terms of imperatives? On a recent visit to francophone Europe, I was struck by the domination of leading contemporary art spaces by some of the first exponents of minimalism. Where I might have expected to see the videos of Pipilotti Rist or the shopping bags of Sylvie Fleury, instead I saw monumental pieces by Robert Morris and diaphanous articulations of light and space by Robert Irwin. It was doubly interesting, therefore, to see on my return to Australia an intense focus on minimalism in a variety of major galleries and institutions. All at the same moment, we have a major new work by Sol LeWitt at the MCA in Sydney, an exhibition exploring the relationship between minimalism and feminist art in Melbourne (*Infinite Space*, curator Rachel Kent, Ian Potter Gallery, University of Melbourne), an exhibition and forum on minimalism in Brisbane (*Art Pared Down*, Queensland Art Gallery), along with a conference early next year (to be organised by Dr Susan Best, Faculty of Architecture, UTS). What might this apparent resurgence of interest in minimalism signify?

Minimalism first emerged as a vortex of silence in the midst of the cacophony of protest—the loud rhetoric of liberation mixed with the strains of psychedelic rock—which marked the 'end' of many 'modernist myths', social, political and artistic. Does this latter-day focus on minimalism indicate a need to find a quiet and indeterminate place to negotiate the pre-millennial hysteria associated with the instantaneity and ubiquity of new communications technology? Are minimalism's aesthetics of quietude a welcome respite from late 20th century image-saturation, a singular encounter with some type of tabula rasa?

When minimalism surfaced in the 60s, radicalising art by foregrounding the relationship between the viewer and the object, its establishment critics were vociferous, angry at the way minimalism undermined the autonomy of the art object and crudely reduced it to bald industrial materials. Before long, however, minimalism had effectively displaced its very *bête noire*, abstract expressionism, at the top of the avant-garde tree, to be sanctified and canonised as the official style. By the end of the 70s, it was rejected as hardline and authoritarian. Yet despite its integration as convention, minimalism as a problem never said die. Its imperatives faded



Dorothea Rockburne, *Locus I* (portfolio)
Art Pared Down, Queensland Art Gallery

in and out of view, but they remained, still sufficiently unresolved to provoke many a contemporary artist. As American art theorist Hal Foster notes in *The Return of the Real* (1996), minimalism occupies an ambivalent position vis a vis modernism; arguably it is both the last modernist style and a crucial step toward the loosening of conventions such as originality and authorship which characterise postmodernism. Minimalist works' apparent dumbness begged the spectator to speak; as monumental steel jutted into their stomachs or threatened to crush them from overhead, these works made viewers acutely aware of their incarnated presence. Minimalism activated the viewer in such a way as to mobilise ongoing debates about the nature of perception and the (highly contingent) power of the viewer to interpret a work according to his or her own desire alone (Toni Ross writes eloquently on this legacy in "The trouble with spectator-centred criticism", *eyeline*, Summer 1997/8). The fecundity of ideas thrown up by minimalism goes to underline that "There is nothing minimal about the 'art' in minimal art. If anything, in the best works, it is maximal. What is minimal is the means, not the ends." (John Perrault, 1968)

The current focus on minimalism is particularly interesting for its foregrounding of some original practitioners, such as Robert Irwin, Robert Morris and Sol LeWitt, whose work from the 60s is often counterpoised with contemporary installations, sculptures and paintings. The intensity of their recent work is a convincing reminder that their individual projects are far from exhausted. Indeed, Robert Irwin's *Double Diamond* (1997) is one of the most moving and provocative pieces of contemporary art I have experienced in some time. *Double Diamond* is a site specific work designed to take full advantage of the natural

light which filters in through the roof of Lyon's impressive Museum of Contemporary Art whose facade itself might owe something to Bridget Riley's minimalist paintings. Open for only 3 years in its new premises, with natural light, sandblasted glass and infinitely flexible exhibition spaces a testament to Renzo Piano's flair, the museum specialises in installation. The collection is made up principally of works executed directly by artists in the museum, including video works by Bill Viola and Tony Oursler and installations by John Baldessari, Robert Morris and of course, Robert Irwin.

Throughout most of his career, Irwin's principal subject has been the threshold of visibility of light. In his installations he has aspired to what he termed, according to his own theory of aesthetic perception, 'site-determinancy', whereby the "the process of recognition and understanding breaks with the conventions of abstract referencing of content, historical lineage, oeuvre of the artist, style etc and crosses the conventional boundaries of art vis a vis architecture, landscape, city planning, utility, importance." (Irwin, 1986) With site-determinancy, Irwin sought to render the art object "so ephemeral as to threaten to disappear altogether", allowing the viewer "to discover and value the potential for expressive beauty in everything." Enter *Double Diamond*...

At first, I am startled by the brightness and the heat—there is filtered sunlight pouring through the ceiling. I enter a type of maze, a spatial conundrum bound by alternating black and white screens of the finest tulle stretched over a structure of interlinking squares, creating spaces which both invite my passage and unpredictably deny it. There is an inner sanctum which my vision tells me is accessible, but my body cannot enter. What's more fascinating is that while I am aware that these walls are made of yielding fabric, nonetheless as I try to orientate myself while walking I appear to be confronting mirrors. The persons on the other side of the maze are doubly, trebly removed, increasingly filtered by layers of taut tulle, and yet they might also be behind me, reflections from another perspective. This is an acutely tuned work, achingly resonant and meticulously resolved. Such resolution through economy of means but maximal intellectual and emotional investment is rare, although Sol LeWitt's wall paintings come close.

There is no doubt something of the temple in LeWitt's black on black floor to ceiling wall paintings. Covering the expanse of walls in 2 large rooms, these works activate the space with an intense energy verging on the spiritual—the gallery is both empty and full. The juxtaposition of matt and gloss paint creates a sense of subtle movement, rendering the black expanses fluttering veils which escape our efforts to pin them down. Yet at another level, LeWitt also appears to be begging us to acknowledge that these are nothing more than gallery walls which have been painted black, to wonder therefore, where does our spiritual sensation hail from? This oscillation from an insistence on materiality and the evocation of the numinous marks many of the most powerful minimalist works, and cannot but be an important factor in minimalism's continuing appeal.

By comparison, Robert Morris's installations from the 60s and 70s, as recreated in Lyon's MCA, exude a cheeky humour. *Passageway* (1961) is a long, curved corridor whose end is at first imperceptible. As I walk expectantly along, it becomes narrower and narrower, finally clamping my shoulders, teasing me to edge further on, but forcing me to retrace my steps backwards. In another work, industrial-scale wooden beams are laid out in a diamond formation, bounded at each joint by mirrors. As you climb over and around, you catch glimpses of different angles of vision, including one which gives the impression of the beam proceeding beyond the gallery walls into infinity. Yet another installation marks Morris' transition into his anti-form works of the late 60s, huge clumps of industrial textile waste crowding the gallery floor threatening to entangle one's feet, strangely organic yet resolutely manufactured.

Whether for their focus on the indeterminacy of interpretation, or the proposal of a 'dumb' object, or the evocation of a curiously secular spiritualism, the questions asked by minimalism clearly are still compelling. It is refreshing to be reminded of the complex working through of

these questions by minimalism's first exponents, and to view this older work alongside more contemporary attempts to grapple with ongoing preoccupations about space, perception and the relationship of the viewer to the art 'object.' This accent on art's *history* can only enrich millennial debates.

Robert Morris, *Musee d'Art Contemporain de Lyon*, June 17 - September 13; *Museum of Contemporary Art, Geneva*, June - September; Robert Irwin, *Musee d'Art Contemporain de Lyon*, June 17 - September 13; *Art Pared Down*, Queensland Art Gallery, August 29 - November 29; *The Infinite Space: Women, minimalism and the sculptural object*, Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, September 28 - December 6, *symposium* October 22; Sol LeWitt, *Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney*, July 30 - November 29

RealTime Online

Appearing only online:

Visual artist and student Clare Marshall of the University of Western Sydney has been a committed RealTime intern writer over recent months.

Clare Marshall "Deceptive surfaces"

Strange Days, The Fourth Guinness Contemporary Art Project at the Art Gallery of NSW. Works by Tracey Moffat, Gregory Crewsdon from New York, Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist and black American artist Kara Walker.

Clare Marshall "The memory room"

At an exhibition of intimate art works, *Personal Effects*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Clare Marshall looks at objects ranging from family histories (shoes, an old violin) and personal celebrations (Robyn Archer and Erika Addis' altar of snaps and mementoes evoking a honeymoon in Mexico) to time capsules and Lucy Orta's political recycling/re-designing of old clothes in *Refuge Wear*.

Read these articles on
<http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/>

"On the beach a nut-brown skinny

bloke was building a sand

sculpture. It resembled a sphinx

but the face said Easter Island.

"The face kept falling off," he

explained to anyone who cared to

listen, "but it's facing the same

way as the real one." / story of the

man who bought a big fishing

boat up north on automatic pilot.

/ straight into the headland. He'd

set the wrong course. they tried

everything to get it clear. Finally

they got this big Guess What? It

pulled the whole nose off."

[John Neylon, vol. 27. no. 3 1998]

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After a visit to China, Linda Wallace frames the work of Chinese artists in the *Biennale of Sydney*

In June this year I travelled into the hallucination that is contemporary China. A China before the skies opened up and flooded vast areas of the country, leaving thousands dead and millions homeless. Agriculture is the lifeblood of China, and the Dragon King rules the waterways. The question is, in a culture where Mao and the cultural revolution did not succeed in eradicating the animistic superstitions of the masses, what then to make of the floods? Why this great punishment? Is it just, as the state admits, a result of rampant upstream logging, or, as the people may wonder, deeper, more malevolent forces at work...?

In the new China, one which mouths the language of multiculturalism while reducing ethnic identities to collections of national dress in museums (as independence movements erupt around the country), an artist from Beijing makes a subtle performance work about Tibet. He stands in a river in the occupied zone and stamps the water with the Chinese character for Water. The river flows on. He categorically states "no, this work is not political."

Nowhere have I seen such manic development as in Shanghai. Knock it down and build it up again...new hotels, tower blocks, multilevel flyovers, immense, lurid billboards—as architect Rem Koolhaas would say, "these are growing cities of exacerbated difference..."

The media/information landscape is also changing rapidly though there is not the homogenised televisual barrage which has so affected the rest of the world. Chinese ads and nascent home-shopping channels are kind of flashy and quaint. However, there is no doubt that the internet will completely transform a China so long starved of information—3 years ago there were 30,000 users, now there are more than a million.

In June there was the Clinton visit. I locked into CNN and Chinese state television/newspapers around meetings with (mainly) video artists. The third repeat on state TV showed Clinton taking tough questions on the US position on Taiwan, human rights and US wealth disparity from students at Beijing University—party

members and believers. Unused as they are to confronting their leaders in such a manner, it demonstrated to young Chinese people what was possible within the staged televisual antics of western-style politics. Clearly Clinton loves the joust. He charms them. He says during the visit that yes, Tibet is part of China, as is Taiwan.

The artistic landscape is one divided into 'official' and 'non-official' artists. The artists I meet and whose work shows on the international art circuit are mainly the latter. They are supported with neither a wage nor state recognition. The non-officials (as opposed perhaps to 'artofficials') are making work inside the flux of huge national economic, technological and ideological change—a landscape of endless contradictions—as are artists everywhere.

Living conditions are generally pretty basic. I visited one artist who exhibits regularly on the international art circuit, with video and installation works of sophisticated fragility and wit, who lives in traditional 'courtyard' housing and shares a collective pit toilet where at least 6 other people could go at once. No secrets here.

Another artist, Zhao Bandi, made a 'light work' for the Biennale of Sydney at the MCA which reads "My Heart is Trembling." At his home in Beijing he showed a work which, at the end of an intense day of discussions and meetings, ambushed my friend and I with what appeared to be stark simplicity. It was night street-scene crowded with neons: brand names and logos. Everything in the image looked normal, but he had substituted one of the neons with the slogan, *Never Forget Class Struggle*. It was so strong, we were excited and talkative, as if it were heavy with irony. I noticed however that the artist and the translator and curator Mr Huang Du were very quiet, circumspect almost, and kind of sad.

The reason soon became clear. They were at school at the tail-end of the cultural revolution and the beginning of 'open door.' The slogan was one which they would have written as children in their notebooks over and over again, repeating it and others like it, drumming into the collective psyche. It was a compelling moment. It demonstrated

the complexity of (reading) images constructed now in unofficially capitalist China by non-official artists—working as they are, by the way, in a socialist country which is growing faster than the ex-socialist, capitalist countries of the former eastern bloc.

Curator and critic Huang Du writes, "This effect evokes certain confusion and restlessness. Due to the fact that we are living in an ever-changing world of space and vision teemed with foreign advertisements, movie products and urban buildings, these exterior cultural distinctions driven by floating international capital no doubt expand the ideology of consumption and intensify the connection between internationalism and regionalism." Huang Du speaks about Chinese artists exhibiting "individualism with Chinese characteristics." Exactly what are these "Chinese characteristics" as China itself goes global and the diaspora evolves curious hybrids?

Unlike the West, where media artists often come to the practice from a diversity of backgrounds (media, film, computer engineering etc), in China many of the artists using video I met are classically trained, many in painting. While some of the art schools may be tooling up for computer production, much of this work is for graphic art/design training. So not only are there very few opportunities to show contemporary video and installation work, there is very little access to equipment, and production costs are exorbitant. As a result I didn't see much video work which made use of fancy software and whammo video effects.

I don't think this aspect of the reality of production (coupled with the contemporary Chinese media landscape) can be overstated in terms of the way it has affected the work produced. Many of the video tapes are unedited—they are straight 'records' of events, a production constraint which works in parallel with a conceptual desire to construct 'pure moments in time.' Now that's not to say that all the work is like this. There were videos which were edited and 'effected', but these tended to come from the few artists with media backgrounds and influences. And they tended to be the younger artists. So over and over I saw videos which were (performative) events in real time.

The video works often push what is possible with the kind of technology available, creating novel setups. Two video artists in Australia for the Biennale typify this approach. The work of Hangzhou artist



Zhao Bandi, *My Heart is Trembling*

Zhang Peili is a kind of streaming-video cubism—multi-monitor works giving a range of perspectives in real time on the same event, for example repeatedly throwing a ball into the air and catching it, or the 3 monitor work we will see in Sydney, *Eating*.

Beijing artist Zhu Jia also uses camera 'point of view.' In one work the camera is attached to the bicycle wheel as it rides through Beijing—round and round the image goes, slowing down and speeding up with the traffic flow/s.

Zhu Jia's video for the Biennale, on Goat Island in Sydney Harbour, is of a dying, flapping fish. The video is looped so that the fish is dying over and over again, still flip-flapping. Contrary to a Western desire for closure and some kind of 'statement', Zhu Jia does not give us an ending. Instead the work speaks more to the circularity of things: endlessness, through floods and famine, dungeons and dragons, life and lives, on and on...

Every Day, 11th Biennale of Sydney, September 18 - November 8, online at www.biennaleofsydney.com.au

Works by Li Yongbin, Cai Guo Qiang, Zhang Peili, curated by Huang Du, Gallery 4A, Sydney, October 15 - 24

Linda Wallace was a guest of the Australian Embassy in Beijing. For further detail and pictures: <http://sysx.apana.org.au/artists/hunger/china>

The craft of the curve

Diana Klaosen looks at *Ecologies of Place and Memory*

The Questioning the Practice program is an innovative 3-year joint undertaking devised to stimulate greater awareness of and interest in contemporary craft practice and to "extend the boundaries of Australian visual culture." The program is funded by the Australia Council's Contemporary Craft Curator Program in conjunction with the University of Tasmania's Schools of Art in Hobart and Launceston, along with their respective galleries. Over 3 years, the University has selected 3 guest curators—1 per year—to research and develop 2 genuinely cutting-edge exhibitions each, highlighting significant new contemporary craft practice and reflecting the changing boundaries between craft and fine art and design.

These keenly-sought curatorships are of 9 months duration and provide professional-level salary and conditions. Bridget Sullivan, a Sydney-based freelance curator and arts administrator, was the recipient of the second annual Craft Curator internship, for 1997-1998 based at the Tasmanian School of Art in Launceston's University Gallery. As the culmination of her research, Sullivan presented two consecutive shows, with seasons in both Hobart and Launceston.

The first show, *Ecologies of Place and Memory*, is substantial and multi-faceted, with some interesting connections between the

oeuvres, concerns, styles and techniques of the participating artists, suggesting a clear curatorial rationale. The show aims to "explore the degree to which objects mirror the environment in which they are produced and examine the relationship between humanity and the physical environment."

Tasmanian and interstate craft artists are featured. Lola Greeno is a member of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. Her textile work *Risdon Cove* and her shell necklace *My Story* are informed by traditional craft practices and contemporary Aboriginal socio-cultural issues. The curved or circle form, integral to much of the work in *Ecologies*, is represented in the dozens of coils of minute shells that make up *My Story*. Sieglinde Karl's *Longing for Belonging* is an installation of small, round, woven baskets incorporating natural found materials such as seeds, shells, bones and stones. The pieces are meticulously crafted and have a definite elegance and dignity.

Cycle, Lauren Berkowitz's installation of suspended loops of recycled rubber off-cuts has its own powerful, architectural physicality, it "engages ideas of decay, regeneration, recycling, growth and preservation" and examines the craft processes of "salvaging, collecting, manipulation and transformation of waste materials." Tasmanian-based Torquil Canning



Ecologies of Place and Memory

John Farrow

presents *Rock Cycle*, a large mixed-media diagrammatic drawing based on the design of the traditional dry stone wall, a simple but effective postmodern piece of "art about craft." Louise Weaver fashions small sculptures from thread and beads hand-crocheted over real found objects—tree branches, granite and even somewhat macabre items such as a dead bird.

These works take a very traditional and undervalued craft and utilise it to produce completely original and unexpected work. Weaver transforms her objects, yet they retain tantalising traces of their original forms.

However, the promise of *Ecologies* is not realised in the second of Bridget Sullivan's curatorial efforts in the Questioning the Practice program. A tiny show with 5 participants and 8 discrete works, *Time & Tide* followed *Ecologies* at the Plimsoll Gallery and claims to investigate why, in vernacular craft practice, "certain traditions are retained and others abandoned." This show is unfortunately too small to demonstrate this or any other clear curatorial premise and the works—by interesting craft practitioners including Pilar Rojas and Tasmania's Gay Hawkes—do not appear to complement each other particularly well. Curator Sullivan's *Ecologies of Place and Memory* stands as a much better example of what a program like Questioning the Practice should be able to achieve.

All quotations taken from the exhibition catalogue for *Ecologies of Place and Memory*.

Ecologies of Place and Memory, works by Lauren Berkowitz, Rosemary Burke, Torquil Canning, Lola Greeno, Ruth Hadlow, Sieglinde Karl and Louise Weaver, Plimsoll Gallery, Centre for the Arts, University of Tasmania (Hobart), May 22-June 14.

Diana Klaosen recently curated *Queer Collaborations* in Hobart and is currently preparing 2 exhibitions for the new Fine Arts Gallery at the University of Tasmania.

Cutting the cloth to suit the fit

Chris Reid slips into the EAF's *Procrustean Bed*

An exhibition predominantly comprising work by artists associated with one art school invites scrutiny of that school's philosophy. With the exception of Christopher Chapman, the artists represented in *Procrustean Bed*, at the Experimental Art Foundation, are lecturers or graduates of the SA School of Art, within the University of South Australia. George Popperwell, Jim Barbour and Jim Moss are respected teachers of long experience. The show could be a homage to them. Michael Newall, Sally-Ann Rowland and the exhibition's curator, Kristian Burford, are recent graduates.

Christopher Chapman showed 2 line drawings on tracing paper of men and boys in various states of undress, urinating, the streams pointed proudly in the air, yet their faces sombre and preoccupied. The images are mounted as decorative pictures that might adorn the home. Chapman's second work involved a red light bulb and a green light bulb lain on the floor adjacent to chalk lines tracing the path of light through a lens. Are these the port and starboard aspects of a conceptual frame of reference?

Rowland's work, comprising 5 blackboard-green panels about a metre wide by 1.7 tall, suggest figures standing about in conversation. Their texts are cut into the surface rather than chalked on, paradoxically non-erasable. The single message, "I miss them", is evocative but, repeated several times on each board, it changes meaning. This elegant work attests to the ultimate inability of words to

convey feeling and it adroitly melds sculpture with drawing.

James Moss contemplates his own existence at the school by showing a wry photo of a toilet graffiti, a 10 x 7 monochrome in a plastic bag blue-tacked to the gallery wall, which reads "art isn't dead, Jim is." Newall's catalogue essay reveals that the graffiti is from the school and is presumed to refer to Moss himself. Moss's offering suggests both that he takes pride in such condemnation and that a photo of graffiti makes worthy art. Its text is a denial (by the graffitist) of Jim as author but he denies himself as author by contributing it to the show, so exposing art theory's poverty and hinting at solipsism. Neat.

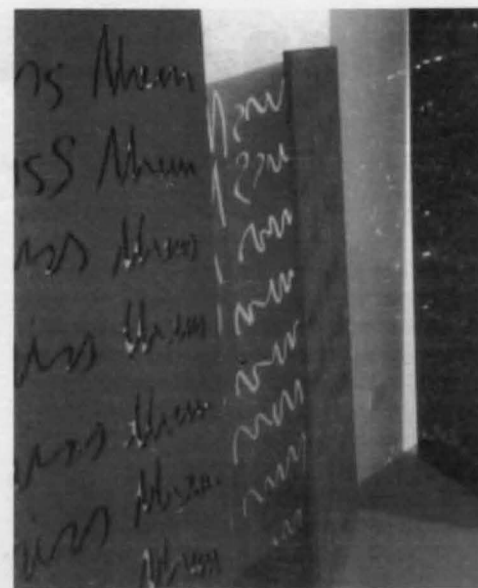
Burford has installed a fully functioning, superbly detailed bathroom. On its floor lies a life-size female mannequin, one hand clutching a foot, the other squeezing milk from a breast. Her head and eyes swathed in a towel, she is clad only in knickers. A large mirror behind reflects a milky dribble from the mannequin's gaping mouth. A tray of housepaint and a roller sit abandoned near the dripping shower. The viewer is rendered voyeur. Burford also includes an essay in the catalogue, recounting a childhood accident and the resulting sharply-focussed self-perception.

Newall's other contribution is a naïve painting of a boyish cherub floating above a jet of wind issuing from an ambiguous orifice between the legs. Newall's stated intention is to

explore the relatively uncharted territory of cuteness. But he has destroyed the cherub's innocence as effectively as might Koons by offering it as a metaphor for contemporary thought—a puff of inconsequential air.

Barbour's small, doodling drawings, dating from the early 1980s to the present, muse on scatology and self-absorption. In one piece, a bearded onlooker (Freud? God?) hovers over a nude thinker located in a desert landscape, who stares at an open book depicting excreta. Barbour has also made a small form from cardboard and packing tape, about half a metre long, embellished with a few paint strokes. It's as abject as any sculptural form could be—Barbour's anti-art is art at its least sophisticated and engaging.

George Popperwell's *...he touches things*, from 1992, comprises a box roughly a metre square by 2 metres, covered in white kitchen tiles and mounted on a low wooden platform. One end of the tiled box is open, and sliding forth on trolley wheels is a smaller tiled box. Atop the outer box are plastic holders containing indistinct monochrome photos. The articulated boxes suggest male entering female, mother giving birth, coffin entering furnace. The tiling evokes hospital cleanliness and orderliness—perhaps a cleansed society replicates itself endlessly, programmed by vague memories and fears. The catalogue refers to the "obdurate hermeticism" of the work. As a practitioner, Popperwell is an artist's artist. Meticulous and systematic layering of



Sally-Ann Rowland, *I Miss Them*

Stephen Gray

meaning characterises the work of many of his former students.

Is there a Procrustes guiding contemporary art who requires that it fit a formula, who employs perversity for pleasure and torment? The theatre in *Procrustean Bed* ranges widely and recalls important themes in recent art such as the unreliability of language, the value of art objects, the viewer as author, the use and abuse of discord as a sensitising device, the end of art itself. It is a strong show.

Procrustean Bed, curated by Kristian Burford, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, August 20 - September 13.

Beyond black + white

Trevor Smith looks at firsts in Robert MacPherson's *Murranji*

...what is the ultimate source of value or quality in art?...the answer appears to be: not skill, training, or anything else to do with execution or performance, but conception alone.

Clement Greenberg, 1962

Robert MacPherson's *Murranji* marked at least two firsts in its presentation at the recently opened John Curtin Gallery. For the gallery, it was the first time it devoted the entirety of its substantial new gallery space to the work of one artist. For MacPherson, it was the first time since their production in 1977 that it has been possible to display the entire suite of 200 *Filled Gestures*.

Individually these firsts are simply a matter of anecdotal record; taken together, they set the stage for a clear assessment of the remarkable fusion of the conceptual, material and formal registers of art-making at the core of MacPherson's practice.

Filled Gestures stand as something of an archetype to more recent works on exhibition. As their title suggests, they are works which consist of a gesture (painted in black onto a piece of cartridge paper) which is filled (in varying degrees of speed relative to the original gesture) resulting in scumbled grey, black and white biomorphic shapes. Like many of his works of the 1970s it is an hilariously literal interpretation of Greenbergian prescriptions of flatness and paint qua paint in all its rolled, brushed and dripped glory. The exhibition made it possible to observe strong links in mark making and

conception between this pivotal early work and the Robert Pene drawings executed over the last decade. The droll 78 *Ringers Hats* clearly functions as conceptual and material gestures—and as representations of ringers' hats. At the age of 10, Robert Pene proved once and for all that representation and abstraction are not opposites.

The graphic humour in the Robert Pene drawings, done in the guise of a Grade 4 schoolboy in 1947, initially seduces but the humour is shadowed by an admixture of fear and sadness at the loss of historical traces, neglected traditions and specific terminology—including that of Modernism itself. This shadow can be sensed in the very urgency of his mark making and the scale of his endeavour—approximately 1000 Pene drawings have been produced to date.

Murranji's previous incarnations at Artspace in Sydney and the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane pivoted on a charged balance between these Robert Pene drawings and the room scale installation from which the exhibition takes its title: *Murranji: 15 Frog Poems, a Keening* (1996-97). Fifteen brown, grey and cream blankets are stencilled with the seemingly innocuous letters M & B 693 and installed in a straight line around a room. At each venue, its installation in a room apart from the other works gave *Murranji* a sanctuary like quality which was heightened in Perth by the mid-grey colour of the walls. This installation and most of the Pene drawings on exhibition memorialise the lives of the



Robert MacPherson, *184 Boss Drivers* (detail)

drovers and stockmen who moved livestock across the Australian continent and whose ways of life are gradually slipping from national consciousness.

Where Robert Pene exudes childlike glee (but not exactly innocence) at his knowledge of the drovers' characters and exploits, *Murranji* is the dignified lamentation of an older and wiser man. M & B 693 sounds like a child-like rhyme but its musical cadences belie a much darker tale. Curator Ingrid Periz points out that it is the name of a sulphanamide drug used as a gonorrhoea treatment by drovers but "while the drug was useful it was most likely not made available to Aboriginal stockmen or Aboriginal women."

Taken together, these works conjure up a full spectrum of emotions to articulate the contradictions and deadly ironies haunting private memory and public memorial in present day Australia. That the meaning of M&B 693 is not immediately apparent magnifies the rip tide of

amnesia surging underneath the waves of memory. MacPherson's 'blanket' works fan the dying embers of Australian colloquialisms and pastoral history. In the face of *Murranji*'s powerful muteness, I found Clement Greenberg's early essay of 1940, "Towards a Newer Laocoon", particularly useful. In that essay he argued that "Poetry subsists no longer in the relations between words as meanings, but in the relations between words as personalities composed of sound, history and possibilities of meaning."

If in the 1970s MacPherson was playing off the aesthetic implications of Greenberg's writings, then the memorial function of recent work grapples with its

ethical dimension. In Greenberg's 1939 essay, "Avant-garde and Kitsch", the hermetic particularities of Modernist art are described as a defense against the reductive banalities of popular culture. This secured a field in which critical distinctions could continue to be drawn, distinctions which are central to the affect and meaning of *Murranji*. By giving over its entire space the John Curtin Gallery made it possible to sense how Modernism in MacPherson's hands is a long way from being tossed in the dustbin of history. It may yet prove to be an essential vehicle to articulate the subtleties and contradictions embodied in choices that are no longer simply black and white.

Murranji, Robert MacPherson, John Curtin Gallery, Perth, July 18 - August 23

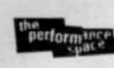
Trevor Smith is Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of Western Australia.

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Surreal, serious, theatrical

Gretchen Miller sees the Seymour Group play Kagel

The Argentine/German composer, Mauricio Kagel was rather hard to get hold of. Nothing on the internet, no journal articles, few mentions in the books on contemporary music history—he was becoming more and more an enigmatic figure, as I tried to pin down his details.

Globe trotting as he does in *Die Stücke der Windrose* (*The Points of the Compass*), all I could do in the end was shrug my shoulders and follow him—from a train ride to the Gulf of Finland, through New Zealand, Siberia, Cuba and finally America, as The Seymour Group took us on a fantastic journey in the Newtown Hall on August 9.

This was a profoundly pleasurable concert. Not only for the energetic and precise interpretation of the music, and David Hewitt's highly amusing and virtuosic percussion performance, but because it was a rare opportunity to hear the 8 part work in its entirety. It is no doubt the dearth of material in English on the composer which makes him rather an unknown to English speaking contemporary music audiences, and yet, The Seymour Group's performance of *The Points of the Compass* was almost full of people who were clearly delighted to take the opportunity to revel in Kagel's playful

and considered writing.

Even the ensemble here was from the points of the compass. The core 'Western' group of clarinet, violins, viola, cello, double bass and piano was joined by a harmonium and a vast array of percussion 'instruments' including broken polystyrene, shaken plastic sheeting, shells, tapped stones and some kind of South American flute.

For me it was also a journey back in time, to be reminded of this composer who first made me aware that music and theatre could combine in a way that was far from the excesses of opera (which Kagel calls a "relic that has placed a burden on us") instead joined as one integrated, inseparable, form.

The theatricalism, internal to the very notes of the music, also made an appearance in the performance—with the players at the end of each piece looking in the compass directions of the title work—or not, as the case may be. This is theatre pared down to the bones—sparse, minimalist, understated, deadpan, Buster Keatonesque and very successful.

The filmic nature of *East*, which opened the concert, is no coincidence. Reminding me of the vulgar energy of Emil Kusturica's *Underground*, it reflects a relationship with film and theatre

that dates back to Kagel's earliest days in Buenos Aires, going to the movies with his English tutor, Jorge Luis Borges.

Here is music with solid rhythms and an innate sense of humour and play, interspersed with moments, such as those experienced when looking out the train window; when you stop seeing what's in front of you and fall into a reverie. The music rolls its eyes and exaggerates its gestures in true Eastern European form, but these gestures have a profundity that is also to be found in commedia dell'arte—absurdity is a serious thing.

North, however, is harsh and bitter. With crackling ice and whip cracks, there is almost a despair in the music that might come from Kagel's repeatedly frustrated attempts to get to the polar cap of Canada where he intended to indulge his passion for a proper winter and join an Eskimo ritual. He writes instead from a memory, a recollection of an article read 40 years before, that discussed Siberian shamans and their enchanted drums. The piece becomes an internal voyage and perhaps here we are seeing into Kagel's more serious desires—reflected here in the piece's atonalism.

The Points of the Compass is a work that

has sprung from Kagel's so called postmodern phase. Moving away from the use of noise and other less pitch-related components (although the almost soloist role of percussion maintains the connection) Kagel is sliding in and out of melody and diatonic harmony. Sure this aspect of his work could be termed nostalgic, retro-postmodernism, but the more interesting multimedia aspect of his work dates back again to Buenos Aires and his days as conductor for the Teatro Colón. Kagel always mixes his media with precision, wit and elegance.

Musicologist Richard Toop, who visited the composer in 1997, just before his well-maintained sketches were to be interred in Basle's Paul Sacher Foundation, says Kagel's composition sketches are full of newspaper clippings, historical accounts of the American Indians and so forth—things unrelated to music but forming the basis of his inspiration.

To me though, the sense is still that his writing is informed by those high modernist genres, surrealism and serialism, despite the regular superficial presence of diatonic harmony and pitch. The political is also never far away—east and west are dependent on where you position yourself.

Thanks to Richard Toop for assistance with this article.

Die Stücke der Windrose, Mauricio Kagel, The Seymour Group, Newtown Theatre, August 9

Maroons vs Blues

Harriet Cunningham keeps score at the New Music State of Origin

Sport sells, or so they say. While thousands flock to a game of footy, new music audiences sometimes struggle to hit 100. On August 8 Damien Barbele, a Sydney based composer, came up with one answer—the New Music State of Origin concert. Even with banners, scarves, hats, and some spirited "go the blues" war cries, the evening didn't pull in a huge crowd, but it was a discerning one, which enjoyed the tongue-in-cheek atmosphere.

The Maroons were represented by Topology, Robert Davidson's Brisbane band and the home side, Sydney University band Coruscations, hosted the concert, with Damien Barbele as referee, with hats and scarves knitted for the occasion by the conductor's mum.

Topology opened with 4 works by Brisbane composers. Robert Davidson's *Exterior* is drawn from a larger work, *Four Places*, composed for the Sydney Institute of

Eastern Music. Davidson takes 3 melodic instruments and reinterprets them as untuned instruments. The double bass, slapped at various points of its body, sets up a deeply satisfying tabla riff, and the viola adds thick rhythmic textures from open strings chords, with improvised interjections from the saxophone.

Luke Jaaniste claims that he prefers his performers to execute the work, rather than perform it, trusting the music to get the message across. This sonocentric philosophy smacks of arrogance, but his work *Quartz* was compelling, if only for the white noise generated by the mechanics of the piano, which got a solid workout from the music technicians.

Toby Wren would laugh at the viola player who announces to his friends, "Hey guys, I've been practising my semiquavers—do you want to hear one?" However, his work, *Album*, could have been written for the same viola player, displaying a sort of disjointed minimalism. Phrases were left hanging in the air, just as you expected them to relax into a pattern.

Idiomatic, by Damien Barbele, is a work which wasn't, but should have been written for this evening. *Idiomatic* is a competition, with heats, semifinals and play-offs, where the entire Topology ensemble plays the same music, the first to the end the winner. It must be hard for the players who make up Topology to resist their instincts and musical training, ignore the rest of the ensemble and make a single-minded race for the finishing line. Occasionally one musician was handicapped—by playing pizzicato or being a double bass player—and the music ran neck and neck, phrases going out of sync and into canon, then back into sync again. I forget who won, and it didn't really matter, but it was a gripping competition and satisfying music.

The second half, Coruscation's turn, kicked off with *Tick* by Matthew Shlomowitz, a solo work for cello. Eleanor Lewis gave a great performance, throwing the

bow around and taking a guilty pleasure in the random noises her cello produced. This was the most spirited performance of the NSW half, and the least polished, but that was how it was meant to be. Jane Stanley's *Whistling Kite*, in contrast, was elegantly scored, with layers of sound describing the sky, water, birds and crocodiles of the Yellow Water environment. The ensemble caught the haunting and lyrical mood with beautiful performances, particularly from the clarinetist, Jason Noble.

John Peterson's *Still Point* was another party piece for cellist, Eleanor Lewis, and one with which she seemed more comfortable. Perhaps it was the traditional scoring, or the predominantly tonal harmony but it was an excellent performance of a strangely domestic piece in amongst the exotica. *Morning Star*, conducted by the composer Paul Stanhope, was polished and lively, and made a great finale. Flute player Kathleen Gallagher captured the forward momentum and brought it to a still point with a poignant solo.

The search for the Brisbane or the Sydney sound could take up as much time and energy as the search for the Australian sound...For the Maroons, Topology has a rhythmic, tight style which can snap into virtuosic improvisation when pushed. It's a style which relies on great energy and sense of ensemble from every player in the group. For the blues, Coruscations is perhaps more reliant on the composer to provide the energy, with the exception of Eleanor Lewis, whose performance showed great commitment.

Like *Idiomatic*, like football, who cares who wins, but on the night Topology definitely dazzled and outshone the cultured tones of the Sydney team. A return match was booked for the following week in Brisbane. One match down and there was still everything to play for.

New Music State of Origin concerts, Topology and Coruscations, Technology Park Theatre, Sydney, August 8; Recital Hall, Queensland Conservatorium, August 15

Harriet Cunningham is an arts administrator and musician formerly from the UK where she ran British Youth Opera. She is currently Sales and Marketing Manager for the Australian Music Centre in Sydney.

Gold for radio fiction

On the 50th anniversary of the Prix Italia, the highly regarded international competition for radio and television works, an ABC radio drama has won the prize for fiction. The winning work is Christopher Williams' production of Merlinda Bobis' *Rita's Lullaby*. Bobis' text has had a promising career, winning the Ian Reid Foundation competition for new writers for radio drama in 1995 and, this year, an AWGIE for best original radio script of a produced work. *Rita's Lullaby* is about street kids in Manila and is performed in English and two Philippine dialects, Tagalog and Bikol. Sound engineer on the work was David Bates and Jim Cotter was the composer. Bobis, who was born in the Philippines and lives in Australia, is also the author of the recently published collection of short and epic poems, *Summer was a Fast Train without Terminals* (Spinifex, North Melbourne, 1998). RT



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Strange sound worlds

Elision introduces Robert Davidson to *Strange Customs*

Whatever impression may be formed of Queensland following the state election, the fact remains that something is going on in Brisbane's music scene. Apart from producing some of Australia's most interesting bands, the city is home to a number of outstanding and original composers and performers. And it is the home of Elision.

Elision brings to contemporary music a focus and discipline rarely encountered, and gives listeners the opportunity to become completely engaged in rare and strange sound worlds created by some of today's leading composers. The concert on July 9 was an experience which left me exhausted from intense mental and emotional absorption.

The ensemble has a particular interest in music which delights in tone colour as a fundamental expressive element. This is a feature which is relatively new to Western music, becoming prominent only in the present century, but integral to traditional Japanese music. It is not surprising, then, that Elision gravitates toward new Japanese composers.

There were 3 major premieres in the concert, including the solo cello work *Threnody* by Akira Nishimura, one of Japan's current leading composers. The work

consists of a single long melody in which subtle modulations of tone colour are as fundamental to the melodic shape as pitch and rhythm. Rosanne Hunt's remarkable focus in performance highlighted usually hidden detail in the instrument's sound.

Detailed attention to tone colour also distinguished the most obviously Japanese music of the evening: Toshio Hosokawa's *Renka 1* for soprano and guitar, reflecting the close relationship of East Asian calligraphy with shomyo sacred vocal music of the Tendai and Shingon Buddhist sects. The changing vowels of the text yielded a vast array of shifting colours so that it was hard to believe at times that we were listening to a voice. Guitarist Geoffrey Morris and soprano Deborah Kayser achieved an intense quietness, and succeeded in conveying a tangible connection between the two musical strands and their calligraphic depictions.

Keiko Harada travelled from Tokyo to Brisbane especially for the premiere of her *heavy wood*, a work which moves abruptly between a highly imaginative range of textures. Opening with sparks of sound which bounced through space from performer to performer, the piece developed areas of funky pointillism, with an instrumentation recalling Eric Dolphy, featuring bass clarinet and

double bass. Harada calls her sections "inner situations", referring as much to the responses of the musicians to each other as to the musical texture, and several sections require improvisation based on listening. The performers' commitment to finely detailed control, with little room left for chance, may have worked against them in this work; Harada told me she suspected that the improvised sections were worked out in advance.

Australian composer Liza Lim was featured with two works: *Voodoo Child* (1989) and *The Heart's Ear* (1997), both based on culturally distant texts from ancient Greek and medieval Sufi traditions. Lim comments that she is attracted to ancient languages because their "openness and lack of fixity is extremely suggestive to me in creating imaginary sound worlds." The highly charged eroticism of the Sappho text set for soprano and ensemble in *Voodoo Child* is reflected in the corporeal nature of the music, with (again) a strong emphasis on timbral range. The vocal part includes many guttural and percussive rasps, rolls and clicks, which are echoed by instrumental analogues, including flutter tongues and snapped pizzicati. The effect is of a single super-instrument. In the final moments trombonist Ben Marks played rude low passages which were gradually transformed into delicate glides preparing for the final fragile utterances of the vocal part, the tone magically altered by singing while inhaling. *Voodoo Child* is impressively sophisticated for a composer of 22, and is one of the works which helped to establish Lim as a

leading composer of her generation.

The distance in time between *Voodoo Child* and *The Heart's Ear* is evident in a clear stylistic contrast. The newer work is less aggressive, more fragile and delicate, and even includes sections of straightforward modal melody drawn from a Sufi source. Lim was inspired by Rumi's idea of a melody being "like birdsong beginning inside an egg" which takes on increasing complexity as it unfolds.

Similarly, Chris Dench's music has undergone stylistic change evident in the premiere of his newest work, *Ik(s)land(s)*, a song cycle based on a text by Bernie M Janssen. The lush sonorities and frank erotic sensuousness of the music, a very convincing conveyance of the text, were a long way from the manic virtuosity of some of Dench's other works. The most striking aspects for me were the inspired choice of steel drums within a richly coloured ensemble of strings, winds and guitar, and the entrancingly luminous sound produced by soprano Deborah Kayser, surely one of this country's most musical performers of new work.

Of all the arts, music is today perhaps the most commonly reduced to a function of entertainment. Elision's concert reaffirmed music's power to do a great deal more.

Strange Customs, Elision, Customs House Brisbane, July 9

Robert Davidson is a composer and the director of Topology, a new music quintet. He studied with Terry Riley and is currently completing a PhD at the University of Queensland.

The rise of desktop radio

Adam Hyde talks internet broadcasting in Berlin

During May of this year I attended the first international symposium on net.radio, *Berlin net.radio days 98* (www.art-bag.net/trimmdich/anno.htm) on behalf of Adelaide based net.radio station *radioqualia* (www.va.com.au/radioqualia).

Due to recent developments in free software technology it is now possible to broadcast ("stream") audio and video material live over the internet from your home computer. net.radio is "desktop radio"; another triumph of software environments over arcane technologies. About 60 participants were brought together for 5 days of lectures and discussions on this exciting new field.

There are few intersections of purpose within the net.radio community. Its members are largely pioneers drawn together through a passion and fascination for exploring this exciting new medium. Hence the practice of net.radio is enduring a mildly uncomfortable adolescence, asking questions about the identity and purpose of the medium. There does seem, however, to be a very clear idea of what net.radio is *not*. It isn't web radio, the practice of retransmitting commercial radio stations on the internet, and it is not simply net.art.

While the debate about exactly what makes net.radio distinct from these 2 disciplines is largely unresolved, it is possible to use 4 broad categories to describe net.radio. There are those such as Pararadio (<http://www.c3.hu/para/>) in Hungary and Backspace Radio (<http://www.backspace.org>) in London, that utilise net.radio to contribute to inner city youth communities. Others such as Berlin-based Convex TV (<http://www.art-bag.net/convextv/>) are 'alternative' radio practitioners, that value net.radio as an important distribution channel for their interviews and music. There are the radio.art and net.art practitioners who are drawn to net.radio because it is yet another opportunity the internet has provided to utilise new technology in broadcast art (Kunstradio, <http://thing.at/orfokunstradio>, and Radio Ozone, <http://ozone.parks.lv>). Then there are those who use net.radio (mostly where oppressive governments reside) to open channels for the expression of important political or counter cultural perspectives (B92, <http://www.xs4all.nl/~openmet>).

In addition to live audio, it is also possible to add live video to internet broadcasts. There have been some forums such as the 1998 Art on the Net Awards (<http://art.by.arena.ne.jp/mcmogatk>) that examine this practice, however most internet broadcasters confine their broadcasts to audio. Although free software such as RealVideo (<http://www.real.com>) make it easy to broadcast video on the internet, the time and cost involved to produce the content is often prohibitive.

There were about 15 presentations over the 3 days in Berlin with lectures covering a broad range of topics including digital broadcasting, midi audio technologies, net.radio collaborations, historical perspectives on broadcasting, and streaming media software. I found all these presentations interesting but some were only obliquely relevant to the practice of net.radio. However some talks were wholly captivating.

My favourite was an extraordinary speech by Convex TV's Martin Conrads on the intersection of net.radio and pop-culture, delving into many radio icons within popular literature. Included was Isaac Asimov's *Harmoniums*, a story about birds which feed on radiowaves. This story led to a beautiful quote from Conrad that has given me much to muse on—"radio does not have to have content." An interesting panacea to the belief that all broadcasting should be strictly about content.

There were also some astonishing live performances, one of them by XLR (<http://www.iflugs.hdk-berlin.de/~xlr>). They mixed live digital music, commentary, and additional nuances provided by the limitations of streaming media technology, together with audio provided live from Canada, Latvia and London. The experience of being immersed within this broadcast was incredible. If you add a beautifully clear Berlin summer night, 60 people who only wanted to talk radio, and cold beer on the banks of the canal, you can understand why it was hard to come back to Adelaide!

The conference also provided the opportunity for many debates (www.art-bag.net/convextv/ram/7398.ram) including a public forum at the end of the last day. However, as with any conference, it was after the scheduled events that the really interesting discussions occurred. From these informal talks I feel my practice has been

wholly altered. The most important consequence is that I now consider net.radio as an important broadcasting innovation. It has opened the door for many to experience the thrill of broadcasting and add an alternative voice to mainstream radio and television. While net.radio is still in its infancy it is rapidly maturing and I believe it is only a matter of time until it is an ingredient in many people's daily media diets. *Berlin net.radio days 98*, though not a triumph of modern organisational practice, was one of the most efficacious and interesting symposiums I have attended.

The writer's attendance at Berlin net.radio days 98 was sponsored by ANAT and ARTSA and assisted by the Media Resource Centre (Adelaide) and Virtual Artists. The Conference was held on June 10 - 15, in various venues in Berlin.

Adam Hyde is an online conference manager, web developer and artist. In New Zealand where he managed several radio stations and established Australasia's first free-to-air community television station. He recently moved to Adelaide to work as a business development manager for Virtual Artists, and to investigate online broadcasting.

CD review

Brian Eno,
Music for Airports
Bang On A Can,
Point Music CD 536 847 - 2

Brian Eno's 1970s album *Music for Airports* is one of his most interesting projects. The original 4 tracks consisted of varying length tape loops of synthesiser, voices, piano and studio effects played together to create some wonderful, floating, eerie and melancholy music. Eno's *Ambient* music of this period was inspired to some degree by Erik Satie's turn of the century *Musique d'ameublement*—furniture music—music to live with, listen to or ignore. Bang on a Can's 1998 version of *Music for Airports* uses a similar clarinet, cello, piano, strings and percussion orchestra to Satie's original music to great effect. Taking Eno's tape pieces and arranging them for a live ensemble has exposed the music to a whole array of rich new acoustic sounds—vibraphones float past droning basses, clarinets echo piano notes from a few seconds back with tubular bells following and the mind wonders how exactly they did it!

The 4 tracks on this new CD are arranged very closely to the originals by Bang on a Can members, David Lang and Evan Ziporyn, plus Michael Gordon and Julia Wolfe, and use the same title sequence 1/1, 2/1, 1/2 and 2/2. After repeated listening I heard the Chinese Pipa—a stringed instrument used to play subtle Arabic-like motifs on track 3, and on track 4 marimba and horn wonderfully evoke shades of Javanese gamelan. The result is a subtle, sensual, mesmerising and intimate sound world which could accompany a variety of activities—I played it in the bathroom, kitchen, living room and bedroom, all with great success. There is a kind of quiet, intensely charged atmosphere here—like a late Bonnard bathroom painting. This could be an interesting new trend, making new acoustic versions of classic electronic music recordings.

Robert Lloyd

RealTime Online

Appearing only Online:

John Potts "Cultural Collisions"

In London, John Potts looks at the strengths and weaknesses of recently produced music theatre works with some interesting talents from outside the opera world—Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* as directed by choreographer Trisha Brown; Gavin Bryars' *Doctor Ox's Experiment*, directed by filmmaker Atom Egoyan; and Harrison Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy*, revived by Music Theatre Wales under the direction of Michael McCarthy.

Read this article on <http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/>

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In RealTime 28

Held over from this edition until December, with apologies, extended reviews of significant new CDs: The Machine For Making Sense's *Dissect the Body* and Amanda Stewart's *I/T* (book and CD).

Girls at our best?

Vikki Riley on the near extinction of the Riot Grrl

Artificial
Electro Lollipop Explosion
Angel's Trumpet
Shock distribution

Debbie Morrow
Flight of the Emu
Independent distribution
03 9489 6215

This critic is always on the lookout for rad sisters doin' it but even the moon faced *Alchemy* girl on TV can't seem to provide any style tips at the moment. And when local galleries start appropriating female DJ culture with trite Koonsian shows called *The World of DJ Betty Ford* using 'fictional' Asian characters, the search for angry girls reaches a dead end, or a workin' for the man playpen where cute-like-a-panda fluffs over the feminist backlash with the greatest of ease. When Donna Haraway arrived in town a few months back to present a paper for Melbourne University's new look Sociology 'Centre' half a dozen provincial 'Gangland' type 'insecures'-about-young-'n'-sexy-voices-needing-their-own-media-space hit the floor when she rose to the lectern. A self tagged 'eco-Feminist'—droopy earrings and a batik vest—she announced that a new oxymoronic marketing image, the patented super species, was now ensconced in display ads in 'thinking' mags like *The Utne Reader*. But was Donna's talk referring only to cows? The Mutant Genome and its key role in



maintaining the New World Order could have also been the paradigm to read the mass commodification of another near extinct species—the Riot Grrl or Bad Girl figure that emerged at the beginning of the decade to re-agitate pop culture's gender imbalance only to end up at the end of the decade to become Generic Grrl, the cheesecake fresh face of the Corporate takeover and white neo-colonialist pushes into other people's pop culture.

In countries like Australia where the femme pop icon career path starts at *Neighbours* and gets you big glory at a gig at the AFL Grand Final or a command performance to help re-elect political heavyweights, Spice Power is at the helm to remind girls that the marketing of personal identity (the old 'I can do it too' herstory) as a getting ahead success strategy for status and wealth is the only game left we're allowed to play. So far too, guide books and telephone directories like Kathy Bail's *DIY Feminism* or Catharine Lumby's *Bad Girls* only seem to hammer in this message further; get to the top and worry about real autonomy later, be a Madonna in lieu of genuine cultural cache, aim for celebrity in order to crash the mainstream and claim the media space young white girls demand to dominate in order to conquer those bad hair days that mess with esteem and the ability to speak.

When Lachlan Murdoch bought up half of Melbourne's 'independent' talent on his birthday (Mushroom Records, PsyHarmonics) he made sure that chicks doing their own thang were part of the package, signing Nicole Skeltys' *Artificial* project for a reported \$1 million. Now for a



Murdoch girl like Natalie "I'm a happy little bunny" Imbruglia it will be interesting if she can carry over her 'self employed chick who can twiddle the knobs like the boys' rhetoric into this exciting mass market of empowered Barbie dolls. Her independently produced *electro lollipop explosion* comes with a veritable list of trendy monikers—retro, futurist, lounge, blaxploitation—but scores less than zero on innovation, cultural authenticity and musical complexity. *Shaft*-era car chase motor beats, soft padded funk, spacy universes and synth sync pulses with invisible nylon and sideburn Scooby-Doo cartoon poses as accessories—straight from satellite P-Funk and Motown circa late 70s with Afro spacefunksters like Mandre (Andre Lewis) whose 1979 LP, *M3000* uncannily maps out this entire oeuvre right down to the titles like "Freakin's fine". Twenty years on the girl gets to cook up her own cake but somehow the taste is White Wings packet mix, a bland, formulated, no nutrients creative diet all about it seems, the virtues of dumbing down.

In this climate too the tyranny of the white Barbie girl in our media culture means that even media set up for other voices now gets to be run by them in the rush to be the next Triple J DJ babe. Melbourne's first Indigenous radio station—KND, Kool 'N' Deadly—mysteriously went to air auspiced by a team of non-Koori girls who seemed to operate on any agenda other than a Koori-led one, with news bulletins featuring interviews with people from World Vision and plenty of 'dumbin'-down banter about what's hip in white indie pop, leaving it up to the real Koori announcers to fill the gaps on the big community and identity issues we all need to hear about, as well as the wealth of music coming out of the Stolen Generation and especially young female Koori artists in general in Victoria, one of the untapped secrets of the state. Debbie Morrow's soon to be released *Flight of the Emu* not only reinvents the idea of singer-songwriter as a serious genre for the female voice but the timbre and intonation in evidence conjures the spectre of an unstoppable Tracey Chapman in our midst; prolific, committed and utterly compelling. It's all questions, probings, poking around for answers, affirming ideas like ancestry and motherhood in the context of a newly found spiritual strength, all the stuff that now only gets heard in a foreign language piped through the speakers at the New Age candle shop or read about in Margaret Atwood books at VCE level. Morrow's material is dead difficult and tragic at face value—adoption, white society's values of violence, soul sell-out, the denial of access to one's cultural birthright. Her ability to turn that into a physical force where words take on extra meaning is a talent all generic grrls need to skill up on fast and leave breakbeat investigations to pudgy goof boys. "Who is this Girl I see" she asks herself on one track, almost like an open invitation to go look in the mirror and like what you see—no bunny ears or pink wigs required.

Sport

TEE OFF

with Vivienne Inch

Sport is beyond politics, said John Howard, in a rest from the rigours of electioneering at the AFL Breakfast this month. Waiting to tee off, I contemplate the metres of film squandered on our leaders chowing down, grinning like good sports at the female impersonators who seem now intrinsic to football—will small boys soon train as cross-dressing rucks I wonder? Later at the game, the outcome of which is accurately predicted for them by McNair-Anderson, more footage spews as they suck on tinnies and make like they're not thinking about the consumer price index but about Bronco and Dog. Spiralling out from the tee, I am transported to the Trigger Happy Games in KL where helicopters circle the stadium and sports commentators in flakjackets turn their hand to political commentary. Outside, police take the boot to rioting civilians while inside, Australia competes with itself, by the sound of it, to win all the medals. 'Sport brings nations together', the Queen is about to say when she's drowned out by fireworks. Sportsmen and women weep at the sight of flags. Huddling protesters weep at the sight of truncheons. Mahatir grimaces under some goal post for the foreign press while local media wince at the powers of his Internal Security Act. 'Water cannons and tear gas are not the Malaysian way' says Mahatir releasing a flight of doves. Back home John Howard says he's always less than comfortable when "the apparatus of the state

has to be used to settle political scores." But both know the diverting power of sporting spectacle I'm thinking as my drive misses the green and sails towards the trees.

TOOTH AND CLAW

with Jack Rufus

The sporting world is reeling from this month's biggest news: the sale of football team Manchester United to Rupert Murdoch's BSkyB. Given the enormous breadth of Murdoch's media resources, what will it mean for the world-famous Man U, and for sport in general?

For a start, Man U will now be extremely hard to beat. If the opposing team is putting up any resistance, Murdoch can send on some of his Fox talent to swing the game. Surely Mulder and Scully could find a way through the most resolute of defences; or, with a quick change of strip, the team from *NYPD Blue* could run on to shake up the opposition. If all else fails, Bart Simpson and Krusty the Clown could always distract the goalkeeper.

The only hope for rival teams is to be bought out by another media mogul. Ted Turner could work wonders with Newcastle United and its black and white shirts: a sudden colourisation would bewilder any opposition. But then Murdoch could wheel on his biggest asset: the Titanic. With the mighty ship parked in front of the Man U goal and Leonardo diCaprio as lone striker up front, opponents would simply surrender, falling to their knees in the pathetic hope that Kate Winslet might blow them a kiss from the ship's majestic bow!

After the elegant simplicity of The opera Project's 1997 success, *The Berlioz: Our Vampires Ourselves* (The Performance Space), comes *The Terror of Tosca*, "a massive undertaking looking at one of the monster works of the theatrical canon, not just the musical canon", declares the company's co-director Nigel Kellaway. "The genius of *Tosca* is that Puccini is not just a great late 19th century composer but one of the greatest dramatists. *Tosca* ushers in the 20th century. Coming from the absurdly romantic tradition of Italian opera, Puccini was not carrying the burden of naturalism. But it's never a matter of him wanting to write a gorgeous tune and then finding some way to fit it in. There's not a single moment wasted in the opera, and only one moment where perhaps the world stands still, and that's when *Tosca* sings "Vissi d'arte" at the end of the second act as a prelude to her stabbing Scarpia—the rest is constant action."

It's the dramaturgical virtuosity of *Tosca* that attracts Kellaway: "The opera Project's job is not just to turn out operas but to look at major dramaturgical questions. We're not offering an interpretation. We already have a large scale opera company to do that. Opera Australia has *Tosca* in its current repertoire, and *Tristan and Isolde*, which we'll also be doing next year as *Tristan*. How many people have looked as closely at *Tosca* as, say, they look at Shakespeare? If we are going to be pummelled with this work over the next 50 years, which I'm sure we will, then it's worth the look."

With the support of the Rex Cramphorn Fellowship, Kellaway "had the time to study the opera note by note and ask what is really happening, what is the real strength of the work beyond the music." The answer? "It's the narrative. *Tosca* is a divinely constructed piece of theatre. So, I thought, let's do the 3 acts of *Tosca*, but not approaching it first and foremost from the music. Puccini spent more time on the libretto with Luigi Illica than he ever did writing the music, years more. If you're doing the opera production, then most time is spent on the music. It's Puccini's *Tosca*, never Illica's. Music is so totally privileged. The opera Project doesn't have to do that. So we look at the work from a textual point of view, with the result that there are large slabs of dialogue. We also clear away what we believe is not relevant to us in 1998, historical and local issues. We do *Tosca* through movement, dance, text. Of course that brings us back to the importance of the music, but a lot else as well."

"In thinking about *Tosca*, we've arrived at a belief that its themes are, of course, religion, desire and power, but especially responsibility—how one acts in terms of belief, carnality, politics. *Tosca* herself is the quintessential diva—she has to reconcile how she acts on stage with how she conducts her life. Scarpia actually believes that he is honest—he knows he's a bastard, but he never tells lies—not to himself anyway. *Tosca*, though, constantly lies and uses everyone, her voice, her sex, her God, anything for her own means. And Mario is useless, never takes responsibility for anything. We play a lot with who takes responsibility for which characters, so it's a matter of who are you playing when, or even refusing to play—"I want to be *Tosca*. I don't want to be Mario", or 'I need you to be *Tosca* to my Scarpia.' Someone might choose to dance a role, or perform as an actor-pianist, or a dancer might have to act, I might have to dance, others sing. This is complicated even further with Beijing Opera artist Xu Fengshang who sings mostly in Chinese, simultaneously translated—everything is translated where it needs to be intelligible."

"The challenge for us as artists working in performance is that we get to look into the creation of character, something some of us as haven't done for 20 years, something I once shunned but have now come to in middle age with a totally fresh approach. We're doing a play, almost, with a grand narrative! Yes, we're not each following one character right through the narrative, but, as in film acting, there has to be the same investment in the moment you are playing a particular character."

With this grand, small 'o' opera reading of Puccini's *Tosca* in terms of responsibility and action, choice and acting, The opera Project promises a sublime experience, the terror and the pleasure, whether or not you're familiar with the original.

RT



Annette Tesoriero, The opera Project

The Terror of Tosca. The opera Project, Nigel Kellaway, Annette Tesoriero, Dean Walsh, Regina Heilmann, Jai McHenry, Xu Fengshang; music Giacomo Puccini, adaptations Nigel Kellaway, lighting design Simon Wise, costumes Annemarie Dalziel. The Performance Space, Sydney, October 16-31. Bookings 9319 5091

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